Dame Sophie Pascoe announces her Retirement from Competitive Swimming

Theme:
Voice & Visibility

Co-authored by NZOC

New Zealand's most successful ever Paralympian, Dame Sophie Pascoe, has announced her retirement from competitive swimming.

Dame Sophie is one of New Zealand's greatest ever athletes and leaves sport as an eleven-time Paralympic gold medallist and multiple World Champion.

Reflecting on her incredible career, Dame Sophie shared her gratitude and aspirations for the future.

"Representing New Zealand in the pool has been the greatest honour of my life," said Dame Sophie.

"Every medal, national record, world record and milestone has been a reflection not just of my efforts, but of the collective dedication of my coaches, teammates, family, friends, supporters and the Swimming New Zealand family.

"As I step away from the pool, I carry with me countless memories of triumph and challenge, lessons learned, and friendships forged.

"While my competitive career may have come to an end, I remain passionate about giving back to the sport that shaped me. I hope to continue inspiring future generations of swimmers and foster an inclusive environment where every athlete feels empowered to achieve their dreams."

In a career spanning more than two decades, Dame Sophie redefined excellence in sport. She leaves the pool with an incredible 19 Paralympic medals, including 11 golds, achieved across four Paralympic Games from Beijing 2008 to Tokyo 2020.

Outside of the pool Dame Sophie is known for her resilience, determination, and humility, with the traits making her a role model for athletes and non-athletes alike. She has been instrumental in raising the profile of para-sport in New Zealand and globally, advocating for inclusion and equality in sport.

Dame Sophie underwent a below the knee amputation on her left leg following a lawnmower accident aged two. She began swimming aged seven and soon after was identified by Paralympians Roly Crichton and Graham Condon who were impressed by her potential and asked her to join the QEII Swim Club.

Her determination and talent quickly became evident, and she debuted on the international stage aged just 11, before competing at her first World Championships when she was 13, winning bronze in the 200IM in Durban. Her first Paralympic Games was Beijing 2008 where she won three golds aged only 15.

Since then she has cemented her status as one of the world's best swimmers, breaking more than a dozen world records and claiming numerous World Para Swimming Championship titles in addition to her Paralympic success. At Tokyo 2020 she completed a famous four-peat by claiming her fourth consecutive gold medal in the Women's 200m Individual Medley.

Dame Sophie has won seven Halberg awards and competed at three Commonwealth Games winning five gold medals. Notably, she was the team flagbearer at the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games and at the Tokyo Paralympics.

In addition to her sporting achievements, 2024 was a significant year for Dame Sophie personally, as she and her husband Rob Samson welcomed a baby boy to their family.

Swimming New Zealand CEO Steve Johns paid tribute to Dame Sophie.

"We have been privileged to have worked with Dame Sophie for around two decades," said Johns.

"She has been a leader in and out of the water and an inspiration to athletes, young women, anyone with a disability, and to New Zealanders all around the country.

"Her sustained excellence along with her drive and determination have been second to none and she is a true sporting great.

"Dame Sophie, your legacy and place in New Zealand's sporting history is well and truly Entrenched. Congratulations on an amazing career and thanks for your incredible contribution to New Zealand sport. We wish you all the best for your next chapter."

Paralympics New Zealand CEO Greg Warnecke said, "Dame Sophie Pascoe calls time on her incomparable career as a true icon who transcended the sport like few others. She is a household name thanks to her stunning achievements spanning four Paralympic Games and also made a significant impact by changing the narrative around disability in Aotearoa New Zealand.

“Dame Sophie inspired so many Kiwis, particularly those with a disability to ‘dream big and aim high’. On behalf of everyone at Paralympics New Zealand, congratulations and thank you. We couldn’t be prouder of Paralympian #166.”

Group Chief Executive, Sport New Zealand, Raelene Castle added, “Dame Sophie’s contribution to para sport and the disability community can’t be measured in medals and records alone. She has been a trailblazer and an inspiration to two generations of young people and has single-handedly changed the narrative for young people with a disability in New Zealand.”

Steve Tew, Director of High Performance Sport New Zealand also paid tribute to Dame Sophie.

“On behalf of everyone at HPSNZ I would like to congratulate Dame Sophie on an outstanding career that sees her retire as New Zealand’s most successful Paralympian and one of New Zealand’s most decorated athletes. It is unlikely her medal-winning record will be bettered in our lifetime.

“While she may have retired from sport at the highest level, her legacy will endure for generations and we genuinely thank her for everything she has achieved in and out of the pool. We wish Sophie and family all the very best as they embark on the next chapter of their lives.”

Dame Sophie was coached by Roly Crichton from 2002 - 2022 with Crichton instrumental in discovering and helping her to her early success. She has been coached by Brett Naylor since 2022.

Dame Sophie was appointed a Dame in the 2022 New Year's Honours for her services to swimming. At the time, she was the youngest person ever to be awarded the title.

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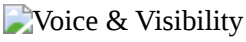

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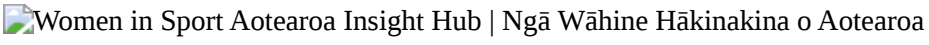
Close panel 

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