

# *Bam Bam* is a *big* hit whether shooting for goal or slamming a home run

na Michael Romanos

*THERE is little rest these days for current New Zealand double sports representative Rita Fatialofa – but that's the way she prefers it.*

**S**traight after the hurly-burly of the 1986 world series softball championships, this 22-year-old super sportswoman went into training for the New Zealand netball team and continued playing major-A intercity Wellington-Hutt Valley softball.

This amazing New Zealand-born woman of Samoan parentage was the star batter at the world softball champs where New Zealand lost their world crown but still finished a most creditable third amongst the world's best teams.

Fatialofa is a certainty to retain her place in the New Zealand netball team which takes on the world champions Australia and Jamaica this year in a back-to-back series both here and in Australia.

Fatialofa was the undisputed star at the 1986 women's world softball champs in Mangere last January. In front of the home crowd, she got by far the biggest cheer when the pre-game introductions were made. When Rita appeared out of the dug-out and headed for the batter's box, the crowd positively buzzed with excitement.

It got to a stage during the 10-day champs when the ground announcer called Rita by her nickname: Bam Bam.

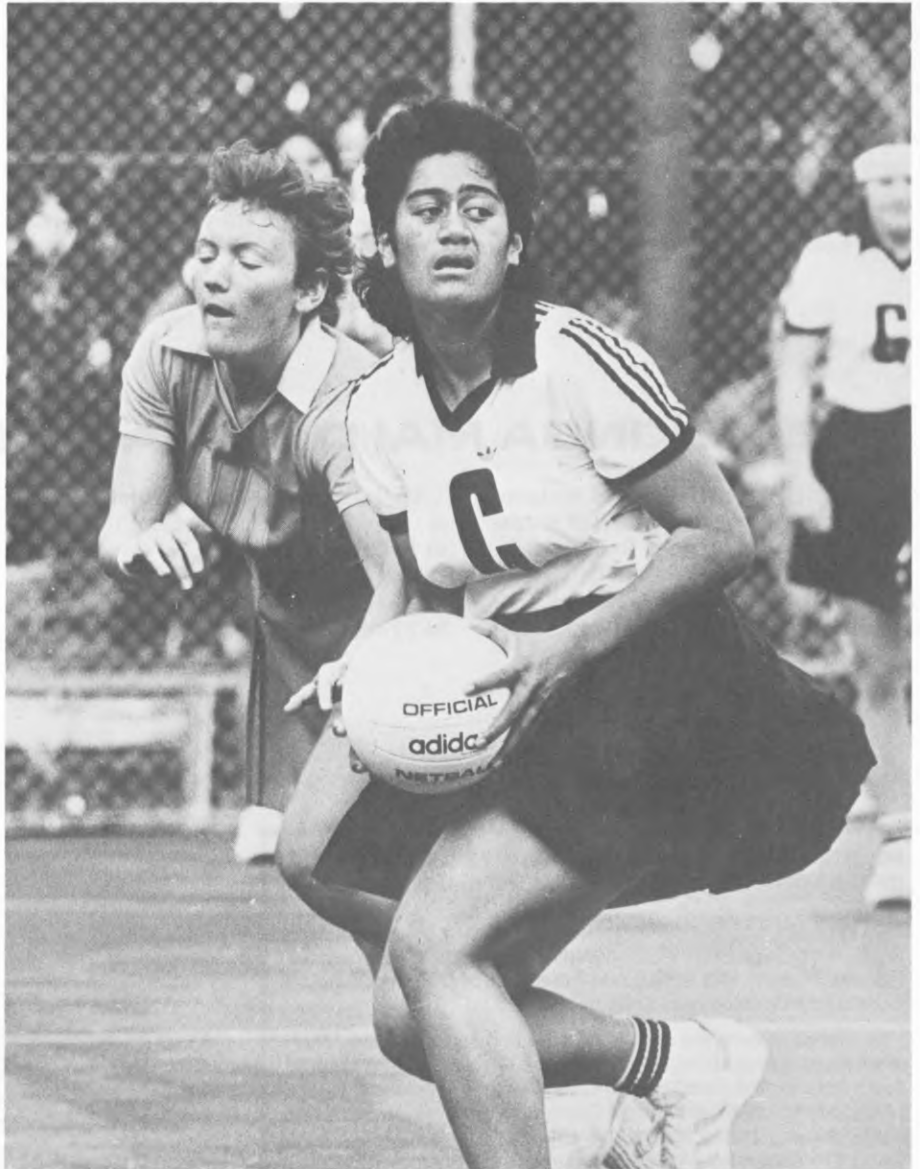
Bam Bam comes from cartoon character Barney Rubble's super-strong son. And if she is not quite super-strong, Rita can sure punish a softball like no other woman. Bam Bam exacted a fearsome toll on the pitchers at the world champs to finish the biggest hitter and second in the batting averages with .381 (16 hits from 44 turns) behind Puerto Rico's Clara Vezquez. Bam Bam's figures would have been even better had she not been deliberately walked several times.

But Fatialofa doesn't get carried away. Her ability to stay cool and block out everything but the task in hand is a mark of a true sports champion. People have termed Rita a superstar but the Samoan maiden doesn't see it that way.

"I don't consider myself a superstar – I just play sport because I enjoy it. That is not to say I wouldn't relish doing it full-time but that's a little bit impossible in New Zealand netball or softball," said Fatialofa.

"People do put me on a pedestal and when they find I'm really a quiet, down to earth woman whom they can relate to, they can get a little bemused."

Auckland born and bred, Fatialofa shifted to Wellington three years ago to



**New Zealand captain, Rita Fatialofa with the ball in hand has cause to look worried in the 1984 under 21 netball match, New Zealand versus Australia. The Australians won.**

– Pix Dominion and New Zealand Times.

take up a college teaching position as a 19-year-old. She spent two years teaching physical education at Porirua College and this year she took up a similar teaching post at Wellington High School.

She became both a senior Auckland rep at netball and softball in 1980. In netball she first represented the New Zealand

senior team in 1982 and has been a permanent member ever since, including the world champs in Singapore in 1983. Her New Zealand team softball career began in 1982 with a gap until last season. Rita missed out the other softball years in the national side because of the clash with netball tours and training.