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A MONTH OF SLEEPS TO THE GOLDEN SHEARS

HANDPIECES are honing and the sleeps and sheep are being counted one month out from Masterton's internationally renowned Golden Shears.

The world's top shearing contest takes place at the Genesis Recreation Centre on March 5, 6 and 7 2009.

Golden Shears Society president Mavis Mullins said the event was shaping up to be a big one with the added attraction of an inaugural Welsh/Kiwi match.

"For the first time ever there will be a Welsh versus New Zealand test to take place on the Friday night."

"The Welsh are as passionate as any people found in the whole wide world and you can bet your boots they'll have something to show for it. We've even got a singer lined up for the Welsh national anthem" she said.

Wales hosts the 2010 World Shearing Championships and Mrs Mullins, herself a former Golden Shears woolhandling champ, said various members of the Welsh shearing fraternity would be in town.

"They'll all be here in Masterton to check out the event and get hot tips on the organisation, as well as to check out the shearing talent."

Adding to the excitement is a fiercely contested competition season between 2008 Golden Shears champ Johnny Kirkpatrick and current world champion Paul Avery.

The rivals shore side by side to win the teams event at last year's world champs in Norway but have battled the rest of the season in competitions throughout the country with Kirkpatrick maintaining the lead. Avery won the Agrodome Shears and the Taihape A and P title late last month heading off Kirkpatrick's three wins in three days early in January in Southland and Levin.

Kirkpatrick then hit back with a win in Danniverke last Friday.

The Golden Shears will be the biggie though, with competitors expected from around the globe.

"It is seen as the pinnacle of the international shearing calendar and we've had an increasing international presence at the competition," Mrs Mullins said.

"One thing we are also very keen to see is for the Wairarapa to embrace the Golden Shears as its own. This is a Wairarapa event to be proud of," she said.

Mrs Mullins said Masterton shearer and woolhandler Cushla Gordon would be the one to watch for locals.

"She has really been hitting her straps with a win in the junior lambshearing finals at Raglan and success in the woolhandling."

Gordon, 19, won last year's Golden Shears novice shearing final and has gone from strength to strength since.

She bought home the New Zealand Lambshearing Championship junior trophy after a quality shear at Raglan's Western Shears last month.

Her win follows victories in the novice sections of both the shearing and woolhandling at the North Island Championships in Feilding last year.

Mrs Mullins said there was already a buzz around Golden Shears 2009 as it comes hot on the heels of the world champs.

New Zealand's Shear Blacks dominated the worlds with Kirkpatrick and Avery's win in the shearing teams, Avery's first in the shearing individual with Kirkpatrick in second and a win in the woolhandling teams from Joanne Kumeroa and Sheree Alabaster.

Alabaster won the individual woolhandling followed by Kumeroa in second and Peter Race and Bill Michelle were third in the blade shearing.

Mrs Mullins said the Golden Shears organising committee had been working hard on the 2009 event and a good turn out was expected.

"It's all on as per usual. We believe numbers will be up this year, which is the way the shows have been trending."

"That's good for the industry and good for the Wairarapa and the Golden Shears," she said.

Next year's Golden Shears will be the event's 50th birthday and the committee were continuing to work towards that.

For all other results and archived video action see www.goldenshears.co.nz.

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