



Jacinta Messer hopes to scale new heights with the Central Pulse in the trans-Tasman league this season. "I've fallen in love with the place completely," she says.

# Queensland import at home in capital

**HAMISH BIDWELL**  
**NETBALL**

Jacinta Messer spent three years as a Queensland Firebird.

In the first of those, the defending Trans-Tasman Netball League champions missed the playoffs. In 2013 and 2014 they finished runners-up. Last year, when Messer decided to take time out from netball, the Firebirds beat the New South Wales Swifts thanks to a thrilling late comeback in the grand final.

It would be a bold person who predicted Messer was finally going to taste championship glory this season. The 29-year-old defender has signed for the Central Pulse who will be doing well to win a couple of games, let alone the whole thing.

Not that Messer minds.

"I watched the championship in 2015 and missed it. I missed it a lot more than I thought I would," Messer said.

"They don't tell you this at the time, but you're a long time retired so when the opportunity came to come back, it was a no-brainer for me."

Messer had always juggled fulltime

## Steel stun Mystics in late rally

The Steel pulled off a stunning comeback effort to defeat the Mystics 58-57 in the opening game of the year's trans-Tasman netball league last night.

It looked as if the Mystics had done enough to win it when they were up by five points with four minutes to go, but

work in the Brisbane Airport Corporation's corporate relations team with netball, but got to a point where something had to give. It was netball, until Pulse coach Tanya Dearn's "rang out of the blue" offering a chance to get back into the sport she loved.

Former Firebird Amelianne Wells was already in Wellington with the Pulse – and Chelsea Locke on her way – meaning Messer would start with two teammates she already knew well.

"Then when I found out the defensive end was Katrina Grant and Phoenix [Karaka] it was a no-brainer. They are two of the most exciting defenders in the

Jhaniele Fowler-Reid scored six points in a row to pull off a remarkable victory at the Trusts Arena in Auckland. It was the perfect way to kick off a new season and one that could make this a compelling New Zealand conference, where the Mystic's dominance is not so assured.

game so the opportunity to play and train with them was a pretty incredible carrot to dangle in front of someone," said Messer.

The other attraction was that coming to the Pulse meant being able to commit to netball fulltime.

"I have a lot more enjoyment when I go to training and I've also moved out from the goal defence position to wing defence and I absolutely love it. I firmly believe a change is as good as a holiday, so I've got this refreshed take on the game and it's really nice.

"I was really keen to get that enjoyment of netball back when I came here

and I definitely have so far."

Messer, Grant and Karaka would all nominate goal defence as their preferred spot. But Dearn has spoken and it will be interesting to see how everyone goes.

While Messer is happy to be adaptable and play where she can help the team most, there are limits. Wells has already become a Silver Fern and Locke, who helped win the 2011 World Cup for Australia, has now pledged her international allegiance to New Zealand.

That's probably a step further than Messer plans to go.

"I have to tell you it's absolutely beautiful over here and I've fallen in love with the place completely. They keep telling me how cold it is and I say 'no, we've had 24-degree days and it's just stunning' and then I go home and it's a stinking hot 33-degrees, so I may yet migrate over."

With a career, and fiancé, waiting back in Brisbane, Messer isn't making netball plans beyond this season.

"I'm nearly 30 so I'm very mindful that my body isn't pulling up as well as it used to, which I'm a little embarrassed to say. But while I'm loving it I'm going to play for as long as I can because, like I said, you're a bloody long time retired."