

# TOUCH WORLD CUP 2019

**Nine serving or former NZDF personnel attended the largest ever Touch World Cup tournament in Malaysia last month, with 26 nations and 117 teams participating.**



This event has come a long way since the inaugural Touch World Cup held in 1988 where only five nations competed in three categories. The 2019 competition was conducted over six days with 11 playing divisions in the hot climate of Putrajaya, Malaysia. New Zealand had eight teams competing.

Warrant Officers Laurence Colvin and Greg Mildon were selected to play in the Men's 45 Division. "The World Cup tournament was the culmination of a 12 month journey, involving initial selection, numerous trials, training camps and tournaments in the lead up. The preliminary trials and camps are a roller coaster affair where the coach gives very direct feedback on your performance and likelihood of making the tournament team and it isn't always what you want to hear," said WO2 Colvin.

"Our tournament was full of challenges, with highs and lows. We went through the tournament, only beaten by Australia in the round robin 8-4 and then again in the final, losing 5-4. The final was full of excitement. We went into halftime leading 4-2 but Australia were too strong, scoring three unanswered touchdowns in the second half. The end of the game had drama; it was halted due to the storm conditions. Australia thought they had won the game only to be told we still had three minutes to play."

At this point the team was down by one so they all got together to devise a plan to score another touchdown. "We knew we had to defend the line first and then had one last chance at attack. The defensive players were able to defend the line and made it to the sub box to bring on the attacking team. The attacking team scored but unfortunately due to mass confusion and pressure the touchdown was disallowed because the person who scored was dummy half and in the rules of Touch, the dummy half can't score. Tournament and Touch World Cup over!"

The presentation of the playing shirts was one of the Cup highlights. Player statistics are displayed on screen and shirts are presented by the captain or coach. All teams are present, and it's livestreamed so families can share in the occasion.

WO2 Colvin, who was selected to represent New Zealand as a referee, said another highlight was sharing the experience with all the other NZDF personnel involved in the tournament.

"In our team, we also had ex-Air Force PTI WO (Rtd) Garner Gulliver. PTE Tamatoa Ropati played Open Mens for Samoa, CPL (Rtd) Jason Broughton played in the Mixed 30's grade and SSGT (Rtd) Greg Muller was playing for Ireland in their 40 mens team. The Navy also had three personnel playing; Chief Petty Officer Aderleen Brownlie and Valerie Tiatia-Seath played in the Women's 35s and Leading Steward Deena-Ranginui Puketapu played in the Open Mixed team. CPL Paul Davis was selected to play Open Mens but had to withdraw due to injury."

The challenge to playing elite sport for those players close to 50 is avoiding injury.

"Unfortunately it wasn't plain sailing for either WO1 Mildon or myself," says WO2 Colvin. "I was hampered with calf and hamstring injuries and WO1 Mildon fractured his forearm and wrist at the 2019 Touch Nationals. Unfortunately he was forced to withdraw from the team."

WO1 Mildon is the most decorated Touch player in the NZDF. He has been to numerous Touch World Cup campaigns, winning at more than one to become a world champion. Due to his extensive experience, Touch NZ looked to use his skills in other areas, employing him as a game analyst and coaching advisor.

"This was a stroke of genius that helped our team come back from an 8-4 deficit against Australia in the Round Robin only to narrowly lose in the final. For me it was an absolute pleasure gaining advice and encouragement from one of the NZDF Touch legends. Leading up to the tournament, I was forced to take some unwanted rest but tested my body by participating in the 2019 Touch Services tournament for our victorious Army Open Mens. For a lot of the Masters teams it's about player management, avoiding attrition. The team that manage their injuries the best, has the best chance of success in the final," said WO Colvin.

"This is a self-funded campaign so any funding assistance or help is greatly appreciated by all involved. On behalf of all the Army personnel, I would like to thank the Singapore fund, our camp welfare funds, and our commanders for allowing us to play, our comrades who continue working in our absence and our NZDF whānau who have supported and wished us well every step of the way.

"The NZDF is a unique organisation that encourages and supports personnel to participate in sport. There are few organisations in the world that offer the same level of support. Sport promotes the will to win and our values of comradeship, courage and commitment are tested every step of the way."

*Left: Deena Puketapu, Laurence Colvin and Marty Brownlee.*

*Opposite, from top: Greg Mildon, Laurence Colvin, and Jase Keno.*

*Jase Keno, Herb Muller, Greg Mildon and Gully Gulliver.*