



Oceania Australia Foundation (OAF)



2024 was a challenging year for the Foundation and our community. While we continue to support our athletes through these difficult circumstances, we can also reflect on some of the highlights of the year and share the achievements of our scholarship recipients.

Sadly, our Chairman, Kevan Gosper, passed away in July. Kevan personally understood the value of the US scholarship programme having benefited from a similar opportunity in his younger days. In the early 1950s he was the recipient of a scholarship to Michigan State University and always said it was the beginning of his “Olympic life”. A silver medallist at the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games, Commonwealth gold and bronze medallist at Vancouver 1958, he had a lifelong passion for sport and during his early days in the region was General Manager for the first PNG team to the Commonwealth & Empire Games in Perth in 1962. Kevan became a member of the International Olympic Committee in 1977 and was President of ONOC 1989 – 2009.

Kevan oversaw the establishment of the Foundation in 2006 to raise the competitive standards of the region’s athletes. In 2011, the first recipients of the Foundation’s two-year academic sports scholarships headed to the United States. Over the years the programme has matured with more than 60 young Pacific Islanders gaining the benefits of academic tuition and regular sporting competition at a higher level through the NJCAA, many of whom achieved further scholarships to four-year colleges in the United States. An opportunity that would not have been possible without this program.

Although Kevan was a prominent businessman in his corporate life, his love of the Pacific and the achievements of the scholarship recipients were amongst his proudest moments, aside from his family of course. He always enjoyed meeting the scholarship recipients and was able to put them at ease and encourage their confidence, particularly those who presented at our meetings.

The scholarship program is a legacy to Kevan and we gratefully acknowledge the ongoing financial support from Olympic Solidarity through ONOC as we continue working to secure alternative sources of funding.

Sadly, in August we were also met with the devastating sudden loss of Kaiava Francis, who was completing his studies at Neosho College in Chanute Kansas, when he lost his life while swimming with friends.

Kaiava was a vibrant member of the college team and in the days and weeks following his loss there were many opportunities, including a memorial gathering organised by the Coach, for our athletes to share personal reflections on his impact on their lives as well as their memories of special times with him.

The staff at Neosho College provided incredible support to all our recipients during this difficult time, ensuring their welfare needs were met. The Foundation Executive Director travelled immediately to campus to provide assistance and we continue to support our athletes and their families.

Turning our focus to some more positive news, our scholarship recipients continue to achieve outstanding results both academically and in competition. Of particular note, at the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) Championships in May 2024, both Joana Vakasobuduru and Waisele Inoke each placed 5th overall in the women’s and men’s competition. Joana was also awarded All American Honours and following her graduation from Neosho College secured a further scholarship at Central Methodist University in Fayette Missouri.

OCEANIA NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEES 2024 ANNUAL REPORT



At the ONOC General Assembly in Nadi in March, we were delighted to have scholarship alumni, Cheyenne Rova join us for a Q & A session on her scholarship experience and the impact on her life. Cheyenne continues to give back to her community through sport and is a strong advocate for our programmes, always willing to assist others along their scholarship path.

We also advised we were planning to deliver an improved Foundation website and are pleased this is now live. We appreciate the assistance provided by ONOC with this project, and in particular Mike Irava for his diligence and creative expertise, as we now have a vibrant and engaging website that focuses on our alumni and their achievements.

With the Oceania Athletic Championships taking place in Suva in June, the Foundation took the opportunity to host a booth with displays of our scholarship alumni and information on the scholarship programmes. This was a very successful initiative and we saw first-hand the strong demand in the region for our programs. Face to face discussions took place with athletes keen to learn how they could access scholarships.

This event was also the perfect backdrop for the presentation of scholarships to the 2024 recipients. Together with ONOC Executive Director, Inoke Bainimarama, scholarships were presented to three outstanding young athletes – Melania Turaga, Rusiate Matai both from Fiji

and our first recipient from Tuvalu – Vaoleta Luka. Local media were also in attendance, boosting awareness of the Foundation and its programmes.

Two swimming scholarships to Iowa Lakes were also awarded this year, but unfortunately both were subsequently withdrawn due to eligibility issues and personal circumstances.

In January the second Oceania Australia Foundation Athletics Business Scholarship at Griffith University was awarded to Braelynn Yee (Fiji). She joins Adrine Monagi (PNG) who is currently completing her second year of scholarship. They are both doing well academically and at the Australian Athletic Championships in Adelaide in May, Adrine set a new PNG National Record of 13.46 in 100m hurdles, smashing her previous best of 13.73.

The Foundation continues to maintain contact with its alumni and this year the Executive Director had the opportunity to meet with Mili Koyamainavure (2012 recipient). After completing her Foundation scholarship, then graduating from a four year university in the United States, Mili returned home to Fiji and volunteered in her sport of basketball. She worked in banking but has now commenced studying cardiac nursing in Sydney. We wish her well with her studies.

As we look back on 2024, we acknowledge the ongoing support and guidance provided by ONOC

President Robin Mitchell and Secretary General Rick Blas, particularly as we dealt with the tragic events of this year. We also thank our ONOC colleagues, Inoke Bainimarama, Mike Kohn, Meli Cavu and their teams for their invaluable assistance. It's a team effort!

Whilst this has been a challenging year in many ways, the well-being of our athletes continues to be a top priority. Our recipients have access to support networks on campus as well as the ability to connect with the Executive Director via WhatsApp who maintains regular communication with all programme participants. Our alumni also continue to offer support and assistance to our current recipients and are always willing to share their experiences.

Looking to the future we will continue to work with ONOC to offer opportunities for young Pacific Islanders as they strive to achieve their full potential both academically and in their sporting life. As we move closer towards Brisbane 2032, we anticipate more opportunities will be secured in Australia. We also hope to develop opportunities in the lead up to LA28 in partnership with the host city arrangements for athlete training.

After all, athletes are at the heart of what we do!

Helen McMurray
Executive Director