



Champion PNG volleyballer retires

Wednesday, February 21, 2018

At the Pacific Mini Games in Vanuatu last year, they called him “The Speedster in the back” and his teammate, Moha Mea; “The Beast of the net.” That, and with Richard Kilarupa’s smoothness and Mea’s rugged and powerful image, they were referred to as “Beauty and the Beast.”

It was a successful partnership that began in 2015 during the 15th Pacific Games in Port Moresby. Before that, Kilarupa played Indoor volleyball and was part of the history-making men’s team that won gold at the 2013 Pacific Mini Games in Wallis & Futuna.

Joining Mea on the sand, they were a force in the Oceania region as they went around competing and training with some of the best in the region.

However, the partnership of this dynamic duo has come to an end as Kilarupa announced his retirement from international competition on Tuesday this week.

Kilarupa has pulled down the curtain on his 21-year career in volleyball which has seen him bag three gold medals for Team PNG.

The 33 year old from Hula village in Central Province said retiring meant spending more time with family and setting up for life after sport.

“I’ve been away most of the time training, playing and traveling and now it will be a good time to spend with my family and also help with the business,” he said.

After building a new house, Kilarupa and his wife have plans to start a family business at their home in Hula and he is looking forward to settling down.

Longtime partner on the court, Mea, said Kilarupa will be missed but he is happy for him to move on in life.

“We’ve been playing together for eight years and I am sad to see him go but I am also happy that he has other commitments and he is happy with his decision.

“Our journey together as a team has been tough and challenging at times but a partnership with someone like Richie made it easy,” Mea said.

He remembers Kilarupa as a quiet person who didn’t say much, but did most of his talking in his game.

“Richie is a great player and a great defender in the back court. I will miss him every second I am on the sand,” Mea said.

He said Kilarupa's retirement is a loss to sports but all athletes have a life to lead and will one day leave their game as well.

After switching to the beach version of volleyball at the Pacific Games in Port Moresby in 2015, he made history with Mea to win PNG's first ever gold medal in Beach Volleyball.

Following that victory, both scoured the lengths of the Oceania region vying for a spot at the 2018 Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast. That dream was not fulfilled when they fell to Fiji in the qualifiers held during the 10th Pacific Mini Games in Vanuatu in 2017.

They bounced back and regained lost pride when they won gold in the men's division of the Pacific Mini Games beach volleyball competition the following week.

Kilarupa began playing volleyball when he was 12 years old in one of the local clubs in the Hula Volleyball Association in 1997.

He started off as a setter for five years before switching to passer hitter which became his permanent position in indoor volleyball.

In 2008, he was selected in the PNG Indoor Volleyball team and played until his transition to beach volleyball in 2015.

However, it is not all bad news for volleyball with the champion player still keen on playing and being involved at the club and national levels.

"I have only retired from taking part in all the international events but I will still continue to play at the national level, like representing Hula Volleyball Association in the National Championships.

"I also have a great passion and interest to train and coach the upcoming players both in indoor and beach volleyball in the country," he said.

While Kilarupa has called it a day, Mea said he still has another two or three years to go before joining his former partner on the sidelines.

"Both of us can't leave at the same time because it will make things hard for the country and the sport at the international level," said Mea.

"I'll be around until I can help set up the next two players to carry on," he said.

Mea tried convincing Kilarupa to stay on until after the Pacific Games in Samoa next year but he had made up his mind.

"I'm glad to have shared this journey with him and the brotherhood and friendship we had on and off the court. His retired now but that bond will still be there," Mea said.

The PNG Volleyball Federation now has a task to find someone to replace Kilarupa alongside Mea going forward.

"Hopefully there's someone there and we'll be testing him soon to see how he goes. I don't want someone to match Richard but at least do the job," Mea said.

Kilarupa acknowledged his uncles, Laka and Nelson Kila who were his early career motivators, his coaches, High Performance trainers and managers in both indoor and beach volleyball, all the sponsors, the PNG Volleyball Federation and the PNG Olympic Committee for making his travels possible.

“To my beach volleyball partner, Moha Mea, thank you for always taking the lead in all our games and tournaments.

“A special thank you to my wife and both our families for their continuous support in finance, providing transportation and accommodation all throughout my career.

“Lastly, to all my fans in Hula village, all throughout Papua New Guinea, around the Pacific and Australia, THANK YOU all for always cheering us on,” Kilarupa said.

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Bio:

NAME: Richard Kilarupa

AGE: 33 Years Old

HOME PROVINCE: Central

CAREER ARCHIEVEMENTS:

Indoor Volleyball Career

2008 Australia - Brisbane Queensland Cup Tournament, Cup trophy

2010 New Caledonia - Noumea Oceania Indoor Volleyball, Silver

2011 New Caledonia - Noumea 14th Pacific Games, Bronze

2011 Australia - Darwin Arafura Games, Bronze

2013 Wallis & Futuna 9th Pacific Mini Games, Gold

2014 Philippines - Manila Asian Club Championships

Beach Volleyball Career

2011 Northern Marianas Oceania Beach Volleyball, Silver

2015 Thailand Asian Beach Volleyball Tour

2015 PNG - Port Moresby 15th Pacific Games, Gold

2016 Fiji - Nadi Oceania Beach Volleyball, Bronze

2017 Vanuatu Commonwealth Games Qualifiers, Silver

2017 Vanuatu 10th Pacific Mini Games, Gold

2017 Australia - Sydney 2 Star World Tour

2018 Australia - Melbourne 1 Star World Tour

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