

OLYMPIC MEDALS FOR SOUTH AFRICAN MATHS TEAM

Although the Olympic Games have not yet begun, South Africa is already bringing home Olympic medals from Greece.

In the International Mathematical Olympiad (IMO), which ended in Athens on July 18, the South African team of six high school students won three silver medals and one bronze medal.

The IMO forms part of the Hellenic Cultural Olympiad, being held in Greece in conjunction with the Olympic games.

A total of 486 high school students from 85 countries took part in the IMO, competing with each other over two days in solving a series of challenging mathematical problems.

South Africa's silver medals were won by:

Dirk Basson (grade 12, HS Diamantveld, Kimberley),

Jon Smit (grade 12, Grey High School, Bloemfontein) and

Tamara von Glehn (grade 12, St Stithian's Girls' College, Randburg).

Tamara's twin sister Ingrid won a bronze medal.

Gerhard du Toit (grade 12, Paarl Boys' High School) was awarded an Honourable Mention for his perfect solution of one of the problems.

The five medal winners were all veterans, of previous Olympiads. The sixth member of the team, Gayle Sher (Reddam House Atlantic Seaboard, Cape Town) was the "new girl" on the team, and did not win a medal, but the points she scored were valuable in securing South Africa's position of 33rd among the 85 competing countries.

Professor Nic Heideman (UCT), the leader of the South African team, said: "This was the best medal tally of any South African team since we first took part in 1992." He also noted that South Africa's overall performance was better than that of any other African country, and outshone the performance of 80% of the countries of the European Union.

Girls are always under-represented at the IMO. South Africa was one of only two countries with three girls in its team of six. Tamara von Glehn, who turned in the best performance for South Africa, ranked fourth in the world among the female contestants.

The top ten countries in the world ranking were China, the United States, Russia, Vietnam, Bulgaria, Taiwan, Hungary, Japan, Iran and Romania.

At the General Meeting of the IMO, Professor John Webb (UCT) was re-elected Secretary of the IMO Advisory Board for the next four years.

The South African team was chosen after an 18-month programme, the Old Mutual Mathematical Talent Search, run by the South African Mathematical Society. The team's travel to Greece was sponsored by Old Mutual

Next year the IMO will take place in Mexico. A new Talent Search is already under way to identify the most promising young mathematicians to represent South Africa in 2005.

Enquiries:

Professor John Webb

Department of Mathematics, University of Cape Town

Tel: 021 650 3193

Fax: 021 686 0476