

No Limits!

Special Beijing Edition

wheelchair sports
association of south australia incorporated



August 2008



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Beijing Paralympics 2008 Special Edition



TELEVISION COVERAGE

The ABC will televise the Games.

ABC 1 (the 'normal' channel 2 station) will show highlights of the games between 6pm-7pm and 11.30pm-12.30am each day.

ABC 2 (digital) and ABC HD (High Definition Digital) will be showing 'live coverage' between 1pm-5pm and 7.30pm-11.30pm each day.

On Wednesday September 3rd at 8.30pm, ABC 2 will be showing the 2005 documentary film about Wheelchair Rugby – 'Murderball'. This film was nominated for Best Documentary Feature for the 78th Academy Awards. If you look very closely (don't blink), you might briefly see our own Australian rugby team in action.

From the CEO

It certainly is an exciting time when the Olympics and Paralympics come around each four years. Beijing 2008 is no exception and Wheelchair Sports SA is proud to have ten members representing us as athletes.

We are very proud of each and every one of them and look forward to following their progress at the Games.

Best wishes from the Board and Staff at Wheelchair Sports SA.

To all of our members we hope that you enjoy this special edition of No Limits!

Darryl Buchanan

SEND YOUR HERO A MESSAGE OF SUPPORT

The APC website: www.paralympic.org.au is currently a dedicated 'Games' site. Scroll to the bottom of the home page to the link 'send a hero message'. From this site you will be able to send a message of encouragement/congratulations to your favourite Paralympian.

You can also email us here at Wheelchair Sports SA where we will forward your message on to the (WCSSA) athlete.

SOME PARALYMPIC FACTS:

- The 2008 Beijing Paralympics will be held from 6-17 September.
- This will be the 13th Paralympic Summer Games. The first was held in Rome in 1960.
- Australia will compete in 13 of the 20 sports in the Paralympic Games.
- There are 471 events, therefore 471 Gold medals on offer.
- Australia's highest ever gold medal tally at a Paralympic Games is 63. This was in Sydney in 2000 as part of our total tally of 149 medals.
- There will be 150 countries participating in this Paralympics, with around 4000 athletes competing.
- <http://en.paralympic.beijing2008.cn> is the official Beijing Paralympic website



Our Swimming Stars

Matt Cowdrey (OAM) – “MY STORY”

“My story starts 19 years ago when I was born without the lower half of my left arm just below the elbow. As with most people with a disability it has not hindered me or affected my life in any way except positively.

I started swimming at a young age (as we had a backyard swimming pool) for water safety more than any other reason. I played many sports when I was younger - soccer, athletics, basketball and many more. I started competitive swimming in 1997 when I joined the Norwood Swimming Club. I really started to enjoy competitive swimming because it was the sport that I was able to compete with and beat able bodied competitors. I joined Wheelchair Sports and went to my first SAPSASA national school exchange in 1998 and my first WS Junior Nationals soon after in 1999, Perth.

Over the years I have been lucky enough to go away on many trips, to many different places, with many amazing people - some of whom helped me become the person and athlete I am today.

My first major team was the 2004 Athens Paralympic Team. I really enjoyed my first Paralympics; at 15 it was very easy to enjoy the moment. I had a good meet, swimming many PB's and coming away with 3G, 2S and 2B medals.

2006 was probably the biggest year of my swimming career. I competed at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne and the IPC World Championships in Durban. I had my coach Peter Bishop with me on both teams and broke a few WR's and won some medals at those meets.

2007 was a year of change having finished year 12 I started a double degree in Law and Media at the University of Adelaide. I was also awarded World Swimming magazine's swimmer of the year with a disability, which was a great honour.

Now with Beijing so close I am again looking forward to enjoying the trip and the people. The Australian Swim Team is a great group of people who make every trip special. I aim to swim my best as there is nothing else I can ask of myself and whatever happens after that is a bonus. I will be swimming the 50, 100, 400 Freestyle 100 Backstroke 100 Butterfly 200 IM and hopefully the medley and freestyle 4 x 100 relays in Beijing. Let's hope that the whole Aussie team has a successful campaign”

MATT'S STATS:

Paralympic Games experience: Athens 2004

Date of birth: 22 December 1988

Sport: Swimming

Discipline/event: 100m Backstroke, 200m IM, 100m Butterfly, 50m, 100m & 400m Freestyle, 4x100 Medley Relay, 4x100 Freestyle Relay

Disability: Single arm amputee - Birth

First time competed in your sport: 1994

Sport highlights:

2004 at Athens- 3 gold, 2 silver and 2 bronze

2006 Commonwealth Games - world record EAD 50m & 100m freestyle

2006 World Championships - 5 gold, 3 world records, 2 silver, 1 bronze

Personal honours/awards received:

2005 Telstra Swimmer of the Year with a Disability

2005 Order of Australia Medal

2006 Telstra Swimmer of the Year with a Disability

2006 Commonwealth Sports Awards – Outstanding Male Elite Athlete with a Disability

Most influential person: Coach Peter Bishop





Jay Dohnt – “NO REGRETS”

Swimmer Jay Dohnt is such a positive and inspiring young man. He believes that adversity often sets people back in life but it inspires him to go further. Jay was a brilliant footballer at 12 years of age but he was struck down with meningococcal and his life changed forever.

When he's not swimming, Jay loves to body-board and he has gotten into his fair share of trouble. He remembers a time when he and some friends went body-boarding at night and became separated. He walked the length of the beach on his knees looking for them and unable to find them, climbed many flights of stairs until he knocked on a stranger's door and tried to call them. Unbeknown to Jay, his panicked friends thought he had drowned and had called the police who sent two search and rescue helicopters, a boat and five police cars to look for him!!

Jay spoke recently (early August 08) to Peter Walsh on ABC Radio 'Grandstand' about when his life really changed:

“Five and a half years ago, when I was 13, I just got sick. I was vomiting and had a fever and felt pretty crook. It was just like a lot of illnesses start. Eventually the GP was called, who diagnosed it as meningococcal. 24 hours from when I was first showing any signs of sickness whatsoever I was hooked up to everything at the Women's and Children's hospital.

It was definitely a massive change in my life. I sort of refer to it as having two lives now; being an able-bod until I was 13, and being disabled since then.

WHAT GOT HIM THROUGH?

“My family were ‘huge’ to me when I was in hospital, and I am lucky enough to have such a fantastic and supporting family. There were some downsides for me; I remember lying in hospital, having no legs and thinking about all the stuff I wouldn't be able to do anymore. However, the Paralympic ideal was something that was huge for me when I was in hospital. I remember the first time being told about the Paralympics. I can't remember who told me about them, but there is a set moment in my mind when a light went on, and I knew that there was life after meningococcal and after sustaining a disability. A life that I could continue sporting wise; as I was pretty into sport before the illness. So that was pretty fundamental for me just to have something to provide a little bit of hope after hospital and something to focus on.

I credit my positive attitude toward my illness to my family, who supported me constantly when I was getting sick, and kept telling me that I was going to live a normal life and do normal things again. Just getting told that over and over again, you start to believe it. Not wanting to get too spiritual or anything, but I think things happen for a reason. If I was capable of putting up with this then maybe that's the reason I got it. I don't want to give the impression that there weren't any downtimes, as there definitely were a lot of downtimes, but I tend not to focus on them. That's why I probably can't really remember a lot of the details from them.

When I was in hospital I was lucky enough to be approached by the 'Starlight Children Foundation' who provide wishes to children with disability and illness. They provided tickets for me and my family to travel to Melbourne for a holiday and to see the ALF grand final. The highlight for me for the whole Melbourne trip was the swimming pool at the hotel where we were staying. I was in there everyday and it was something that I really loved to do. When I came back to school and was in the special sports program for footy and cricket, they asked me what I wanted to do as the practical side of the special sports program, and we came up with swimming. Since then I've progressed into competitions and, here I am today.

I guess you could say swimming was a talent, but it's more of just a lot of hard work and mentally you've got to just get in and do it. Those that can stick at it usually go somewhere”.

SPEAKING OF GOING SOMEWHERE.....

“I was stoked when I realised that I'd made the Paralympic team. My family and friends were just so ecstatic for me because they know how hard I'd worked. Especially my friends who realise that I can't go out with them a lot of the time. Since I had the dream of the Paralympics, I've just been working hard, sometimes up to 25 hours a week of training, including gym sessions and around 50-60kms in the pool a week.

My goal for Beijing is of course to win a medal, but achieving a PB definitely comes before a medal for me. If I achieve a PB and come 4th, I'll still walk away happy, whereas if I swim slower than my PB and come 2nd I will feel pretty empty. I just want to get up there and swim the fastest I've ever swam, and hopefully that results in a medal.

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Beijing provides a lot of firsts for me. This is my first Paralympics, first international competition, and the first time I've competed for Australia. It's also the first time I've ever been overseas on a holiday or anything. I'll be swimming in the 100 freestyle, 200 individual medley, 400 freestyle (which is my main one), and 100 backstroke. Like the able-bodied swimmers, I jump off the block, but I jump off from my knees, so there's not as much propulsion. This is the biggest experience of my life and I'm looking forward to it!"

My message to all those people out there who have a sporting dream but maybe not the confidence to try is just to jump in and give it a go. There are so many opportunities out there now, many organisations like wheelchair sports and so many grants available, so money wise, it's do-able for most people.

You've just got to get out there and do it".

JAY'S STATS:

Paralympic Games Experience: This will be Jay's 1st Paralympics

Date of Birth: 20 November 1989

Sport: Swimming

Discipline/event: 400m freestyle

Disability: Bilateral below knee amputee - Meningococcal disease

First time competed in your Sport: 2003

First time competed for Aust: 2008 (this Paralympics)

Sport career highlights:

Won Able bodied 8km open water swim 06 and 07.

Finishing 5km OWS (Open Water Swimming) Australian Championships in St. Kilda

Personal honours/awards Received:

2007 Junior Athlete of the Year SA Wheelchair Sports

2005 Pride of Australia Courage Award

2004 Lions Club Children's Courage Award

Shelley Rogers - "YOU MISS 100% OF THE SHOTS YOU NEVER TAKE"

At the age of 19, Shelley Rogers will be one to watch at the upcoming Beijing Games. Shelley's achievements include the world and Australian record for her class in the 100m backstroke, as well as the world and Australian record for her class in 200m individual medley.

When she's not competing, Shelley works as a swim instructor and also enjoys reading and spending time with her dog. She describes herself as an individual, caring and crazy. She is an avid animal lover who also enjoys listening to music whenever she can. Shelley's message for others is take everything that comes your way because you miss one hundred per cent of the shots you never take.

Shelley tells us; "I'm now 19 and have been swimming since about the time I started walking, mainly as a form of physio for my CP. At the age of 12 I discovered that I could swim competitively against other people with a disability and so started training more, and participating in races.

My 1st interstate competition was a Junior National Games in Queensland, where I had a ball! I then started taking the sport more seriously and somehow I've worked my way up to where I am now - leaving for my first Paralympic games in less than a week! I admit that I'm getting a 'little' nervous now!

I've gone away on a few international competitions over the years and they have definitely been amazing experiences that I will never forget. In 2006 I went to South Africa for the IPC (International Paralympic Committee) World Swimming Championships and won a silver in the 200 individual medley, and got good placings in my other events. It was definitely one of the best trips I've been on, which included a safari the whole team got to go on before the competition started!

Swimming has given me some amazing opportunities and experiences. I think it has helped me accept who I am and not be so self conscious of the fact I have a disability. Disability sport is clearly a great way of enjoying physical activity and staying fit, and I encourage anyone to have a go".

SHELLEY'S STATS:

Paralympic Games experience: This will be Shelley's 1st Paralympics.

Date of birth: 7 November 1988

Sport: Swimming

Discipline/event: 50m butterfly, 100m backstroke, 200m individual medley

Disability: Cerebral palsy - Stroke before birth

Occupation Student, swim instructor

First time competed in your sport: 2001

Best International Results: IPC World Championships 2006

Greatest sporting moment: IPC World Championships 2006

Most Influential Person: Her coach

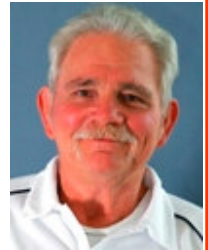
Heroes/Role Models: Katrina Porter



Our Athletic Aces

Eric Russell (MBE) - "DO WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO TO DO WHAT YOU WANT TO DO"

Eric Russell has a long history as a 'throws' athlete, coach and administrator. He has won 26 international gold medals in shot-put, discus and javelin, and attended 4 Paralympics.



Eric is currently coaching our Paralympian Rod Farr, and in the past has served on National Committees, including the I.P.C's (International Paralympic Committee) Executive Committee. He was international chairman of Athletics from 1978 to 1988.

Eric speaks about his hopes for Rod: "We all know the story of 'a bridge too far' – how even the best planning can go wrong. But our question is; "is it too FARR for Rod to bridge the Gap?"

At the world championships held in Assen (France) in 2006, Rod won 2 Silver medals, missing the shot-put gold by a mere 4 centimetres. How to bridge the gap? Following Assen, we developed a 2 year training plan aimed at Beijing. Weekly sessions included 3 throws sessions, 3 weights sessions, 3 pushing sessions and 2 stretching sessions using 2-3 Theraband. In the last 2 years at national championships, Rod has won gold in shot-put, discus and javelin, beating athletes from Australia and New Zealand that he will also compete against in Beijing.

Is the gap "too Farr?" Only time will tell. After all is said and done, all any athlete can do is to be the best they can be 'on the day'. To reach the Paralympics is a great achievement in itself. To win a medal is crossing the bridge. As a coach, I will be on the other side harbouring all the doubts shared by all coaches and still trying to work out if the best planning can go right".

ERIC'S STATS:

Paralympic Games Experience: Toronto (1976) Arnhem (1980) Stoke Mandeville (1984) Seoul (1988) Barcelona (1992)

Date of Birth: 07/01/44

Sport: Athletics

Discipline/Event: Coach

Disability: Paraplegic-Motor vehicle accident

Occupation: Coach

First time competed for Australia: Feb 2 1974 (Commonwealth Games NZ)

Sport Career Highlights/Achievements: 1st Paralympic Gold in Pentathlon 1976

Best ever world ranking: 1 (Javelin); 1 (Discus); 1 (Shot-put)

Personal honours/awards: Advance Australia Award 1980 Member of British Empire (MBE) 1981

Greatest sporting moment: 1st Paralympic Gold 1976 Toronto

Heroes/Role Models: Tom Richards - Rugby Union Olympian, Gallipoli Veteran (ANZAC)

Rod Farr

- "LIFE IS A JOURNEY - NOT A DESTINATION"

Rod permanently injured his spine in 2000 after a swimming accident and decided to become involved in disabled sport. Athletics field (throws) events have become his speciality.

When he's not throwing things, Rod enjoys watching AFL. He was once a professional AFL player and also a TAFE lecturer in cabinet making. Describing himself as extremely driven when it comes to sport, Rod aims to improve on his previous results by winning gold at the Beijing Games.

Rod tells us of his journey.....

"My road to Beijing started back in 2000 while completing my rehab at Hampstead Spinal Injury Unit. I was introduced to throwing (field events) as an opportunity to be involved in some form of competitive sport, which I was used to since playing football at West Adelaide Football club. My first competition gave me the inspiration to make a long term commitment, when I broke (what was fairly poor) existing Australian records in my class.



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For the next 2 years I struggled as a part-time athlete with little regular coaching, however, I was selected to attend world championships in France as a developing athlete for future Paralympics. When I won a Bronze Medal in discus I realised that I needed to have a more professional training program.

In early 2004 I met and asked retired Paralympian and coach Eric Russell to be my coach. My results in Athens were below expectations due to a health problem after arriving at the village.

Following Athens we formulated a 4 year plan aimed at Beijing 2008. My results at the world championships in Assen, Holland, proved that the plan was on track when I won 2 silver medals. One in was in discus and the other in Shot, where as Eric mentioned, I missed the Gold by a mere 4cms!!! My training was then stepped up even further in order to be at my peak for Beijing.

The Beijing Paralympics will prove to be an even greater challenge now; as the event organisers (in their wisdom) have decided to make it a combined class event. Therefore I will be competing against two other disability classes, as well as my own, on a point score basis. My world ranking now effectively drops from No.2 to around No 6-8. It will prove to be a challenge, but I think everyone involved in the Paralympics and Wheelchair Sports face challenges on a daily basis.



I have quickly learnt you can't become an 'elite athlete' on your own! You need a great team around you.

Many thanks go to my family, my partner and daughter, the staff and volunteers at Wheelchair Sports, George Dunstan and the staff at Hampstead Gym; who have encouraged, bullied and bribed me to become much stronger and fitter.

I owe a huge debt to my coach - Eric Russell, which I can't even begin to repay. Eric has taken me from a fella with some potential to an Elite Athlete proudly representing my country. Along the way, we have claimed the National Titles and Records for my Class for the last 7 years, won 2 silver and one Bronze medal at international level. Eric has coached me with a great mix of enthusiasm, professionalism and humour. I count him not only as my coach, but as a good mate as well. I can honestly say he has brought out my full potential and as a coach, that alone must offer some form of repayment.

So, as Beijing approaches rapidly, I can only wonder how I will go. All I know for sure is that I will be giving it everything I have.

Beyond Beijing.....who knows. Maybe retirement, or maybe I will do something crazy and take up wheelchair rugby. I might just be content to catch up on lost time with my little family.

Whichever way I decide, I know I will never forget my team, and will think of them all fondly when reminiscing my time as an Athlete".

ROD'S STATS:

Paralympic Games experience: Athens 2004.

Date of birth: 24 October 1967

Sport: Athletics

Discipline/event: Discus, Javelin, Shot-put

Disability: Spinal injury - Swimming accident

Occupation Employment Officer

First time competed in your sport: 2000

First time competed for Aust: 2002 – World Championships

Sport career highlights:

2006 World Championships - Dual silver medallist (Discus and Shot-put) & 5th in Javelin

2002 World Championships – Bronze medal (Discus)

Best international results:

2006 World Championships - Two silver medals in the discus and shot put

2002 World Championships - Bronze medal in discus

Current world ranking: 2

Best ever world ranking: 2

Greatest sporting moment: Silver medal at the 2006 World Championships

Most influential person: Athletics coach – Eric Russell

Heroes/role models: Steve Waugh, Lleyton Hewitt

Michael Roeger

- "NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE, SOMETIMES YOU'VE JUST GOT TO WORK HARD AND HAVE FAITH IN YOUR ABILITY"

Michael Roeger says that he isn't scared of anything, but even if he was, there's no way anything would be able to catch him. When Michael runs, he just keeps going, and going, and going.

Michael tells us: "For the 2008 Beijing games I have qualified for the 800m, 1500m, and 5000m track events. I will definitely be competing in the 1500m and 5000m as they are my two stronger events and will see how I feel after them whether I run the 800. The 1500m is my strongest event, as I ran the second fastest time in the world last summer for my category (T46).

I have been running my whole life, whether it has been on the footy field or the running track. My first real taste of running nationally was in 1999 when I represented South Australia in the cross country event held in Darwin. I gave up all my other sports at the end of 2005 and purely focused on one thing - Beijing.

Beijing will be my first Paralympics, but I got a taste of international competition at the FESPIC games in Malaysia 2006.

What interested me most, in not just running, but endurance running was the feeling of pushing yourself to that



next level and seeing how far and fast you can run.....and keep running. When you have just finished a session of 1km reps and you have just gone faster and harder than ever before, there is no feeling like it! In the 1500m, when you have done 1200m and you are racing to that finish line, the last 300 metres feels like a marathon and every muscle in your body is hurting, but some how you manage to pick yourself up and run faster and harder to beat the guy in front of you.

Now that's why you run!!

Others who have inspired me...

I have always been a big fan of Neil Fuller's achievements. I've followed his career and think he's done an awesome job in this Paralympic sport for Australia, and now I am fortunate enough to be good friends with him.

I have also always looked up to my Dad and I

think he is the best bloke in the world! I owe so much to him for my achievements. I wouldn't be representing Australia at the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games without his help and support!!

One of my many sporting dreams is obviously to represent my country on the track and the other would be to become the 1500m world record holder one day. My life ambition is to own my own house and live happy.

I have always had a passion for going fast, so maybe one day I'll end up in a race car of some sort 😊

My greatest sporting moment was winning the 2005 senior colts' footy premiership with my club Langhorne Creek. It was the best feeling ever with a great bunch of guys.

As I am still young, I hope one day I will represent Australia in the marathon. I would have loved to have given it a shot in Beijing, but my coach kills me if I even talk about marathons!! He says; "when you've got speed... use it"!!

MICHAEL'S STATS:

Paralympic Games experience: This will be Michael's 1st Paralympics.

Date of birth; 14 May 1988

Sport: Athletics

Discipline/event: 800m, 1500m, 5000m, 10,000m

Disability: Right arm amputee - Birth

Occupation: Rebel sport

First time competed in your Sport: 1999

First time competed for Aust: 2006

Best international results: 2 bronze medals at FESPIC Games (800m, 1500m)

Greatest sporting moment: 2005 Senior Colts premiership

Most influential person: Father

Heroes/role models: Father, Neil Fuller, Hicham El Guerrouj

Our Shooting Superwoman



Libby Kosmala (OAM) – SHOOTING FOR THE STARS

Libby Kosmala is a founding and 'life' member of Wheelchair Sports SA. So far Libby has been involved in 10 Paralympics over a period of more than forty years. This is more than any other athlete has achieved, including able-bodied Olympians. She also managed to raise two sons during this time, without missing one Paralympic games. She is undoubtedly a legend in sport.

Nobody was more surprised than Libby to hear at the age of 60, after a series of (unrelated) tests, that her disability was not due to Spina Bifida, as she and everyone had always been told, but to a birth injury. Whatever the cause of Libby's being a wheelchair user, she has never let it concern her, and it has not stopped her from being Australia's leading Paralympian, and a world champion with nine Paralympic gold medals to her credit. In addition to her nine gold, Libby has also won over a hundred silver and bronze medals.

The 1984 Games were particularly successful for Libby as she won four gold medals and made four world records in Air Rifle Shooting at the Paralympics in Britain.

The best year for Libby personally however, was in 1988. Both she and her husband won gold medals at the same time – for shooting and lawn bowls respectively.

Libby has been the top Paralympic shooter since 1985 when she was also awarded her OAM (Order of Australia Medal) for services to sport and the disabled community. Most recently, Libby won the 2007 Open European Championships in the women's ten metre air rifle standing.

As with any elite sport, rifle shooting is demanding, and training is intensive. Libby says the effort is 95% mental and 5% physical, with the emphasis on hand/eye coordination and intense concentration. She enjoys training, and revels in competition.

An achievement of which Libby is very proud is gaining parking concessions for people with disabilities. In the early 70's she paid a great many parking fines before she thought that she should do something about the situation. She knew that in some overseas countries, people with disabilities had extended parking times. Her approaches to the Adelaide City Council on the subject were met with refusal. She deliberately let her parking fines accumulate until she was required to show up in court. Libby represented herself, and the court ruled in her favour. Libby's action was the catalyst in the development of government issued parking permits for people with disabilities.

On top of an already hectic sporting life, Libby is a public relations agent for the Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus Association of South Australia. Her community work includes being a member of various boards including: Charity Card Shop (President), Morialta Rifle Club (secretary), Physiotherapy Board of SA and Youth Opportunities.

Libby is a shooting 'super woman' and will no doubt be bringing home more medals from Beijing to add to her huge tally.

LIBBY'S STATS

Paralympic Games experience: Libby will be competing in her 10th Paralympics!!! Heidelberg 1972 (Archery, Athletics & Swimming), Toronto 1976, Arnhem 1980, Stoke Mandeville 1984, Seoul 1988, Barcelona 1992, Atlanta 1996, Sydney 2000, Athens 2004

Date of birth: 8 July 1942

Sport: Shooting

Discipline/event:

SH1 R2 Women's Air Rifle Standing,

SH1 R3 Mixed Air Rifle Prone,

SH1 R6 Mixed .22 Prone

SH1 R8 Sport Rifle .22

Disability: Paraplegia - Birth

Occupation: Public relations/fundraising

First time competed in your sport: 1976

First time competed for Aust: 1970 – Commonwealth Games Scotland (in 7 different sports – not shooting)

Best international results:

1984 Paralympics: 4 gold and 4 world records for Air Rifle Shooting

2002 World Championships in Korea: gold and bronze

Greatest sporting moment: Her first gold medal in 1976 for small-bore shooting and gold for air rifle in 1988 when her husband Stan also won gold for lawn bowls.



Our Smiling Cyclist

Melissa Leckie - "KEEP SMILING"

Mel Leckie has achieved more than what some people dream of doing in a lifetime. She has overcome a fall which left her with complete paraplegia, is studying for a degree in education, is a qualified women's artistic gymnastics judge and coach, began cycling at an international level, and has still managed to live by the motto "just keep smiling".

She made her debut as an Australian (hand) cyclist at the World Championships in France in 2007. It was here that she achieved two silver medals - an amazing achievement for a first time international cyclist.

Mel writes:

"The Games open on the 6th of September but I don't compete until the 12th and 13th. It's cool that Beijing is only an hour and a half behind Adelaide, so at least the coverage is during reasonable hours!

It's all happening so fast and I can't seem to get my head around it. It certainly doesn't feel like a year ago that I was off to France for the 2007 World championships. I'm training and doing really well at the moment, but I really don't feel like I've done a years worth of training. I have absolutely no idea how I will go. I've been doing really well with road and home training (on my computrainer) and going to the aquatic centre for weights.

I am of course aiming for Gold in the time trial, and will do everything in my power to get it. It's just difficult because I've had no real competition since the 2007 worlds, so I don't know where the other girls are at.

I hope to spend a year in Europe cycling the European Handbike Circuit (EHC) prior to the London Paralympics. I just need to find a good financial sponsor and someone to come with me before then! In the recent 2008 National Road Championships in Sydney, I won 2 Gold. Nationals were cool. I beat the guy from QLD (that I wanted to) in the road race. He was sitting right behind me the whole time which was great, as it kept me pushing on".

As the **first woman hand-cyclist in Australia to compete internationally**, with the determination to win and the talent she holds, such a goal is in the making.



MEL'S STATS:

Paralympic Games experience: This will be Mel's 1st Paralympics

Date of birth: 7 February 1984

Sport: Cycling

Discipline/event: Hand Cycling (Road and Time Trial)

Disability: Paraplegia - Fall

First time competed in your sport: 2007

First time competed for Aust: 2007

Sport career highlights: Qualifying for World Championships and winning 2 silver medals.

Greatest sporting moment: Receiving her first medal at her first World Championships

Most influential person: John Gormley (athletics coach)

Heroes/role models: Louise Sauvage, Alejandro Albor



Our Rugby Ruffians



George Hucks - "YOU GET THAT"

"I started playing Rugby in 1994. I guess I was a late starter, but made my first International team in 1995 and have represented Australia in every Paralympics and World Championships since this time.

Beijing will be the fourth Paralympics which I have been selected for, even though I didn't get to compete in Atlanta in 1996 as I broke my knee in a training mishap a week before the Paralympics started, and had to return home. This was the biggest disappointment I have faced in my career.

Also, our poor performance at Athens in 2004 was disappointing, mainly due to some classification issues with one of our best players.

My best experience was Sydney 2000. We were ranked 6th in the world coming in, and played in the Gold medal game losing by only 1 point to the US. We had a magical tournament, and personally, I think this was the best performance I have put in at this level.

One other truly satisfying experience in Rugby was the Nationals held in Adelaide in 1995. The SA team was undermanned for the level of competition, and the Americans toured Australia with a National Development Team. We played them in the final and they won, but they threw everything they had at us, and they had a roster of about twelve players who mostly went on to represent the US in Atlanta the following year. We only had me, Steve (Porter) and two other non International players, but we took all they had and gave them some back. It was an extremely satisfying effort and one game that I have remembered fondly.

My other loves outside of rugby is my family, spending time with them and our dogs (Oakie and Pop), watching AFL Footy (Power) and most other sports.

I have been described as a big softie and the thing I would love to do the most, is to own a Harley Trike and tour around Australia.

I love representing my State and Country, and try to be the best person I can be".

GEORGE'S STATS:

Paralympic Games experience:

Sydney 2000

Athens 2004

Date of birth: 18 January 1968

Sport: Wheelchair rugby

Disability: Spinal neurological disorder - Congenital

Occupation: Funds officer

First time competed in your Sport: 1994

First time competed for Aust: 1995

Sport career highlights: Silver at Sydney 2000 Paralympics

Best international results: Silver at Sydney 2000 Paralympics

Current world ranking: 2

Best ever world ranking: 2

Most influential person: Steve Porter

Heroes/role models: Russell Ebert

Most admired person: Family

Lowest sporting moment: Breaking knee one week before Atlanta 1996



Steve Porter - "YOU CAN GET THROUGH ANYTHING IF YOU TAKE A LONG ENOUGH RUN UP"

Steve began playing Wheelchair basketball in 1992 and upon trying Rugby in 1993, he was quickly converted. Steve is the current captain of the Australian Wheelchair Rugby team and is based here in Adelaide. Steve is one of Australia's most experienced players having represented both South Australia and Australia with distinction since 1994 competing at 3 Paralympic Games – Atlanta 1996, Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004, and 2 World Championships - Canada 1998 and Sweden 2002.



Wheelchair Rugby (also known as Quad Rugby and Murderball) is full on, action packed fun! The sport was first developed in Canada by two quads looking for an alternative to Wheelchair Basketball and it is really nothing like able bodied rugby (well apart from the hard hits). It combines rules from Basketball, American Grid Iron and Ice Hockey and is played indoors on a basketball court.

His list of achievements is significant including a 5th place at the Athens Games, a Silver medal at the Sydney Games and 6th place at the Paralympic Games in Atlanta. Other achievements include a Bronze medal at the 2002 World Championships in Sweden.

As well as being the captain of the National team, Steve is also the captain of the South Australian Wheelchair Rugby team - 'The Sharks'.

He has achieved Most Valuable Player and Best in Class awards in 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2005.

Steve Porter is an athlete who demonstrates the extreme level of commitment, motivation and dedication necessary to achieve in this high intensity sport.

STEVE'S STATS:

Paralympic Games experience:

Atlanta 1996,
Sydney 2000,
Athens 2004

Date of birth: 22 November 1969

Sport: Wheelchair rugby

Discipline/event: Rugby

Disability: Tetraplegic - Spinal injury

Occupation: Human resource manager

First time competed in your sport: 1993

First time competed for Aust: 1994

Sport career highlights:

2000 - Sydney Paralympics

2002 - USA Tour

Best international results:

Silver at the 2000 Paralympics,

Bronze at the 2002 World Championships,

Gold at 2007 Oceania Zone Championships

Current world ranking: 2

Best ever world ranking: 2

Greatest sporting moment: Sydney 2000

Most influential person: Michael Kelly



Ryan Scott - A HUMBLE GENTLEMAN

From a young age Ryan enjoyed playing a variety of sports, including football, soccer, basketball, surfing and motorbike riding. A motor vehicle accident at the age of 16 changed this. After spending six months in rehabilitation, followed by a further six months at home he began playing wheelchair rugby – on top of Year 11 studies and countless hours at the gym.

Ryan says: "I started playing rugby in 1999. My main interest in rugby was due to the fact that it was the only team sport available for 'quads' and it is a contact sport".

In August 2001, Ryan was selected for the Australian team.

Ryan is the current Vice Captain of the Australian Wheelchair Rugby team and is the Coordinator of rugby on behalf of Wheelchair Sports SA. Ryan has won many individual awards and has represented Australia at the 2002 World Championships in Sweden, 2004 Athens Paralympics and the 2006 World Championships in NZ.

Ryan's achievements haven't come easily; they are a result of dedication, commitment and hard work. He travels over two hours a day six days a week to attend training sessions, ensuring he is in top form to represent his country.

When not training or competing Ryan enjoys spending time with his partner, watching live sport and when the rare moment arises, sleeping in.

RYAN'S STATS:

Paralympic Games experience: Athens 2004

Date of birth: 3 March 1982

Sport: Wheelchair Rugby

Disability: Quadriplegia - Car accident

Occupation: Road Safety Presenter

First time competed in your sport: 1999

First time competed for Aust: 2001 Oceania Zonal Championships.

Sport highlights:

2001-2006 Gold at Oceania Zonal Championships

2002 - Gold at Lakeshore Demolition USA

2002 - Sweden World Championships

2004 - Athens Paralympics

2006 - World Championships

Personal honours/awards received:

1999-2003 - Best Point Value

2001 - Kevin Bowden Award

2005 - MVP

Greatest sporting moment:

Making Australian team and competing in Athens

Most influential person:

Kostya Tsyzyu, Jamie Carragher, Rod Campbell

Heroes/role models: Jamie Carragher



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Wheelchair Sports SA acknowledges the following sources of information for this newsletter:

Australian Paralympic Committee (Staff and website) - <http://www.paralympic.org.au>

Telstra Paralympic Education Program - <http://www.paralympiceducation.org.au>

History of Disability in South Australia - <http://history.dircsa.org.au>

Speakers Bureau at ICMI - <http://www.icmi.com.au>

Wikipedia - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Main_Page

We also acknowledge our Wheelchair Sports SA 2008 Beijing Games Paralympians:

Swimming - Matthew Cowdrey, Jay Dohnt, Shelley Rogers

Target Shooting - Libby Kosmala

Handcycling - Mel Leckie

Athletics - Rod Farr, Michael Roeger

Rugby - George Hucks, Steve Porter, Ryan Scott

We thank them for their articles and support for his newsletter during the final days of their preparations for Beijing.

GOOD LUCK !!!

Best wishes go to our great former Paralympian and current Wheelchair Sports member **Julie Russell** who will be attending the Games as a referee in the Powerlifting. Also to our valued physio **John Camens** who will be part of the Basketball support team.

