

MEDIA RELEASE

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

Southland shearer Brett Roberts, aiming to step up another level at the Southern Shears in Gore today and tomorrow, as he focuses on a place in the Top 30 at the Golden Shears in two weeks' time. He was pictured at the Canterbury Show in 2016. PHOTO/DOUG LAING SSNZ

It's a long road making it to the top in shearing

Southland shearer Brett Roberts' almost 40 wins in finals in the 10 years since he first started competing at the age of 13 includes wins at the Golden Shears and the New Zealand championships.

But as the Mataura gun and proud new dad prepared for the local two-day Southern Shears which started in Gore today he said the highlight of his career was making the Top 30, at the Golden Shears.

The worst moment was last year when he missed out on the same group of Open grade elite in Masterton, and he says: "I was gutted."

"So," he says, "coming back stronger is the focus. Really wanting to get in the mix as fast as I can."

Thus, while there is the immediate focus of getting into tomorrow's finals in Gore, and perhaps even the top three, the goal is making the quarterfinals at the 58th Golden Shears in two weeks' time.

It's a Friday-night shearing drama dubbed the Top 30 Shootout, an event even two-times World champion and Australian shearing legend Shannon Warnest once rated as one of his greatest dreams.

The tale of fortune and new endeavour highlights the typical path of even the best Junior, Intermediate and Senior shearers in New Zealand, as they hit the top Open class with the freasliation it is generally the start of second apprenticeship.

It could take 10 years or more, and over the years many of the best have not made it, even though they can still proclaim to be among the best shearers in the World.

When younger shearers like Roberts arrive in Open class they have to accept that such guns as Rowland Smith, John Kirkpatrick, Gavin Mutch and fellow Southland shearer Nathan Stratford are not only opponents to beat on the shearing board, but also the mentors who will teach them how to do it.

“I’m competing every year, and learning from these older competitors,” he said, expecting to face Smith, Kirkpatrick and Stratford, at least in both the Southern Shears and South Island Shearer of the Year events which are the features of the last big South Island show before the focus shifts to three central North Island competitions heading towards the March 1-3 assignment in Masterton’s War Memorial Stadium.

The immediate target however is a place in the two finals in front of the home crowd in Gore, a realistic proposition after finishing fourth to Smith, Kirkpatrick and Stratford last Saturday in the Otago championships Open final in Balclutha, where his previous wins had included three consecutively in the Otago Senior championship.

The winner of the Golden Shears Junior final in 2010, the Senior final two years later, and the New Zealand Intermediate championship in Te Kuiti in 2011, Roberts is in his fourth season in the Open class, and claimed his one and only win in the grade at the Cheviot A and P Show last March.

He’s reached five finals this season, in which he veered from the usual plan of following the season around the country so that he could be around for the birth of son and first child Brock four months ago.

“Didn’t wanna miss that,” he said.

Competition across all grades of shearing and woolhandling in the Pavilion at the Gore Showgrounds today and tomorrow includes a shearing test match in which Smith and Kirkpatrick defend an unbeaten run in the CP Wool Shearing Series against Wales, 2-0 after the first two tests at Marton and Balclutha.

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