

Saturday March 1 2008

IT was double-whammy for the Kiwis in two Trans-Tasman wool sports tests at the world's premier shearing and woolhandling competition this week, the Golden Shears 2008.

New Zealand had two wins after hard-fought battles with ace Australian teams in woolhandling and shearing tests at the event in Masterton, New Zealand.

Kiwi woolhandlers 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 on Friday night. See www.goldenshears.co.nz for a full report.

Then last night Australians Shannon Warnest from South Australia, Victoria's Jason Wingfield (Capt.) and Beau Guelfi went up against a strong New Zealand team. They were, 2007 Golden Shears open champ Paul Avery along with the South Island's Tony Coster and veteran Kiwi test representative John Emslie.

Emslie shore in place of New Zealand team member Joe Paewai who passed away in December last year.

Both teams wore black armbands as a mark of respect for Paewai, who represented New Zealand in the 2007 Trans-Tasman test series.

Emslie was presented with the singlet Paewai would have worn prior to the start of the event.

Each shearer shore six merinos, three full wools and three second shear sheep and Kiwi Coster was the first to finish sheep number one but was quickly followed to the pen by the Australian captain.

Wingfield then gained a lead over the next few sheep while at the other end of the board Avery quietly fleeced his way through the merinos just ahead of current World Champ Warnest.

Guelfi and Emslie worked blow for blow in the early stages with Guelfi gradually pulling away by half a sheep.

By the fifth Merino Coster was reeling Wingfield in which provoked a bit of ribbing from the commentators.

"He's going to do it, he's going to beat the Aussies at their own game!"

And he did, finishing the last merino first but the Australians shore strongly and left Emslie the last man to finish.

The post-shear judging saw New Zealand victorious, but only just, with very little points difference between the teams.

The least penalty points win in shearing, and New Zealand won with 216.889 to Australia 219.548.

Australian manager Matt Philipson said Paewai's spirit must have been watching over the battle.

"Congratulations New Zealand. It was a great competition and a very close event."

"I know there's one guy up there and he's looking down and he's smiling. He's a great man," he said.

The Golden Shears ran from Thursday February 28 to Saturday March 1 and saw competitors from New Zealand, Norway, Australia, the UK, Ireland and South Africa battle for the top titles.

The iconic event celebrates its 50th birthday in 2010 and is very much a fixture of the New Zealand rural calendar and closely linked to the national identity as a farming nation producing some of the world's finest wool.

For a full results and archived video action see www.goldenshears.co.nz.

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