

Friday February 29 2008

THE gloves came off and the fleece flew tonight in the Trans-Tasman Woolhandling Test at New Zealand's top wool industry contest.

The Kiwi team of Jo Kumeroa and Hanatia Tipene met and bet Aussies Deb Chandler from Western Australia and Tasmania's Mel Morris handling four Merino and four crossbred fleeces.

Commentator Audrey Tamanui-Nunn rated the Australian team's chances at the outset.

"They're bloody good and I wouldn't take them too lightly just because they're on New Zealand soil."

"I spent a few hours with them in the shed and they're good."

She said the competitors needed to throw their fleeces squarely, flatly and evenly to avoid penalty points.

Both teams threw well but the Kiwis quickly gained an edge as the Australian throws landed with the odd side off the table.

Two-times World Champ Kumeroa had qualified earlier in the day for the Kiwi team heading to the 2008 World Champs in Norway later this year and she showed why.

Her calm presence and perfect throws complimented Tipene's speed and young gun-energy.

Chandler and Morris were close behind though, working at lightening speeds to clean up their tabled fleeces.

But as the finish approached the Kiwis surged ahead and threw their final fleece while the Australians still had their eighth fleece on the shearing stand.

New Zealand's speed was matched by the quality of their work and they were declared the winners.

Meanwhile things are heating up in the Open Shearing Competition.

Regarded as the pinnacle of competitive shearing, the field of 90 was narrowed down to twelve after a Top 30 shear-off tonight.

Semi-finalists include shearing superhero and 15-times Golden Shears winner David Fagan from Te Kuiti, with past winners John Fitzpatrick of Napier, Paul Avery from Stratford and Napier's Dion King.

The other semi-finalists are Havelock North's Cam Ferguson, Dean Ball from Te Kuiti, Gavin Mutch of Stratford, Roleston's Jason Win and Digger Balme of Te Kuiti. As well as Nathan Stratford from Invercargill, Rakaia's Tony Coster and Tony Devery from Tuatapere.

The Golden Shears kicked off yesterday and runs to Saturday March 1.

The event sees competitors from New Zealand, Norway, Australia, the UK, Ireland, and South Africa battle it out for the top titles.

For a full programme and live video action see www.goldenshears.co.nz.

For free images or further information contact the Golden Shears Media Group at goldenshears@pete.co.nz or phone 021 488 137 or 027 5788 137. International callers phone 006421 488 137 or 006427 5788 137.