

World cup for Liggins



Goal fever: North Harbour centre-forward Mark Liggins play at the Unity Cup in South Africa.

Very few footballers anywhere in the world could say they have taken the field with former England captain Alan Shearer and South African president Jacob Zuma at the same time.

But that is exactly what North Shore's Mark Liggins will do in July when he appears in an all-star football match in Cape Town during the World Cup.

Liggins, 36, a Special Olympics North Harbour centre-forward, has been selected to play in the Unity Cup.

Special Olympics programmes in countries whose teams qualified for the World Cup were asked to nominate athletes for the Unity Cup team.

Of those nominations, 16 athletes from around the world were chosen.

"Not all the countries that qualified will be represented in the match," says Special Olympics New Zealand national sports and coaching director Mike Ryan.

"We are very proud of Mark, who is without a doubt a very skilled footballer."

Ryan also credits his coach and the rest of his team who have helped him achieve the milestone.

The match, which will feature some of the world's greatest football legends and internationally renowned entertainers, will be played before the quarter-finals of the World Cup.

Liggins began playing football as a 10-year-old and has been playing seriously for the past five years.

He will be travelling to South Africa with his coach Kevin Hodges.

Outside of football, Liggins plays basketball and takes part in athletics.

Liggins lacked confidence when he began playing sport but he and his family credit Special Olympics sport for helping to turn that around.