



SONNY BILL WILLIAMS

PRECISION PLAY

ALL STARS / CHEERLEADING CAMP

It's mid-morning at Camp Adair, the century-old outdoor education centre tucked into the Hunua Ranges. Beneath an endless blue sky are log cabins, and groups of young, tanned blond kids doing impossibly acrobatic stunts.

Kimberley Ramsay Reid's All Star Cheerleading Camp runs with trim, toned precision, continuing her quest to bring the quintessential middle-American sport to middle New Zealand.

Reid — sparkling Ugg boots, tiny towelling shorts, Victoria's Secret singlet — quit working as a tax lawyer a decade ago to start All Star, and she's keen to dispel some myths about the sport.

"We don't think cheerleaders have to be skinny or pretty," she tells me earnestly.

But it helps! Or maybe cheerleading just helps you find your outer beauty. Aside from the primary and intermediate kids who are just starting out, almost all the cheerleaders are some kind of physical specimen. The sport is dominated by women, unsurprisingly, who have blonde high ponies, bulging biceps and six packs below their sports bras, along with gnarly grazes on their joints.

Boys are harder to attract. Reid tells me they've had a couple who "wouldn't tell their dad they were going", and soon quit. Some are recruited by their girlfriends, some by more basic instincts. "I was doing weights for gridiron one day," says Derrick Turner, a Californian over to help coach. "Some cheerleaders walked in wearing that type of attire..."

The rest was history.

The impetus to start All Star came from Reid's experiencing cheerleading in the US, where it's an enormous high school and college sport. Competitions consist of two-and-a-half brutal minutes, involving a large squad, a bespoke routine, a stunt, a pyramid and a toss. "The more it hurts, the bigger your smile," says Liv Ford, 17.

All Star now employs 30 staff, and regularly sends teams to competitions in the US — the latest involved more than 200 children and parents. The New Zealanders are objects of fascination: "Do you have electricity? Do you ride a sheep?" mimics All Star's Rebecca "Beccs" Norton, 23.

It'll be a long while before New Zealand makes an impact in the US, where millions take part. But judging by Reid's progress so far, she won't stop until the routine is perfect.

WARRIORS VS ROOSTERS

The Warriors will be hoping third time's a charm after dispiriting losses to open the last two campaigns at the home of rugby (maybe there's a connection...). The match will be highlighted by the hulking presence of Sonny Bill Williams in the Roosters' line-up, giving Aucklanders an early chance to survey his return to the code that shaped his game.

EDEN PARK, MARCH 16.

NEW ZEALAND VS ENGLAND

The last time Eden Park hosted a test, Stephen Fleming was captain, and we won. The seven long years since then have seen the Black Caps slide to a miserable eighth in the world in all three forms of the game. It's possible we might witness a revival at Eden Park. Possible, but incredibly unlikely. At least the Barmy Army will make the event memorable.

EDEN PARK, MARCH 22-26.

ROUND THE BAYS

The venerable fun run turned 40 last year, and remains one of the best ways to appreciate that magnificent stretch of waterfront. And at 8.4km, even the most marginally fit among us can give it a crack.

TAMAKI DRIVE, MARCH 10.

MYSTICS VS VIXENS

A botched TV deal in Australia may yet spell trouble for the transtasman netball comp's future — so make sure to head out west to witness the resurgent Mystics take on last year's minor premiers, the Vixens.

TRUSTS ARENA, MARCH 25.



BARMY ARMY



ROUND THE BAYS



DARING MOVES AT CAMP ADAIR.

CLINTON TUDOR

GETTY IMAGES