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**AGAMES LIKE
NO OTHER**

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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

ANNE MARIE HARRISON

What a joy it was to see the Olympic and Paralympic Games in Tokyo take place with athletes demonstrating their extraordinary talent, together with their gratitude to simply be able to compete.

Our thanks and congratulations are extended to the Australian Olympic Committee and Paralympics Australia for navigating the most challenging of circumstances and yet enabling an environment where athletes felt safe and ready to perform. The Tokyo Organising Committee and the Japanese community were wonderful in hosting and supporting the event despite what must have been a level of disappointment for them that they could not showcase the events to spectators and event partners.

So, this edition of the Pinnacle will provide you with unique insights into the experiences and performances of our athletes, coaches and staff at the Tokyo Games. Take a moment to enjoy, reflect and relive their journey over the last 5 years to arrive at the Games prepared to represent their country and compete at the highest level.

Of course, we are also in the final preparations for the next Games. The Olympic and Paralympic

Winter Games will take place in Beijing during February and March and the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in July/August. Whilst the challenges of domestic competition, let alone international travel remain, we offer our very best wishes for selection to all athletes who have set these events as their performance target.

This year has been busy for all at the Victorian Institute of Sport. In addition to managing our way through COVID-19 and supporting athletes to maintain some routine and training opportunities, we have also completed our new Strategic Plan, commenced our Reconciliation Action Plan, established an Alumni and through the strong support of Minister Martin Pakula secured a significant increase in funding for the Paris cycle. Our thanks are expressed to all who play an important role in enabling us to strive towards our Mission; Victorians are proud and inspired by our national and international sporting success and support our athletes to achieve Success in Sport and Life.

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TOKYO 2020: A GAMES TO BE REMEMBERED FOREVER

From Australia storming home for a stunning rowing victory in the Women's Four, to Dylan Alcott OAM notching up back-to-back wheelchair tennis gold medals in the Quad Singles, Tokyo 2020 had it all.

The Tokyo 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games will be remembered forever, for not only the incredible results of the athletes but for the extraordinarily long and challenging journey they took just to reach the start line.

We're incredibly proud of our athletes and how the Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS) has been able to play a role in helping the athletes achieve their successes at Tokyo.

Overall, there were 52 VIS scholarship holders that donned the green and gold for Australia at the Olympic Games, and 31 VIS athletes in the Australian Paralympic team. At both Games combined, our athletes brought home an impressive 5 gold, 13 silver and 10 bronze medals - Congratulations must go to:

Medal performing Olympians

Lucy Stephan, Rosie Popa & Jessica Morrison

- Gold, Women's Four (rowing)

Josh Simmonds

- Silver, Men's Hockey (Kookaburras)

Brendon Smith

- Bronze, Men's 400m Individual Medley (swimming)

Matthew Temple

- Bronze, Men's 4 x 100m Freestyle Relay & Mixed 4 x 100m Medley Relay (swimming)

Mack Horton

- Bronze, Men's 4 x 200m Freestyle Relay (swimming)

Kelland O'Brien & Lucas Plapp

- Bronze, Men's Team Pursuit (cycling)

These medal performances were backed up by some great individual final's performances, highlighted by **Jemima Montag** (6th, Women's 20km Walk) and **Rhydian Cowley** (8th, Men's 50km Walk) who braved the scorching Tokyo heat to both finish inside the top 8 in their race walking events.

Who could forget **Tyson Bull's** performance (5th, Men's Horizontal Bar), etching his name into the history books as he recorded the best result of any Aussie men's artistic gymnast at an Olympic Games, or **Sinead Diver** showing the world that anything is possible, as she became only the second Australian woman to finish top-10 in the Olympic Marathon at the age of 44.

Brooke Stratton (7th, Women's Long Jump), **Kathryn Mitchell** (6th, Women's Javelin Throw), and **Linden Hall** (6th, Women's 1500m) were all stars in the track and field, all making the final of their event and giving it everything in Tokyo's National Stadium.

It was heartbreak for our trap shooters with **Laetisha Scanlan** (4th, Women's Trap) missing bronze by one target and **Penny Smith** (6th, Women's Trap) also falling short of her Olympic medal dream, still inspiring the nation, nonetheless.

The Aussie Stingers were captained terrifically by Rowie Webster, who although were knocked out by the ROC in the quarter final bounced back to finish fifth in classification. Another exciting moment came when we were able to watch **Steph Catley** overcome a range of different injuries to run out for the Matildas once again. In a nervous finish, the Matildas fell agonisingly short of their bronze medal ambition, losing 4-3 to the USA.

Medal performing Paralympians

Emily Petricola

- Gold (Women's 3000m Individual Pursuit C4)
- Silver (Women's Time Trial C4) (Para-cycling)

Carol Cooke AM

- Silver (Women's Time Trial T1-2) (Para-cycling)

Alistair Donohoe

- Silver (Men's 4000m Individual Pursuit C5)
- Bronze (Men's Time Trial C5) (Para-cycling)

Ma Lin

- Silver (Men's Class 9 Singles)
- Silver (Men's Classes 9-10 Team) (Para-table tennis)

Li Na Lei

- Gold (Women's Class 10 Singles)
- Silver (Women's Classes 9-10 Team) (Para-table tennis)

Qian Yang

- Gold (Women's Class 9 Singles)
- Silver (Women's Classes 9-10 Team) (Para-table tennis)

Melissa 'Milly' Tapper

- Silver (Women's Classes 9-10 Team) (Para-table tennis)

Michal Burian

- Silver (Men's Javelin F64) (Para-athletics)

Jaryd Clifford

- Silver (Men's 5000m T12/13)
- Silver (Men's Marathon T12 - supported by guide Tim Logan)
- Bronze (Men's 1500m T12/13) (Para-athletics)

Isis Holt

- Silver (Women's 100m T35)
- Silver (Women's 200m T35) (Para-athletics)

Maria Strong

- Bronze (Women's Shot Put F33) (Para-athletics)

Nicholas Hum

- Bronze (Men's Long Jump T20) (Para-athletics)

Col Pearse

- Bronze (Men's 100m Butterfly S10) (Para-swimming)

Dylan Alcott OAM

- Gold (Men's Quad Singles)
- Silver (Men's Quad Doubles) (wheelchair tennis)

Heath Davidson

- Silver (Men's Quad Doubles) (wheelchair tennis)

The Paralympics had so many inspirational moments and highlights,

including **Jaryd Clifford** who won three medals from three events. But it was his silver medal in the Men's T12/13 5000m event that brought the audience to tears, when he dedicated his run to his late grandfather, who had hoped to watch him race at Tokyo.

Australia's Paralympic table tennis team hadn't won a gold medal for 37 years, but with the help of VIS scholarship holders **Li Na Lei** (Class 10 Singles) and **Qian Yang** (Class 9 Singles), the drought was over, and the medals came within an hour of each other. **Ma Lin** (Class 9) added a couple of medals of his own to the overall tally, in the Singles and Team event. One of the highlights came in the Women's Classes 9-10 Team event, which saw three VIS athletes come together; Lei, Yang and **Melissa 'Milly' Tapper** to win a special silver medal. Overall, the Australian squad secured six medals, with VIS athletes contributing to five of those medals, clearly marking Tokyo as Australia's most successful table tennis campaign at a Paralympic Games.

The Para-cyclists again proved a force to be reckoned with as we saw five medals won by three of our VIS athletes. However, there was plenty of drama in the road races. Days after **Carol Cooke AM** won a silver medal in the Time Trial T1-2, she was vying

to defend her 2016 Rio, Road Race gold medal before crashing heavily in treacherous conditions during the 26km Road Race T1-2 and ending up in hospital. Only a day later, **Alistair Donohoe**, was looking to add to his medal collection but slipped on the slippery road when he tried to avoid a crash. He came down a second time on the road in his pursuit to re-join the leaders and although he eventually caught up to them, bloodied and bruised, it ultimately left him outside medal contention.

Col Pearse had to wait until the back end of the Paralympic swimming program, with his events all scheduled for the second week. When his opportunity came in the Men's 100m Butterfly S10 to step on the podium, he took it, winning the bronze medal.

The achievements and performances of these VIS athletes is not only a reflection of the depth of our sporting talent but the hard work of the whole VIS community including all coaches and service providers.



Image: Qian Yang (left) and Li Na Lei (right),

Image Credit: Paralympics Australia

SMITH'S SPIRIT UNBROKEN

The pandemic put an end to Anabelle Smith's hopes of winning another medal in the 3m Synchronised diving event in Tokyo. With the help of VIS sport psychologist, Caroline Anderson, Smith reframed her mindset with the end goal of representing Australia at a third Olympic Games.

Each Olympic diver gets five attempts to make their mark on the competition. With every dive lasting only two seconds, ten seconds is all it takes to determine your fate.

"In diving and especially at the Olympics, your mental game needs to be stronger than your physical game," Smith says.

If everyone has the same diving ability, the person who is going to win the competition is the one with the mental edge."

Smith, a VIS scholarship holder for 13 years, spent several years searching for a sports psychologist that suited her needs. Smith met Anderson four years ago and they instantly formed a connection.

"From day one, Caroline made me feel safe and comfortable, and I knew after my first session, I'd found my fit" says Smith.

"I feel like I have developed a greater layer of resilience and confidence in myself, thanks to the work we have done together."

The last two years have been challenging for Smith, who has had to overcome many different obstacles to be able to represent her country for a third time at the Olympic Games.

At the end of 2019 she made the move from her home town, Melbourne, to Adelaide to be with her long-time coach and former VIS diving head coach, Andy Banks. The diving program was relocated in preparation for Tokyo.

Relocating is nothing new to Smith, who over the last eleven years, has had to move back and forth between Brisbane and Melbourne, to cater to training needs. However, due to the pandemic, this time, Smith was locked out of her home state and could not see her family for extended periods.

"It was an extremely turbulent time leading into the final qualifying event,"

Smith says referring to the 2021 FINA Diving World Cup. "It was on, then it was off. We were going, then we weren't. In the end, Diving Australia made the call that it was unsafe for us to go, and the logistics proved too challenging."

Smith and Maddison Keeney just missed out on the Tokyo automatic qualifying spots at the 2019 FINA World Championships in the 3m Synchro event. So when, COVID-19 prevented them from travelling to the World Cup to qualify the long way, their dream of winning another Olympic medal together was officially over.

When the Tokyo dream appeared to be over, Smith turned to Anderson for help mentally.

"Caroline was integral during lockdown, the postponement of the Games, and especially after losing our chance in Synchro. She helped me reframe my mindset and also gave me the grace to feel all my emotions when challenges arose, and to constantly work through what was going to come next," says Smith.

Anderson helped Smith focus on the positive things in the tricky situation she was in. Instead of focusing on missing out on a competition she turned her attention to the fact she gained more time to train for a new opportunity, 3m Individual.

At the 2021 Australian Open Championships, Smith and Keeney were now battling each other for the elusive top two finish that would secure a spot on the Australian Olympic Team in the 3m individual event.

Smith used the skills on which she had worked with Anderson to help her perform at her best when she needed it. Breathing techniques helped her calm her nerves and stay present in the moment avoiding negative thoughts.



Image: Anabelle Smith

GALIABOVITCH, AUSTRALIA'S OLYMPIC FLAGBEARER

A SPECIAL MOMENT OF RECOGNITION FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Elena Galiabovitch received the prestigious honour of being named the Olympic flagbearer for the Tokyo 2020 opening ceremony. Along with five other international Olympic athletes, Galiabovitch was selected to carry the Olympic flag in recognition of her work on the frontline to help Melbourne battle the COVID-19 pandemic.

Galiabovitch is a Victorian Institute of Sport shooting athlete and represented Australia in both the 10m Air Pistol and the 25m Pistol events. This was her second Olympic Games, having competed at the 2016 Rio Games.

Her father Vladimir is her coach, who is also Australia's national pistol coach.

Living by the VIS' motto of success in sport and life, Galiabovitch is studying to become a urological surgeon. She is used to balancing full time work and training but due to her preparation for the Games she worked as a casual employee on COVID wards and COVID screening clinics.

We caught up with Galiabovitch to learn more about her experience as an Olympic flagbearer.

How did you find out that you were going to be carrying the Olympic flag for the opening ceremony?

"We were at our staging camp in Brisbane prior to departure and one day our High-Performance Director, Adam (Sachs, ed.), told me that he needed to speak to me for 5 minutes. I think it's pretty common to assume that it's going to be something bad when someone says they need to talk to you, but he assured me it wasn't."

I don't remember the exact words he told me, but it was really exciting, and I immediately agreed that I would like to participate in that capacity. He informed me they were looking for athletes that had helped out in the pandemic and the IOC had approached the AOC to see if I could be one of Olympic flagbearers honouring the frontline workers all over the world."

What was your ceremonial flag duty?

"We each had part of the flag to hold and together we had to carry it out in a straight line - harder than it seems! - wave when our name was called and then turn and hand it off to other Japanese essential workers.

We had a rehearsal the day before. I had the top left corner, so I was also the pace setter and I had to direct the team to turn when we changed direction. Our main instruction was to hold the flag taut so that it looked nice for the cameras."

What was the opening ceremony experience like?

Stepping out as a healthcare worker representing Oceania was really powerful. I know first-hand the struggles people in the healthcare industry have faced on top of those experienced by the general population. Those who have reached out to me expressed they felt

proud of me but that it was also a special moment of recognition for healthcare professionals as a whole to be recognised in this way."

What will be your fondest memory from these Olympic Games?

"This is a tough question. Participating as an Olympic flag bearer is a very unique experience and one, I will always treasure. However, there are so many moments around competing that also stand out, particularly my last day of competition.

In addition, some moments with my Dad who is my coach, they were just simple things like having breakfast together on my last day or walking together under an umbrella in the rain to go and take some pictures right after my last event finished and I narrowly missed out on the final. There was an unspoken connection and comfort in having shared the experience."

Image Credit: Getty Images



ROOS' LEGACY CONTINUES: RACH LYNCH

Five years' worth of tears were shed at the Oi Hockey Stadium when the full-time whistle sounded, and for a group that had gone through the ringer in recent years the loss hurt - it really hurt.

India was not supposed to beat Australia. A team ranked ninth in the world and contesting at only their third Olympic Games were not meant to oust the No.2 ranked team with four decades of Olympic experience.

But the 1-0 quarter-final was unlike perhaps any other, an upset to rival all women's hockey upsets.

The Hockeyroos had won all five previous matches in Tokyo, conceding just a single goal, but were stunned by an Indian team that just made the semi-finals on skill and mettle and in doing so spoiled the Roos' quest for an Olympic medal since 2000.

It was well documented that long-term Victorian Institute of Sport scholarship holder Rachael Lynch experienced some very dark days in the lead up to the Games. She was sensationaly dropped from the squad, appealed the decision, worked on getting in career best shape and was ultimately rewarded with selection in the 16-woman squad for Tokyo.

The star Hockeyroo goalkeeper speaks to Pinnacle about her experience:

"The 2020 Tokyo Olympics were unique and incredible."

Strict COVID protocols meant a long and slightly painful airport processing



My secret weapon for the hot and humid conditions - my trusty camelback backpack! A hydration solution I came up with whilst training alone

experience but once we were in the village, things were great. We were spoilt with bundles of uniform, comfortable rooms, a barista, Indigenous artwork everywhere and a collection of the most caring and athlete centered AOC staff you could ask for. From slushies and snacks to recovery boots, we were sorted and the Roos were ready to go!

We quickly got the lay of the land and made ourselves at home. Our COVID-safe rules and routines were in place which allowed us to focus on competing and enjoying the Olympic experience.

As the various athletes and teams rolled into the village, the excitement began to build. After 18+ months of uncertainties and set-backs, we were all so keen to get underway (before any outbreaks threatened to call off the whole thing).

As expected, the Tokyo heat was relentless, but we were all prepared.

A week in Darwin pre-Games to acclimatise, and careful planning around individual strategies meant we had a psychological edge. We wanted hot days and high humidity as we knew we could handle it better than most.

From day one to the conclusion, time just flew. We competed; we watched; we cheered; we ate; we laughed and we slept.

in late 2020 when I was dropped from the squad.

It is almost impossible to keep hydration up during games which I knew would impact my decision-making and negatively affect my performance. I wore the 2 litre backpack filled with Powerade slushy under my goalie gear during games which allowed me to cool internally and stay hydrated and alert. Even with the halftime refill I still lost 1 to 2 kgs to sweat loss, which shows the importance of this method.

The day finally arrived for the opening ceremony where we watched from our balconies as athletes and staff from around the world gathered in traditional dress before making their way into the Olympic stadium. Cate Campbell and Patty Mills did us all proud as they carried the flag on behalf of Australia. We were all very happy to get dressed in our kit but then enjoy the ceremony via televisions in the village.

The vibe amongst the Hockeyroos was much like that of the whole Australian team; excited, united, focused and ready.

A dream come true experience for any athlete.

I loved my roommates on this tour and boy did we have some fun! Our apartment was set up like a home. We had a projector (delivered via Japan Amazon) that streamed sport from 7am till late at night, a pantry made out of cardboard boxes filled with meals and snacks, a makeshift linen store for all towels and bedding (we didn't allow cleaners in our room due to the COVID risk), a mini basketball ring for shoot-out competitions, a polaroid photo wall and little pieces of home next to our beds.

Normality can be hard to create at an Olympics so some creature comforts made the world of difference.

The Games; at Tokyo 2020 the Roos created some history. We won five games in a row (all pool rounds) which had never been done before. I set a record for going the longest without conceding a goal (one in five pool games then one in the quarter-final where we bowed out) and then to top it off I was presented with an award by World Olympian's Association patron Prince Albert II of Monaco for 'Olympian for Life'. It was given to 5 athletes globally for their contribution to society and use of their platforms to improve people's lives. A truly incredible honour!

The most special part of this experience however was the poem and presentation made by my



teammates Rosie Malone and Sav Fitzpatrick. Some beautiful and powerful words shared in a moment I'll never forget. Surrounded by my teammates and staff, with the AOC looking on and filming, so I could keep this memory forever.

Spain (3-1), China (6-0), Japan (1-0), New Zealand (1-0), Argentina (2-0).

Final's time came around and we knew we were at the business end of the tournament. Five out of five wins put us in a fantastic position going into the quarter-finals, but none of it meant a thing as this was a knockout game.

Across the tournament I had chosen to read a few letters from home before each game. Our Well-being and Engagement Manager Rohan had organised an envelope for each of us filled with letters and cards from friends and family back home. A very special gift! Each one gave an emotional boost and a nice reminder of those who had contributed to this journey.

The night before the quarter-final I felt a little nervous so chose not to read any. I knew the incredible support I had around me and wanted to keep my emotions in check for the big game.

The quarter final came and went and with it, the end to our fairytale journey, I deeply wanted this to be our time, our year. After everything I'd been through and the team had been through, a gold medal (or any medal in fact) would've been the icing on the cake.

One goal is all it took. Our Olympics was over. We sat in silence in the change room. Some cried, others just stared at the floor. It's a tough pill to swallow when every ounce of you goes into preparing for an Olympic Games. Our coach told us she was proud. She thanked us for the incredible experience and emphasised that we had not let anyone down.

I took some time to reflect then was requested for an interview with waiting media. Through tears I spoke of how proud I was of the group, how united we had become, and of the courage and leadership shown by some of the girls during my dark times. I knew it was obvious to those back home but I shared how we had laughed and how much fun we had had together. How the girls played so freely and without fear. This was what hockey should be about.

As a group of aspiring women, we aimed to create something really special. Something that young girls wanted to be a part of. And we had done that!"



DISAPPOINTMENT AND PRIDE

Jaryd Clifford returned to Australia as a three-time Paralympic medallist, winning silver in both the T12/13 Marathon and the 5000m, and a bronze in the 1500m.

Initially Clifford, who is a visually impaired athlete, qualified for his favoured events the T12/13 1500m and 5000m. But, leading into the Tokyo Paralympics, Clifford "accidentally" broke the Marathon world record at the Sydney Grand Prix and secured himself another race at Tokyo. Clifford was running as a pacer for teammate Michael Roeger in the Marathon and didn't even intend on finishing the race, until he reached the halfway point and was encouraged to keep going. His time was not only a world record but secured him a place in the Marathon event at the Paralympic Games.

After achieving the accidental qualification, Clifford decided that he would still dedicate his training schedule to his favoured events, but thought, why not run the Marathon on the final day of the Paralympics as a bonus?

We caught up with Clifford to hear how he went in an event he had never trained for.

"The first 30km of the Paralympic Games Marathon felt like it transpired in the blink of an eye. The final 12km, however, felt like an age, as if time stood still – each step only burying me further into the well of pain enveloping every inch of my mind and body.

In those endless moments, when pain threatened to beat me down, my best mate turned guide-runner, Tim Logan, calmly navigated my path to the finish not only by directing me through the twists and turns of the course, but also by using his voice to remind me that I wasn't alone on that road, that the pain would soon come to an end.

I've won world titles and broken world records, but nothing can beat



that Marathon silver – nothing can beat running into a Paralympic stadium after going to hell and back with your best mate, nothing at all.

I knew the wheels were falling off at the 30km mark. Without warning, my body had violently (yes, this is the most suitable word to describe it) convulsed, expelling the contents of all the prior drinks stations and the pre-race snacks. Frankly, I was surprised it took so long. After all, I had once again opted not to train for a Marathon, so what else could I expect? My body yearned for replacement fluids, but I had never trained my body to take them. From that moment on, Tim and I struck a fine balance between the pace my legs could sustain and the pace that would most effectively keep me from descending into further distress.

As we entered the stadium, my body began to anticipate the indescribable relief of crossing that finish line. It began to cave and my strength wavered as my body took over in the final metres. I collapsed, threw up one last time, Tim slapping me on the back. He picked me up, we embraced, and he gave a fist pump – we'd done it. We'd just run a bloody Marathon at the Paralympic Games.

I remember after the first bout of vomiting at 30km, Tim asked me: "you all good?"

I replied: "yeah, my legs are fine. It's just my stomach's not!" If anyone already knew that other than me, it was Tim with his ringside seats.

At around the 38km mark, the course climbed like the Pyrenees (that's how it felt at the time), and my body started to cramp. I said to Tim: "I'm starting to cramp." He replied: "okay, do you want to go faster or slower?" I then replied: "no, just the same pace."

Not long after this riveting conversation, any remaining energy evaporated almost instantly. Tim could sense this, so he reminded me that if I needed to conserve more energy I could always just close my eyes. Not many people could say that to me whilst running flat-stick through an unknown city, on unknown roads, and yet that moment sums up the trust we've built over a decade of running together almost every single day.

I wasn't nervous for myself going into the race, I was nervous for Jaryd as the marathon is still such unknown territory for him, so the goal was just trying to get him to the finish line. The team assumed if he would be able to finish the race a good result would come out of it.

A vivid memory I have from guiding the marathon was after the first guide changeover had happened, and for the next 5km Jaryd and I were just talking and catching up on the morning's events prior to the race.

During the race I was trying to keep Jaryd's mind off the pain of the marathon, but at around 28km Jaryd started vomiting, kindly enough he directed it away from me. From this point onwards, he was trying to get the fluids at every drink station in even though they just kept coming up.

It was difficult to ever be comfortable with Jaryd completing the race even as we rounded up the hill and into the stadium he was still vomiting and almost staggering along to get to the finish line.

Image: Jaryd Clifford (left) and Tim Logan (right)

Image Credit: Getty Images

misses felt like devastating blows. But I'm proud that I fought, proud that I gave it everything, and proud that I got to run on the biggest stage of all.

As Philo said whilst embracing me after my silver in the 5000m: "You've got to be proud of that, Clifffy." I am, I definitely am.

Now, we look to the next chapter. I'm 22 and the one thing that has dominated my teenage years is now behind me, and I can't explain how liberating that now feels. I didn't know how I would respond to the aftermath of Tokyo, but I feel rested, motivated and more determined than ever to tick the final box on my whiteboard. It didn't happen in Tokyo,

but I'll be giving it everything to try make sure I can get it done in Paris. Thank you to everyone for all your support, and to all those people that have our backs and believe in us even more than we believe in ourselves sometimes, thank you!"

GUIDING CLIFFORD

Jaryd Clifford insists a key reason he was able to win silver in the Men's T12 Marathon was due to the help of his guides, one of those being VIS scholarship holder Tim Logan.

Logan spoke to Pinnacle about his Tokyo experiences, and what it was like to guide his best mate to the finish line of the Marathon.

"Guiding Jaryd is extremely special and it's an absolute honour to be able to help my best friend achieve his goals. In a sport that is very individualised on race day it really brings a team element especially as it can be extremely lonely on the road in a marathon.

I wasn't nervous for myself going into the race, I was nervous for Jaryd as the marathon is still such unknown territory for him, so the goal was just trying to get him to the finish line. The team assumed if he would be able to finish the race a good result would come out of it.

I figured a big positive to having a guide is that when push comes to shove and Jaryd starts to tire, I can try and motivate him and take his mind off the race with words of encouragement or just something completely irrelevant.



"From the first time we used the guide rope, it seemed to work perfectly" - Tim Logan

We both felt a profound sense of relief and accomplishment once we crossed the line. To get through one of the most gruelling events and one that Jaryd had not trained properly for and pick up a silver medal at the Paralympics, just to be a part of it all was incredible and is a memory that will stay with me for life.

Jaryd is such an incredible athlete and human, guiding becomes a breeze when you have an athlete as professional as Jaryd, he's always looking up and researching things to improve the guiding and strategies that we have, he may not have won a gold at these Games but at only 22 years old he's an absolute champion and has the world at his feet.

Jaryd and I plan to keep running together and continue guiding – it's such a unique experience that I wouldn't be able to give up easily, fingers crossed we can make it to Brisbane 2032 to be able to compete in front of a home crowd."

Image: Tim Logan (left) and Jaryd Clifford (right)

AROUND THE GROUNDS

STINGERS FINISH FIFTH

Despite more than 18 months without any international competition the Aussie Stingers delivered an inspired performance throughout the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, finishing in fifth place – one spot better than their placing at Rio 2016.

The Stingers, featuring Victorian Institute of Sport stalwart Rowie Webster, were knocked out of medal contention after a heartbreaking 9-8 loss to ROC in the quarter-finals – a disappointing end to their campaign given their strong form during the preliminary rounds.

After the disappointment of not progressing on to compete for a medal, the Aussies bounced back to show that they are more than capable of competing with the top four teams, defeating European heavyweights The Netherlands 14-7 in the fifth-place play-off.

Rowie, a triple Olympian and Captain of the Stingers, led her team proudly, saying she couldn't fault the effort of the team throughout the Games.



Image Credit: Getty Images



ONE SHOT FROM BRONZE

Some 16 years of shooting culminated in split-second heartbreak for Laetisha Scanlan, who fell one target short of a medal in Tokyo.

Scanlan finished fourth in the Women's Trap competition, while fellow VIS athlete Penny Smith was the first eliminated in the six-shooter final.

Scanlan started the medal-deciding contest at Asaka Shooting Range with a score of 24/30, putting her just one target behind eventual gold medallist Zuzana Rehak-Stefcekova.

Five shots later, the 31-year-old was ousted from the final.

Scanlan missed her last target to finish level with Alessandra Perilli, but the latter's higher ranking in qualification meant she went on to claim bronze and San Marino's first-ever Olympic medal.

The jarring end came five years after Scanlan finished fifth in Rio, having topped qualifying on that occasion then watched on as Catherine Skinner secured one of Australia's eight gold medals at the 2016 Games.

Despite the disappointment, Scanlan refused to make excuses, "We live in Australia, so we are used to windy conditions and things like that. It wasn't a surprise," she said.

"It has been an amazing journey. It has been a five-year process, and I am really proud of myself to get in another Olympics, especially within the pandemic."



THIS BRONZE FEELS LIKE GOLD

Australia's bronze medal in the Men's Team Pursuit event at Tokyo will be remembered as one of the gutsier performances of the Olympic Games.

Alex Porter was involved in a freak accident during qualifying, when his handlebars snapped off his bike after the team had ridden for over a kilometer. The Aussies were given a restart just 30 minutes later, but were only able to qualify fifth fastest, meaning they were unable to ride for gold as they finished outside the top four.

Team reserve Lucas Plapp replaced an injured Porter in the heat ride the following day, joining fellow VIS

scholarship holder Kelland O'Brien, and teammates Sam Welsford and Leigh Howard. The team improved in their heat and set up a bronze medal ride-off against New Zealand.

The drama continued in the ride-off, but this time involving New Zealand. The battle was tight and anyone's for the taking, until one of the Kiwi riders touched the wheel in front of him and went down at the rear. Essentially ending the Kiwi team's bronze medal ambitions.

With bronze under their belt after a drama-filled few days, the Aussie team agreed at the end of the race that this bronze felt like gold, and something they were all immensely proud of.

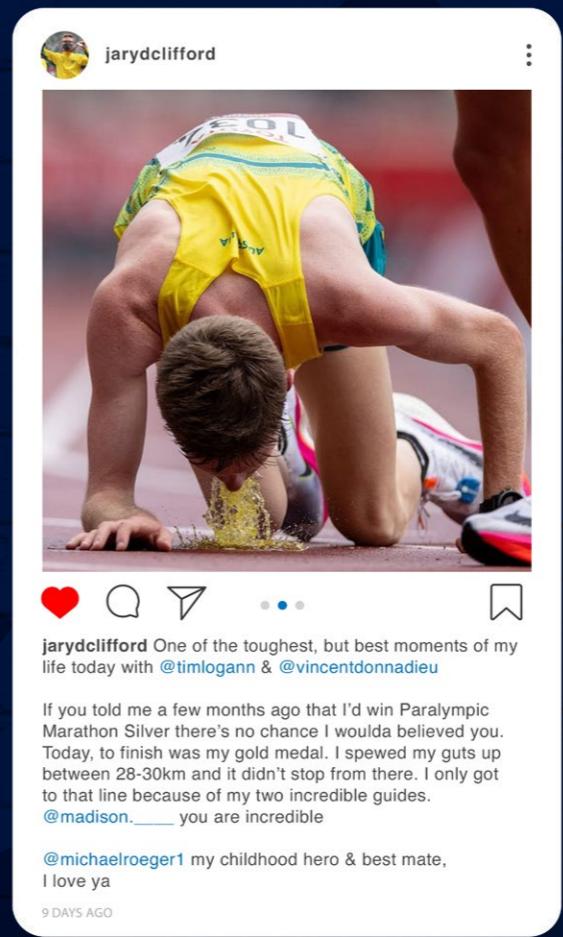
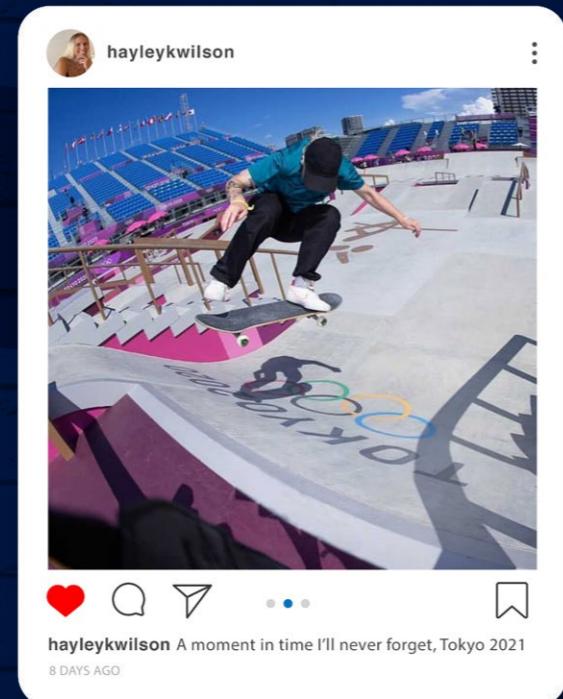
"It was a crazy few days for us and an even more hectic five years. We've been

through a lot together. We wanted gold, it's what we came for. But, I think we can really hold our heads high after that. It's such a special moment for us, one I'll remember for a really long time."

O'Brien said.



SOCIALS



CHAMPIONS OF THE WORLD: A COUNTDOWN TO SUCCESS

"There were a lot of nerves, but we had a lot of trust in one another, it was very much business, stay in the process and trust what we had to do." - Lucy Stephan

When the Australian Women's Four crew crossed the finish line, Jessica Morrison was unsure if they'd done enough to hold off a fast-finishing Dutch outfit, but Lucy Stephan insisted to the crew "we've done it."

A moment Morrison remembers to be "so relieving", having achieved something she had spent her whole life dreaming about and being able to do it with some of her closest friends made it even more special.

"It's such a rare opportunity to do something very special and I'm so happy I was able to achieve it with three of my closest teammates," she said.

While there was a lot of attention elsewhere at the Tokyo International Swimming Center, a trio of VIS scholarship holders – Jessica Morrison, Lucy Stephan, Rosemary Popa – kick-started a historic day for Australian rowing, along with Anabelle McIntyre.

"Our gold medal was the first rowing medal for Australia that day and was promptly followed by another gold in the Men's Four and two bronze from the Men's and Women's Quads Sculls." Morrison said.

"Later that day the 16 medal winners travelled back to the village wearing our medals and walked a lap of the village celebrating together. It was very special to be able to celebrate our collective triumph together," she continued.

The Women's Coxless Four event which had been retired from the Olympic program for close to 30 years, returned to Tokyo in the IOC's movement toward gender equality. As the Australian Team arrived to the banks of the Sea Forest Waterway in Tokyo Bay on finals day, Lucy

Stephan admits that she could sense the four of them were ready to take on the world.

"We knew our rhythm, we knew how to get to the finish line, we didn't need to practise anymore, we just had to do what we needed to do."

5 MINUTE RACE COUNTDOWN

5 minutes to go	We think about all the training we have done and all the sessions we have done together in Penrith
4 minutes to go	We think about all of the races we've had together, and all of the times we've executed good racing.
3 minutes to go	We think about our mid-race rhythm, for us this is a strong point, it's all about how we're going to get to the finish and how we are going to move the boat in that mid-race rhythm.
2 minutes to go	We think about the transition, coming out of the start and transitioning into that mid-race rhythm. What are the technical calls, and what feelings do we want to feel going into that transition?
1 minute to go	This is all dedicated to the first stroke, when the buzzer goes, all you can control is that first stroke and once you do, the rest flows naturally.

Although the Australian's qualified as the fastest team through the heats, they knew they were going to be in for a strong battle, particularly against the Irish and Dutch teams. The girls were able to break the Irish team early in the race, but they could see the Dutch team sitting closely behind, waiting to make their move.

"I could see the Dutch team started coming back on us with around

150m to go, and after we had a bad stroke, I thought that we were going to get silver" Stephan said.

"But we got straight back on it, and 50m later out of the corner of my eye, I see the Dutch team had about three messy strokes and that's when I knew that we had this."

"As we got closer to the finish line, I just kept saying to the girls – enjoy this, we've got it."

An emotional Rosemary Popa dedicated the historic victory to everyone back home who had helped their Olympic dream become a reality.

"I know everyone at home is so, so proud. They've been there for all the tears, the ups and downs, so I think this is as much for them as it is for us," Popa said.

Image Credit: Getty/Images



EMILY PETRICOLA: BECOMING A PARALYMPIC CHAMPION

In 2007, following the sudden onset of numbness throughout her body, Emily Petricola was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). She was 27.

Subsequent and frequent MS attacks severely impacted her ability to function as she had before. Further debilitating symptoms, including extreme fatigue, temporary loss of sight and numbness through her body, rendered basic tasks challenging and incapacitated her for a number of years.

Emily's weight ballooned to 115 kilograms because of her inability to exercise and the large doses of steroid medication used to control her MS. However, encouraged by her network of supporters, she remained determined to keep physically active.

In 2015 some friends suggested she take up Para-cycling (the friends were dual Olympic rower Matt Ryan and five-time Olympic cyclist Shane Kelly!) and a few months into training they were so impressed that they emboldened her to dream big and set a goal to qualify for the Tokyo Paralympics.

Fast forward six years, Emily is a Paralympic Champion! We caught up with her post Games:

Firstly, how does it feel to be a Paralympic CHAMPION!?

It is crazy to think that I am now a Paralympic champion and know that my name will be in those results books forever! It was such a long process and a very long extended preparation to get to Tokyo. The postponement meant that there were many extra challenges thrown in there, so to get the result in the Individual Pursuit (IP) was incredible. I'm so happy that I was able to perform well and do justice to the work of the team of people behind the scenes – it is fair reward for all the work that they've put in, especially the VIS staff (special mention to both Harry Brennan and Shane Kelly). These guys have given me so much of their time and energy over the last few years and deserve all the credit that comes with this result.

I have to say that if I didn't have Harry Brennan on my team, I would not be in the sport today. I have had a lot of

challenging moments over the past three years, and he has been instrumental in helping me navigate what has been and is a very challenging landscape. I couldn't feel more grateful to have someone with not only such incredible intellect and knowledge in his specialised area, but someone that takes the time to understand those he works with and make sure that they feel seen and heard, working with them to maximise their potential.

How did you celebrate?

Celebrations in Tokyo were pretty limited given the COVID restrictions in place, and the fact I had the road Time Trial within six days of the IP. It was, however, lovely to come back to the hotel and show the medal to my teammates and the staff with us who have been a part of the journey. It was great to see and feel the genuine excitement of those around me for the result. I also got a chance to speak to Matt Ryan and Shane Kelly who, as I've always said, are the reason I am doing this. To get to share my excitement and deep gratitude to them both publicly and privately was incredibly special. These guys were instrumental in helping me rebuild my life when I started on the bike, and I will spend my life feeling grateful to them.

What was your best moment from the Games?

I had a few wonderful moments at the Games, and none more special than seeing Paige (Greco*) after my medal ceremony. We hadn't seen one another since she left our little warm up room for her final, so it was so incredible to see her as soon as I walked off the podium and to get to share a hug, some tears, and really celebrate the fact we had both delivered on all the expectation that we had carried into the track competition.

*Paige won Australia's first gold of the Paralympic Games, winning the Women's 3,000m Individual Pursuit C1-3, just moments before Emily's race.



What was it like competing in an empty velodrome?

Racing in an empty velodrome was obviously different from how I had imagined racing at the Paralympics to be, however, whether there are 10,000 people in the stands or none, my preparation for an event and how I approach it doesn't change. I have done a lot of work with my sport psychologist, John Baranoff, to prepare for the Games and so I implemented those strategies to minimise any nerves and remained focused on getting the job done to the best of my ability.

What is next for Em....?

With Tokyo behind us, I have started back at training and am looking forward to making big improvements on the bike in this cycle. I am still new to this sport really, and still very raw, so I know that there are a lot of improvements we can make to my performances, which is exciting. I am someone who is improvement focussed and always striving to be better than I am, so knowing I have the best possible team of experts around me from the start of the cycle brings great confidence and excitement about where we are going to go over the next three years as we head towards Paris. Track World Champs should be early next year, so it will be great to hopefully be able to travel to that to defend my three titles, and then to Road World Champs later in the year. The short Paralympic cycle is sure to be hectic and challenging, but I am looking forward to all of it – my team and I will be pushing the envelope, working to make me the best athlete I can possibly be.

While Emily still deals with the challenges of MS on a regular basis, she describes Para-cycling as her silver lining. The sport has afforded her the opportunity to become a multiple World Champion, World Record holder and, now, a Paralympic Champion. She hopes her story can give others with the disease belief that a lot can still be achieved.

Image Credit: Getty/Images

FAREWELL TO A CHAMPION

Dylan Alcott OAM started his journey at the Victorian Institute of Sport as a 16-year-old wheelchair basketball player. Five Paralympic medals, 23 Grand Slam titles and a Golden Slam honour later, he leaves behind him a lasting legacy.

Alcott announced shortly after he became the first man in any form of tennis to win a Golden Slam – all four major titles and Paralympic or Olympic gold – that the 2022 Australian Open in January will be his final tournament.

"This is my home and the Australian Open changed my life," Alcott said. "What a way to finish, in my home city, in front of big, big crowds."

Victorian Institute of Sport CEO Anne Marie Harrison congratulated Alcott on a tremendous career, saying that he is "a wonderful example of the value and importance of diversity in providing opportunities for athletes to be successful in sport and life."

"Dylan has been on scholarship for 14 years and in that time has won multiple awards culminating in the Award of Excellence in 2015, which was achieved through his sporting achievements, complemented by him being focused on challenging the status quo for people with disabilities," Harrison continued. "Dylan is a great role model, not only to people with a disability but also to the general population on how to live a life with no restrictions, no limits and living life to the fullest."

"The athletes, staff and Board of the Victorian Institute of Sport thank Dylan and wish him all the best for what no doubt will be another exciting chapter in his life."

It's only fitting that the champion will bow out in front of a full house in his



hometown, Melbourne. Showing the world and a community of people with disabilities that anything is possible.

"The reason I get out of bed is not to win gold medals and Grand Slams, it's to change perceptions. So that people like me, people with disabilities, can get the opportunities they deserve." He said.

The noise and reception that Alcott will receive as he makes his way out for his final Open, will be very different to when he first made his international tennis debut, "hidden away on the outside courts."

"When I played my first Australian Open in 2014, five people were there and four of them were my family!" he said.

"In 2020 there were 12,000 people at Rod Laver, a million people watching it live on Channel 9 and 500 kids with disabilities there."

Alcott's elite sporting career began when he was awarded a scholarship at the Victorian Institute of Sport as a wheelchair basketball athlete in 2007. A place he mentions has been with him since the very start of it all.

"I absolutely love the VIS," he said. "They've been behind me since I first started my sporting career and without the VIS, I wouldn't be here doing what I'm doing today."

At the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games he created history as the youngest ever gold medallist for wheelchair basketball. He went on to win a silver Paralympic medal at London 2012, before he decided

to make the switch back to his childhood sport, wheelchair tennis in 2014.

Alcott became a dual gold medallist at the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games, winning both the Quad Singles and the Quad Doubles, and most recently won gold in the Quad Singles and silver in the Quad Doubles at Tokyo 2020.

Throughout his whole sporting career, he admits that Paralympic sport had meant so much to him.

"I used to hate myself so much. I hated my disability. I didn't even want to be here anymore."

"Paralympic sport in general, it saved my life... it was the best thing that ever happened to me."

"Now I've become the only male ever in any form of tennis to win the Golden Slam, which is pretty cool."

Alcott's performance at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games was simply incredible. Down 3 games to 5 in the opening set, Sam Schroder looked to be all over him. Until Alcott got to work and showed exactly why he is the world number 1, winning 10 of the final 12 games of the match to secure back-to-back Paralympic gold medals.

Whilst Alcott achieved so much success in his sport, he admits that his "proudest" achievements have been the ones that have come off the tennis court.

"I am so proud of the work we have done," he said. "Being a good tennis player is not the priority of my life. Being a good person is."

Image: Dylan Alcott
Image Credit: Getty Images

IN HER ELEMENT: JESSICA ROTHWELL REFLECTS ON TOKYO

Jessica Rothwell has been working as a sports dietitian at the Victorian Institute of Sport for over four years, helping to support and educate Victoria's elite athletes.

Also working at Athletics Australia as their national high performance nutrition lead, Rothwell went to Tokyo to support Australia's Olympic Athletics Team.

Rothwell played a key role in ensuring athletes were able to meet their nutritional needs, in what was one of the most hot and humid Games on record.

We caught up with Rothwell to hear about her Tokyo experience:

"You are in your element! In a room full of food and rooming with your idol" said Hugh, as I sent him a selfie after setting up our Sapporo team food/relax room. Pretty spot on!

It was really a privilege to be part of such a unique Games. I have never felt as much responsibility in a role like this before, supporting team management and sports nutrition responsibilities under such unique circumstances.

I tell you; the first few days of hotel quarantine on return to Australia was absolute heaven – I'm sure the VIS nutrition team could attest to this, it was an overwhelming feeling that everything was okay, had gone okay and we were out the other end!

The preparation and teamwork of everyone involved from Athletics Australia was outstanding and by the time we settled into a week of quarantine, it was really evident the impact and results from our athletes was widespread with an overwhelming sensation of pride, unity, and gratitude. Tokyo 2020 was Athletics Australia's 3rd best result in half a century and the best result in 20 years...which was really something to celebrate!

Athletics is a giant and diverse beast of many hard working coaches,

athlete pairs and practitioners, it's one of the reasons I love this sport so much.

My work whilst away, largely involved supporting a great food service environment at our staging camp in Cairns, facilitating and refining competition nutrition strategies to help athletes prepare for one of the most hot and humid Games on record, liaising with our sports dietitians SIS-SAS practitioner network to provide updates of their athletes as relevant, supporting research interventions that particular event group athletes were participating in, troubleshooting and understanding all of the specific logistics for Sapporo (where the endurance athletes were competing) and working with our extended sport science and sport medicine team.

Once on the ground in Sapporo, my time was absorbed in lots of learning, troubleshooting, plenty of hand gestures with the local organising committee, and sharing learnings back to the team, as well as the very busy few days supporting athlete preparation across the competition schedule.

Whilst incredibly grateful that Japan provided a safe, warm, and inviting environment and both Olympic and Paralympic Games successfully went ahead, Sapporo lacked the sparkle of the Tokyo Olympic Village and we were mostly hotel based, in small rooms with limited daily activity that consisted of going to the old 72' winter Olympic training ground, the course and the dining hall located in the conference space adjacent to the hotel. We were fortunate to spend a night in the village on the way home, which really signified the enormity of the Games and the magic that Japan made happen.



I feel very fortunate to have had the support of the VIS nutrition team, the AOC sports dietitians and network, not to mention reviewing plans with the Godmother of sports nutrition, the one and only Professor Louise Burke. This was personally a very special time, to be working with one of your idols, who designs and implements the research, writes our scientific papers and then who is there on the Olympic stage, implementing the world's best practice protocols to support our athlete's performance."

JESS' THREE FAVOURITE MEMORIES

- 1 Watching the beads of sweat from the great man, Eliud Kipchoge as he raced through the Men's Marathon drink station
- 2 The emotion and celebrations involved in athletic successes
- 3 In her own words, watching Louise create a 'sophisticated interpretative dance' on our drinks table

JESS' THREE CHALLENGING MEMORIES

- 1 Estimating contingency food without known dates, known numbers of athletes/staff in Sapporo and stupidly worrying I wouldn't have enough rice in the case of a COVID – outbreak!
- 2 Seeing dedicated athletes' hearts break
- 3 Long transits and little time outdoors

WATCHING PROUDLY FROM HOME: JAY STACY

The Tokyo Olympic final between the world's top two hockey nations lived up to the billing. Cruelly for the Kookaburras, they were not the ones celebrating at the end of the enthralling contest.

The gold medal match was full of suspense and emotion, with European powerhouse Belgium emerging victorious 3-2 in the shootout after scores were locked 1-1 at full time.

The silver medal capped a courageous campaign for the Kookas - they remained undefeated until the final and showed tenacity, togetherness and a standard of hockey that was world class despite a tumultuous COVID-affected preparation which saw a distinct lack of international matches.

VIS men's hockey head coach, Jay Stacy, was one of the best players Australia has produced. A four-time Olympian representing Australia in a record 321 games, he was a player of a generation. The three-time Olympic medalist paints our readers a picture of how he watched the Games from locked-down Melbourne:

Describe how you watched the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games?

I guess a saving grace for me during another lockdown in Melbourne was the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. I have been involved in the Olympics for many years, four as an athlete, two as a spectator and three as the VIS coach with athletes competing. The coverage of the Tokyo Olympics was by far the most comprehensive and viewer friendly there has been.



VIS athlete Josh Simmonds had an extremely solid debut Olympic campaign. With only 30-40 matches

Image: Josh Simmonds (left) and Jeremy Hayward (right)
Image Credit: GettyImages

Prior to the beginning of the Olympics, the Kookaburra coaching staff assigned tasks to all men's Institute program coaches around the country to scout and provide feedback on opposition teams competing in Tokyo. I was paired up with QAS men's head coach, Matt Wells, to scout Belgium. At the conclusion of every match in Tokyo, HA performance analyst, Jason Duff, would upload each match that was filmed from behind the goals with detailed coding of both teams ready for us back in Australia to analyse and review. The view from behind the goals provides greater knowledge from a tactical aspect rather than side on TV coverage. This was an exciting challenge and provided me with a great PD opportunity scouting Belgium who were considered the greatest threat to the Kookaburras gold medal chances.

Collaborating on each Belgium match, Matt and I forwarded our scouting and feedback reports back to the Kookaburras coaching staff prior to the gold medal match for their perusal.

The Kookaburras were attempting to win their first gold since 2004. Were you impressed with the team's performances throughout the Games? How did our boy Josh Simmonds fare?

As an ex-Kookaburra, I was very proud of the team in Tokyo. Their performance was outstanding considering the lack of international matches leading into the tournament and the way they coped and excelled in times of adversity. This exemplifies the culture and characteristics of the Kookaburras across many decades of Olympic cycles.

The silver medal positions the Kookaburras as one of the most successful teams in Australian Olympic history having won 10 medals since the sport made its debut in 1908. While it might take some time, the Kookaburras' Tokyo Olympic Games silver medal will be looked back on with pride and satisfaction.

of experience under his belt, he performed consistently in each match at the highest level of our sport. Bring on Paris 2024!

How did you feel after watching the Kookas lose the final in heart breaking circumstances? As a former player, you must have felt all the feels?

It is obviously heart breaking to lose any final but to lose an Olympic final in shootouts only magnifies that feeling. I am sure all of the athletes, as I did in 1992, feel as though they lost a gold medal rather than winning a silver medal. With time the pain eases and a silver medal is nice to reflect back on with family and friends.

It was tense final, unmissable television. We suspect you wanted to be there immediately after the loss to console the team? How did you feel?

A tense final is an understatement. Belgium and Australia were ranked 1 and 2 in the world and met in the gold medal match. It was 1-1 at the end of normal time and the gold medal was decided in a shootout. I felt ill when we lost the shootout and when Josh missed his shootout opportunity. On the other hand, I was extremely proud that Josh put his hand up to take a shootout on world hockey's biggest stage for world hockey's ultimate prize. He handled himself with class and professionalism beyond his years.

The silver medal positions the Kookaburras as one of the most successful teams in Australian Olympic history having won 10 medals since the sport made its debut in 1908. While it might take some time, the Kookaburras' Tokyo Olympic Games silver medal will be looked back on with pride and satisfaction.

SYLVIE WITHERS: THE BRAINS BEHIND THE BRAWN

VIS lead sport scientist, Sylvie Withers, whose parents were Olympic rowers, was training to qualify for the Australian Rowing Team before she realised that she wouldn't make it to the Olympics. It was then that she decided to help others achieve their Olympics aspirations.

been more grateful for the privilege to work in high performance sport.

When the opening ceremony aired it was as though I could finally release that breath, I didn't even realise I was holding. The tributes to our frontline workers lodged a golf ball-sized lump in my throat. That lump then spent the next two weeks circulating between bouncing around my guts in nervous energy, occasionally stopping my ability to breathe, eyes bulging out at the suspense, and back to the throat to trigger the waterworks. Sitting wasn't an option. I was either hovering over the seat or jumping up and down on the spot.

*Apologies to my neighbours for all the yelling and screaming.

Celebrating the Aussie green and gold is innate. The cheers, understandably, get a great deal louder for those familiar faces from the VIS. But there is nothing quite like the guttural sounds that emerge when cheering on an athlete you work with directly, dredged up by the deep personal knowledge of the journey it took to get there. And that's only half the ride! Next comes the result-driven mystery box of emotions. From pure elation when they achieve what they set out to do – which may or may not involve a medal. To the heartbreak when a goal proves too far out of reach. But with disappointment comes opportunity, and so the process to critique and improve begins.

Without a doubt, the most dominant emotion was that of immense pride in not only the athletes, but in playing my part within the team and the greater Olympic movement."



Her sport science career started with a 12-month work placement at the VIS in 2007. The traineeship led to a part-time job and over time, her position developed into a full-time role.

Sylvie has worked with a number of Olympic and Paralympic athletes across a range of different sports during her 14 years at the VIS. She loves the challenges that different sports present and then problem solving to find solutions and interventions that enable our athletes to excel.

Most recently she has been helping athletes prepare for the Tokyo Olympics in the sports of sailing, diving and sport climbing. Sylvie talks to Pinnacle about how she helped them prepare for the Games, and how she felt watching them from afar:

"I for one, love a good challenge, but the phrase 'be careful what you wish for' has never resonated

so clearly. Athlete preparation is rarely without a few spanners thrown into the works: injury, illness, equipment failures, even changes to competition scheduling. Enter: Global Pandemic. The preparation for Tokyo was more akin to putting together an IKEA flatpack without instructions or that flimsy (but crucial) Allen key, whilst also blindfolded. If I never hear the word 'pivot' again it will still be too soon!

Despite the change of date, cancelled international events, altered selection procedures, border closures, lockdowns and restrictions, we put our creative caps on and adapted to the ever-changing situation. What's more, the challenges presented gave us a focus and purpose in a time of such uncertainty. I had close friends and family members lose their jobs, single parents struggling to juggle home schooling with running their business from home. In a time of such fear and doubt, I have never

UNFINISHED BUSINESS: CAROL COOKE

Carol Cooke AM, a three-time Paralympic gold medallist, arrived in Tokyo as the athlete to beat. For Cooke, Tokyo turned out to be a Games like no other, for many different reasons.

We caught up with her post Games to hear all about her Paralympic Games experience:

"Tokyo...It was a long time in coming! With the postponement of the 2020 Tokyo Paralympics it seemed like forever for the Games to come around and then all of a sudden they were here.

For me the postponement of the games wasn't a massive deal like most athletes. I hadn't put my life on hold or put a career or education on hold to compete. I guess the only thing I worried about was still being competitive with another year of age under my belt. My biggest question was, "as a 60-year-old would I still be competitive?". So, with that in mind I continued to train probably even a bit harder.

By doing that I ended up pushing myself over the edge in terms of health and I had my first MS relapse in almost 13 years. Luckily enough I was able to get through it and come out the other side without too much of a loss of fitness.

At the end of June, I relocated to Brisbane as I wanted to make sure I could be on camp with the team and not be stuck in lockdown. It was hard saying goodbye to my husband Russ and my beautiful border collie Jack, we had spent the last 15 months together! But I knew it was important to just be able to focus on what I had to do.



The Tokyo Games were certainly like no other. In saying that, each Games I have been to have been completely different from one another. I wasn't too worried about having no crowds because as a Para cyclist a lot of our races are done with minimal crowds.

There were quite a few races overseas this year, a World Cup and World Championships, although we hadn't gone to any of them. It was disappointing to lose my World Championship titles without being able to race for them again. But I was able to see the courses my competitors raced on and their results. As none of my competitors knew how fast I was riding, I decided to think of that as my superpower!

We had been able to race the Time Trial course for the last 15 months on the virtual platform FulGaz and no one else in the world had! So, I was very confident going into the time trial.

On the day of the race, I was quietly confident and went out and gave it everything I had. However, everything I had was only good enough for a

silver medal which I can't be unhappy with. The German rider who won, loves climbing and is about 50kgs so gets up those hills a bit faster than my 64kg frame!

I still had the Road Race to look forward to and on that day the weather wasn't the best. There had been a torrential downpour in the morning during racing and it was still raining and slightly foggy when our race began, but it wasn't anything I hadn't trained in.

Unfortunately, the Canadian cyclist in front of me crashed trying to navigate a corner and being right behind her I had nowhere to go but hit her. I knew it was going to happen, said a few choice words and then tried to relax into it. I honestly believe that this saved me from breaking any bones. I did however puncture my lung with the force of hitting the ground at around 45 km/hr.

As most people might know I did get back on the trike but realised that I wouldn't be able to continue, but I was able to get back to the start/finish line 9 kms away and pulled out of the race.

I do like to take a couple of positives away from every race, even if it's not great. From this race I had a couple of firsts – my first DNF ever in a race and my first ever crash in a race, so I am hoping that neither of them happen again.

Not finishing the Road Race has left me feeling like there is a bit of unfinished business! So I'll take each year as it comes and who knows, maybe I'll be able to be there in Paris to rectify that feeling!"

FROM CRASH TO COMPANIONS: GILLIAN NIVEN

When long-time VIS remedial massage therapist, Gillian Niven, travelled to Tokyo she thought she would travel home with everyone else after the closing ceremony. However, Niven's Paralympic assignment didn't end there as an unfortunate crash for a VIS Paralympian extended her stay, but filled it with long-lasting memories.

Gillian Niven has been part of the VIS for over a decade and has worked at multiple major international sporting events. Including two Paralympic Games, the Commonwealth Games and several Track Cycling World Cups and Championships.

It's safe to say that this one ended up being like nothing she had ever experienced before.

Niven was appointed to the Tokyo Paralympics Team as a soft tissue therapist in the Australian headquarters. She worked with sports such as table tennis, goalball, taekwondo, wheelchair basketball, archery, rowing, triathlon and wheelchair rugby.

"I got to understand a couple of sports much more too, namely goalball and boccia. On two separate occasions I had the opportunity to go and watch goalball and rowing. This was fantastic to be able to cheer on our athletes" Niven says.

A first for the Australian Paralympics Team was getting all the athletes' meals catered in, to avoid going to the dining hall. This was a mammoth task and the performance services team all pitched in.

"We would help with stocking fridges, handing out meals, making wraps/smoothies, washing up and drinking coffee," Niven says. "So often if I wasn't busy massaging, I'd be in the tuckshop (kitchen area) assisting with whatever was needed."

Niven stayed in a hotel just outside of the athlete village together with some of the other support staff.

"In the mornings for breakfast and

at the end of the day we would meet different staff and chat about the day," Niven says. "It was great to get to know other people doing different jobs."

One of Niven's favourite moments from Tokyo was the opening and closing ceremonies where the whole Australian team came together in the athlete village.

"The atmosphere we created as a group was incredible and it reminded me what we can do when we come together," Niven says. "There was so much support and admiration when athletes returned to the village from competing, whether they had won a medal or not."

As the Paralympic Games were coming to an end, Niven thought she would be heading home, until VIS Para-cyclist Carol Cooke crashed heavily on her bike and had to go to hospital with a punctured lung.

"The call was put out to our performance services team to ask if anyone would be able to stay with her," Niven says.

"I put my hand up, as I knew I wasn't able to work back home, so wouldn't be letting anyone down, and I didn't have to rush back to a young family, as some of my colleagues needed to."

Niven was also keen to stay on in Tokyo and assist a fellow VIS family member.

"We stayed at a hotel not far from the Australian embassy and right next to Tokyo Tower, which lights up beautifully at night and looks like the Eiffel Tower," Niven says.

Niven didn't know Cooke that well but within a few days they were getting

along famously and enjoying all that Tokyo had to offer.

"We found a couple of local French bakeries for breakfast, would do short walks, went to the gym at the embassy, met the Australian ambassador one night at a BBQ," Niven fondly recalls.

"We had a couple of sightseeing day trips with a great person from the embassy and generally had a super time, whilst Carol recovered."

The Tokyo companions even ended up spending 14-days of hotel quarantine together in Melbourne in two rooms adjacent to each other with a door connecting them.

"I am full of respect and admiration for Carol, she has handled so much in her life and remains so positive plus encourages others," Niven says. "I've been so fortunate to have been 'stuck' with her!"

"My life has been enriched through this experience of the last 6 weeks and I can only hope to go to Paris 2024."

FACT BOX: GILLIAN NIVEN

- VIS Remedial Massage Therapist – 12 years
- 3 Commonwealth Games: Melbourne, Glasgow, Gold Coast
- 2 Paralympic Games: London and Tokyo
- Multiple track cycling World Cups and Championships
- 14 years at the Australian Open Tennis (outside of her VIS role)

FROM TOKYO TO TUNGAMAH

OLYMPIANS & PARALYMPIANS CONNECTED WITH STUDENTS ACROSS VICTORIA

Athletes returning from the Tokyo Olympic and Paralympic Games dialled into virtual classrooms across Victoria, as part of the Victorian Institute of Sport's 'Be Fit. Be Well' program, in partnership with School Sport Victoria (SSV).

Eighteen VIS athletes, including Olympians Rowie Webster (water polo), Rhydian Cowley (race walking), Brooke Stratton (long jump) as well as Paralympic gold medallist Emily Petricola (Para-cycling) and dual medallist Alistair Donohoe (Para-cycling), shared their stories and experiences with 55 schools in Melbourne and regional Victoria.

There were no homecoming parades or parties for Victorian Olympians and Paralympians after the Tokyo 2020 Games. Instead, they were met with 14-days hotel quarantine upon their return from Japan.

During the period when athletes were returning, Victoria went back into lockdown and schools reverted to remote learning once again. The 'Be Fit. Be Well' program was the connector both students and athletes needed.

By setting up video calls, athletes were able to dial into Victorian classrooms live and inspire the students with their stories. Athletes connected with students from around the state. From Bainbridge College in Hamilton to Tungamah PS in the Goulburn Valley - a school with only 29 students.

Olympic race walker Jemima Montag kept herself



busy after a sensational performance in gruelling conditions in the Women's 20km race. From her hotel quarantine she said that connecting with the kids and sharing her Olympic experience was a huge part of her "WHY" factor.

"It has been so heart-warming to see how excited they got (the students) to hear from an Olympian and asked plenty of questions," Montag said.

"I was starting to lose my voice because I had done so many talks, but it was helping the time fly by in hotel quarantine."

Olympian and Paralympian, Melissa 'Milly' Tapper also participated in live video chats but from Japan while she was preparing for the Paralympic Games.

Tapper presented to Arnolds Creek Primary School (Melton West) and after her talk the students had been posting to their online learning portal non-stop since they logged off, according to teacher Kaitlyn Foley.

"The session with Milly was fantastic!!

"She was so engaging and able to set the conversation to the maturity level of our students. Our teachers and students have been speaking all about the session and our Grade 5/6s were counting down the days until

the Paralympic competitions begin - with Milly being the star athlete they wanted to follow," said Foley.

Tapper is Australia's only Olympian and Paralympian, and she spent the time between the two Games in Mishima, Japan.

The 'Be Fit. Be Well' program encourages primary and secondary school students to stay active and lead a healthy lifestyle. It has been running for more than 20 years and helps promote physical activity and its links to wellbeing.

Athletes share the importance of lifelong physical activity and their inspiring personal stories including overcoming adversity, building resilience and, ultimately, personal triumph.

The program is funded by SSV and is free for Victorian Government schools.

In 2021, SSV and VIS added to their long-standing partnership by establishing the VIS-Team Vic High Performance Education program, delivering a suite of education sessions by VIS Performance Lifestyle advisors to SSV's Team Vic participants. The Team Vic program provides opportunities for Victorian students to trial for State team selection across a range of sports, and to represent Victoria at School Sport Australia (SSA) Championships annually.

VICTORIAN INSTITUTE OF SPORT CELEBRATES THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF BRISBANE 2032

The Victorian Institute of Sport is pleased to join in the celebrations of the announcement that Brisbane will host the 2032 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) awarded Brisbane the hosting rights for the 2032 Games in July. After six-years of planning, the vote ensures that Australia will host its third Olympic Games, following on from Sydney 2000 and Melbourne 1956.

The news came shortly after the VIS welcomed the funding announcement made in the 2021/22 Victorian Budget.

Victorian Institute of Sport Chief Executive Officer, Anne Marie Harrison welcomed the exciting news and voiced how fantastic this announcement is for sport all around the country.

"A home Olympic and Paralympic Games is surely the pinnacle for any athlete. It will inspire so many young people to pursue a dream through sport. The VIS looks forward to nurturing this talent and being part of their journey. It also provides a new long-term focus for all who work and officiate in high performance sport and for the system partners to plan together for Australian success.

Congratulations to all involved in bringing this wonderful opportunity to Queensland and Australia."

12-years ago the VIS launched its Future Talent Program which aims to fast-track the next wave of Victorian athletes.

In 2021 the program supported 12 athletes across 10 different sports, who will now have an extra incentive to make the most of the opportunity to place themselves perfectly to hit their prime in 2032.

Kipp Smith who is currently a Future Talent athlete at the VIS is an aspiring Olympic gymnast and believes that this announcement "provides all the incentive to keep pushing."

"I was thrilled when I heard that the Olympics will be in my home country," he said.

"This is the new I need to help me keep pushing and make sure I give myself every chance to be on the team in 2032."

Brisbane 2032 is set to build on the powerful legacies of the Sydney 2000 Paralympics and the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games, which set new standards for accessibility and equality for Para-sports and Para-athletes.



Image: Kipp Smith

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