

MEDIA RELEASE

From Doug Laing, media officer,
Shearing Sports New Zealand
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PHOTO

Happy champions and happy new parents Angela and Ricci Stevens pictured during the Golden Shears in Masterton in 2017. PHOTO/Doug Laing SSNZ

Husband and wife battle for top woolhandling honour

The opening day of the New Zealand Shearing and Woolhandling championships in Te Kuiti tomorrow (Thursday) could see a unique piece of matrimonial property decided by a couple whose family exemplify the adage “the family that plays together stays together.”

Ricci and Angela Stevens, of Napier, are currently tied for first place in Shearing Sports New Zealand’s 2017-2018 Senior woolhandling rankings going into the last event, the New Zealand Senior Woolhandling Championship, the final of which will be held late tomorrow afternoon.

Only Dannevirke woolhandler Ash Boyce can deny them the season’s honour, and then only if he reaches the championships final, and they don’t.

As it happens, each already has a fashionable record at Te Kuiti, both having previously won the Junior woolhandling title.

As Angela Kirkpatrick, daughter of champion shearer John Kirkpatrick, Angela Stevens won the Junior woolhandling final and was No 1 Junior woolhandler for the season in 2015-2016, a feat which was emulated last year by her husband, who had in 2015 also won the Junior shearing title.

Last season, Angela Stevens was beaten by just one point in the race for the top spot in the Senior woolhandling rankings, which are based on placings in finals during the season, and this season has passed a threshold for promotion to Open-class woolhandling for next season.

This season the couple have faced-off in seven finals, Angela claiming the family head-to-head honours in two shows before Christmas but Ricci taking the honours in the five showdowns to date in the new year.

The championships culminate a New Zealand Shearing Sports season of 57 shows throughout the country since the open even and only finewool competition at the New Zealand Merino Championships in Alexandra in October. While all-but one included shearing, only 23 include woolhandling competition.

But woolhandling, all on second-shear wool, dominates the first day of the three-day championships in the Waitomo Cultural and Arts Centre with heats in all three grades, culminating in the Junior and Senior finals, followed by the Open woolhandling semi-finals, expected to feature World champion Joel Henare.

A speedshear will be held tomorrow night (Thursday) at the nearby Waitomo Club, and shearing competition dominates the second day on Friday, with the Novice and Junior finals during the afternoon, and the Intermediate final in a night programme culminating in the North Island Shearer of the Year final, the first of three Open-class shearing events which were all won last year by Hawke's Bay gun Rowland Smith.

The New Zealand Open shearing and woolhandling finals will be held on Saturday night along with the New Zealand Shears Circuit final, the two last-night shearing finals deciding the members of a two-man New Zealand team to tour the UK in July.

Top South Island hopes during the three days are expected to be Southland shearers Nathan Stratford and Brandon Maguire Ratima, in the Open and Intermediate grades respectively, and Open woolhandler Pagan Karauria, of Alexandra, who is pushing Henare closest for the No 1 Open woolhandling ranking.

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