

New Zealand Surf Life Saving correspondent Jamie Troughton provides a Kiwi perspective on the Black Fins victory.....

ANDY'S CAPTAIN'S KNOCK STEERS NZ VICTORY

Andy McMillan played the ultimate captain's knock for his country as New Zealand won their first surf lifesaving championships in 14 years in Adelaide today.

The 27-year-old Otago swimmer, a London Olympian earlier in the year, jubilantly cheered home his team on Glenelg Beach as they beat six-time defending champions Australia on their own turf.

New Zealand finished the four-day teams event with 844 points, with Australia 79 points adrift on 765. Crucial to the Kiwis' effort was the 81-point lead they established in two days in the pool, where McMillan and fellow Olympian Steve Kent thrashed themselves to a standstill, sacrificing their individual ambitions for the sake of the team.

"It was hard for a start because we both wanted to get world titles and world records as well but we had to take a step back and think about the team rather than ourselves," McMillan said. "It was an easy choice to make in the end and I'm so glad we decided to go with that. We knew we'd have a pretty tough schedule and we'd have a lot of events to get through but we prepared ourselves for that and it paid dividends."

Nursing a torn cartilage in his knee, suffered a month ago during training, McMillan battled through gamely and he and Kent even had something left on the beach, finally capturing gold in the tube rescue on the final day.

It was only the second gold won by the Kiwi men, while the six-strong female contingent picked up an incredible eight golds, led by Tash Hind's four and three to Sam Lee.

Needing a miracle on the final day, 91 points adrift in second place, Australian star Shannon Eckstein made a bold statement by claiming the surf race and clean-sweeping the men's board race with Hugh Dougherty.

Kevin Morrison (third) and Max Beattie (fourth) limited the damage in the board race, however, before 19-year-old Devon Halligan tore up the ski race with a remarkable display. Her effort was magnified by teammate Nikki Cox, who snuck through for second, leaving Australian ironwomen stars Kristyl Smith and Commonwealth Games swimming gold medalist Rebecca Creedy in their wakes.

"I couldn't have asked for anything better than to turn around on the line and see Nikki come through right behind me," Halligan said. "It was really tough out there because it was so flat and there was only a little bit of wind chop and I could see them coming in my peripheral vision but managed to hang on."

Chanel Hickman added to the lustre with a consummate beach flags win, Beattie underlined his potential by finishing second behind Eckstein in the ironman while the New Zealand women's taplin team produced the final flourish by winning the last event of the championships.

McMillan believes the seeds of their success were sown long before the team reached Adelaide.

"It's been a huge campaign from our support staff, who have planned for this for many months, if not years. We got the belief in the squad early on that we could pull it off and that has just grown the longer we've been together. We came here with a mission and we

achieved it and the whole team is jumping out of their skins. This feeling will stay with us for the rest of our lives."