

Friday 5 March, 2010

Tension High as Open Heats Prepare to Kick Off

WOOLPRESSING results are blasted from the loudspeaker as a steady throng of wide-eyed, expectant Golden Shears fans make their way through Masterton's War Memorial Stadium.

A visitor will find supporters cheering on woolhandling finalists, a few sweaty contestants milling about with handpieces under their arms having finished the senior shearing final, children making their way through the aisles.

There are people catching up with old friends, judges taking a break between sessions and journalists grabbing a quick bite before the afternoon's proceedings.

Who they are unlikely to see in the crowds are competitors in the upcoming open shearing heats.

That's because these guys will have spent most of the morning psyching themselves up, fine tuning their handpiece skills, preparing their bodies and their minds for what is widely considered to be the world's premier shearing show-down.

This is the kind of situation where a shearer will be damn proud of himself if the only thing he ever does in his career is make it to the top thirty shoot out of this event, said publicity officer for Shearing Sports New Zealand, Doug Laing.

"There are a top dozen who are genuine contenders for the open final," Doug said.

"But the situation is tense and everyone knows that anything is possible."

Doug said people only need to look back at last year's competition where John Kirkpatrick entered the competition as favourite but was knocked out after incurring a maximum penalty in the semi-finals.

"If that kind of thing happens in the heats, it could be good night nurse for a top contender. And it's happened in the past."

Each of the 110 entrants in this afternoon's open champion heats will be well aware of the risks and potential pitfalls of the competition and each will be spending time trying to calm their nerves in their own fashion. For some that means grinding their gear, for others a morning round of golf and for many a warm up shear at a nearby farm.

One of the contestants falling into the latter group is 21-time open final competitor and one of the top contenders for this year's event, Dean Ball of Te Kuiti.

The TAB currently has Dean sitting at sixth position for favourite to win the event but he's doing his best to ignore the pressure for now.

Dean spent this morning shearing a "handful" of sheep with a few other competitors. Back from the sheds, he's now trying to stay relaxed but focused.

"I'm feeling pretty good. You've just got to relax and do what you normally do," he said.

"I wouldn't say that I'm nervous, just excited. I want to get into it now like the rest of the guys. You want to get up there and make your mark again."

While he hasn't yet won an open title, Dean will be giving it his all out there this afternoon, cheered on by his wife, Gill, their three children and a decent quota of fans.

For detailed results to date visit

<http://www.goldenshears.co.nz/results10/index.htm>

For free higher resolution images go to <http://pete.co.nz/press/> at

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