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MACK THE KNIFE

Mack Horton



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ANNE MARIE HARRISON
CEO, VICTORIAN INSTITUTE OF SPORT

The year has got off to a cracking start for many of our athletes and what is most pleasing is that we are seeing performances across a range of sports. In many cases we are seeing the next gen take the step on the international stage. The Aerial Skiing "Flying Kangaroos" ended the season with three athletes ranked in the Top 8 in the world with Renee McElduff and Dani Scott winning World Cup events and Laura Peel taking out the World Championships. Not to be outdone Scotty James was also on top of the world as the World Champion in snowboard halfpipe. This was on the back of David Morris taking out the VIS Award of Excellence for 2014 in November. Winter sport is rocking!

In the quad wheelchair tennis singles final at the Australian Open, VIS athlete Dylan Alcott claimed his first Grand Slam title, in his home city, with a 6-2 6-3 win against David Wagner. Subsequently Dylan won the Pensacola Open and in amongst all of this he rolled into the history books, completing a 24-hour tennis challenge at Melbourne Park and raising more than \$70,000 for charity.

Reigning world champion and dual Paralympic gold medallist Michael Gallagher pocketed his seventh individual pursuit world title at the 2015 Para-cycling Track World Championships winning the C5 1km TT. He was joined on top of the podium by Alistair Donohoe winning his first World Championship in the C5 15km scratch race.

The golf program has had a flyer with some great results and Todd Sinnott turning pro. Marty Joyce, VIS head golf coach, and Todd's long-time mentor, says his power-hitting protégé has the game to not only compete, but entertain; "Fans will one day go to tournaments just to see this guy drive a ball – he's a very exciting guy to watch." Another golfer Zach Murray became the youngest winner of the Australian Masters of the Amateur Championships with a score of 12 under and Ryan Ruffels captured his second consecutive Australian Boys Amateur Championship with a stunning 15 shot victory.

In Para Triathlon Jack Swift is taking all before him winning the World event at Twin Waters on the Sunshine Coast in the PT4 category and following up with a win in the National Championships.

VIS shooters Catherine Skinner and Jason Maroney were honoured at Shooting Australia's night of nights with Catherine named Female Shooter of the Year 2014 and Jason recognised as the most outstanding athlete in the Paralympic discipline.

I am delighted to advise that the Carbine Club has increased its support of the VIS with an additional donation to assist with the delivery of an extension to our nutrition program; "Fuel for life – nutrition advice for the sporting field and beyond". This is further to their support of our Future Talent program. In other news, City Mazda has come on board and are providing a fully maintained car (CX5) to the Triathlon program for 12 months.

Finally we recognise the retirement of arguably Australia's greatest Road Cyclist, Cadel Evans, who held a VIS scholarship for 15 years. We congratulate Cadel on all he has achieved throughout his stellar career and wish him all the best for his retirement.



HON JOHN EREN MP
MINISTER FOR SPORT

As the Minister for Sport, I'm privileged to spend so much time watching our Victorian stars of the sporting arena achieving their goals. Our State is renowned for producing top international athletes and performances in a variety of sports.

Once again, it's great to see VIS athletes so quickly out of the blocks in the New Year, delivering some fantastic results.

Scotty James' fearless performances to capture the snowboard half pipe world championships and Laura Peel's extreme skill to land the gold at this year's aerial world skiing championships in Austria were truly inspirational.

Closer to home, we saw Basketball Paralympian gold medallist, Dylan Alcott ace his first quad wheelchair tennis singles Australian Open at Melbourne Park.

Congratulations also to Sochi aerals silver medallist, David Morris, and all the other winners and nominees at the recent 2014 VIS Award of Excellence event.

I would particularly like to acknowledge cycling legend Cadel Evans and all those passionate Victorians who came along to the Victorian Government-backed inaugural Cadel Evans Great Ocean Road Race.

The huge crowds and electric atmosphere provided the perfect send-off for Australia's only Tour de France winner as he retires from the professional circuit.

The achievements and performances of all our VIS athletes are not just a reflection of the depth of our sporting talent, but the excellence and professionalism of VIS coaches, support staff, officials and administrators.

The Victorian Government is proud to support the Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS) and all its hard work nurturing our state's top talent.

I look forward to joining all Victorians in celebrating lots more inspiring sporting achievements in the second half of 2015.



SCOTTY JAMES – OUR YOUNGEST VETERAN

Six years of hard work on the international snowboard circuit paid dividends for Scotty James in January when he stood atop the podium at the World Championships in Austria.

Of course there's another way of viewing Scotty's Halfpipe victory which suggests that at just 20 years of age the best is still in front of the VIS scholarship holder from Warrandyte, in Melbourne's north eastern suburbs.

It's well documented that 15 year old Scotty was the baby of the Australian team at the Vancouver Winter Olympics; in fact he was the youngest male competitor at that level of competition in 50 years.

Incredibly by the time he made it to Vancouver he had already been snowboarding for 12 years. His father Phil bought him an 80 centimetre board when he was just three years of age!

Now that he's won a World Championship, Scotty says he's "even hungrier for another one. Winning it opened my eyes to the idea that no personal goal, however unattainable it may seem at first, is impossible to achieve."

Scotty is also wary of losing focus on the qualities that propelled him to the top in the first place; "it's easy to fall into the glamorous side of experiencing success in sport but I'm constantly reminding myself of what it took to get here, and what it's going to take to keep getting good results."

One of the toughest things Scotty has had to cope with in recent years has simply been "growing up". Over a period of just a few years he gained 23 centimetres in height and went from being the shortest guy on tour to the tallest.

Consequently his balance and "air awareness took a bit of a hit" and he "went back to technical basics to get used to my new body".

A couple of things stand out about this year's World Championship. Firstly, it was a top shelf field with the Sochi gold and bronze medallists eager for greater glory and a number of other riders renowned for bringing their "A game" to big events also competing.

Scotty says sometimes when you ride against guys of that stature you are tempted to try a new trick, or run, but this time he stuck to his plan and the rest is "winter sport history".

The other thing, the thing that Scotty's family, friends and growing legion of fans will always remember, was his finale. The Australian knew before his final run that he'd won the gold medal and as he was riding down he "could see and hear people who had come out to watch and I wanted to say thanks".

Scotty didn't complete the run, instead he jumped out of the pipe and hi-fived the crowd. That's about as close as you get to a victory lap which is something Scotty has been dreaming about for a long, long time.

It's likely his breakthrough win will inspire other young Australians to try snowboarding.

Does the young man with 12 years experience under his belt have any advice for them? "Approach everything you do wholeheartedly. When I leave training or a competition knowing there's nothing more I could've done to change the outcome I walk away satisfied with the result regardless of where I finished on paper. I apply this to every area of my life."

OUR INCREDIBLE AERIAL SKIERS - "GEN NEXT"

Australia has an enviable tradition in women's Aerial Skiing and, incredibly, at the end of last season three VIS athletes were in the world top eight. Our women also enjoyed some significant breakthroughs - Laura Peel became the fourth Australian woman to win the World Championship while Danielle Scott and Renee Mc Elduff both soared to their first World Cup wins. We caught up with Laura and Renee:

With four World Championships and two Olympic gold medals is Australia's amazing Aerial Skiing reputation something that skiers from other countries are aware of?

Laura - Within the aerial skiing community other countries are very aware of Australia's history and continued strong performance and success on the hill. Australia is definitely considered a threat; we have a number of athletes capable of landing themselves on the podium as we demonstrated this season and have many times previously.

Renee - Australia and China are two countries on tour which have a reputation for boasting a long line of successful athletes and a strong current team. Often other countries will comment on how technically good the Australian team is.

People would like to know how close you aerial skiers are when you are on tour; do you celebrate and commiserate together?

Laura - We spend 10 months of the year together, so we have become a "little family" out there. It makes the good times better and the hard times easier having some of your closest friends there with you! Renee was commentating during the finals of the World Championships, so after I won it was a while before I saw her. When I finally did see her we were laughing and crying together all over again! It really is something special to be able to share that joy with people who have been through it all beside you!

Renee - Like any team or family, because that is essentially what we have become, we have our differences; however a victory for one of us is definitely a victory for everyone. When Laura became the world champion I was almost as happy as she was. I ran right up to her and we just hugged and cried for about 10 minutes!! When I won my World Cup, Laura was the first person I wanted to see and she was so happy for my good result.

While there have been signs previously that things were coming together it's nevertheless been something of a "breakthrough season" for the new generation of Flying Kangaroos. How come?

Laura - We've all been working hard for many years now and it's all those years of hard work and determination that are paying off! This is just the beginning, we've got a lot of good years ahead of us! It's an exciting time for sure!

Renee - It is actually quite interesting that this season was a 'breakthrough' season for us. We had a very tough pre-season training camp. We had almost all our staff retire after the 2014 Olympics and for me personally a replacement coach wasn't found until late November. It meant that we had to become more independent athletes. It forced us to believe in ourselves and acknowledge that we had the skills to achieve greatness on our own.



2015 International Rankings Aerial Skiing

Danielle Scott	3 rd
Renee Mc Elduff (up from 20 th the previous season)	7 th
Laura Peel	8 th

Laura have you become used to seeing the words "World Champion" beside your name?

I'm not sure I'll ever fully get used to it, but I'll never get tired of it, that's for sure! It really is a dream come true! I couldn't be happier but I'm also so excited to continue building on this success!

What role has the VIS played in your success?

Laura - The VIS has had a huge impact on my career and has been crucial to my success! Our S&C coach James Karageorgiou has been invaluable in getting me into top shape, keeping me healthy, and managing my load throughout the season for optimal performance! Our sport scientists, nutritionists, doctors, Personal Excellence advisors, and the VIS as a whole always go above and beyond. We are in good hands!

Renee - The VIS is very important to our success as a team. They provide great facilities when we are in Melbourne. We get really great strength and conditioning and sport science support from the VIS, and we're always looked after in our studies too.

Does the group have a prankster?

Laura - Samantha Wells (2014 Olympian) is definitely the prankster of group! Sadly we missed her this winter as she was at home rehabbing an injury. It'll be exciting to have her and her mischievous ways back soon!

Renee - My favourite prank was stealing our coach's black gum boots which he was wearing at the Lilydale training base because it was so muddy. We glitter glued the boots so they were sparkly pink. Unfortunately this was the same day his boss came to observe our training routine!

DAVE CROSBEE – PERFORMANCE MANAGER, VIS

Dave Crosbee is sports triple threat. As a former elite athlete, coach and now Performance Manager at the VIS, Crosbee knows the ins and outs of a wide variety of sports.

Originally from the UK, Crosbee grew up on sports such as football, athletics and cricket.

"When I was about 11, through Scouts, I got involved in canoeing and then through local canoeing clubs started to be more involved in the sport canoe slalom," said Crosbee.

"It was a challenge. You're competing against other people but primarily you're competing against the elements and so no course is ever the same. Even if you're competing on the same river, there will be gate sequences that always change and so there's constant challenge. You've never got the same thing twice."

Crosbee was a member of the Great Britain Junior Team from 1983 to 1986 and on turning 18 was a member of GB senior teams up until 1994. Crosbee saw himself as a "solid international paddler", with his best results within the top 10 in the world. Although he did not achieve his ambition to be world champion, his performances at the top level sparked his interest in coaching.

"I wasn't able to deliver the level of performance I was capable of regularly enough, and enough times on the right day. But I think being puzzled by that

then helped when I went into coaching because as a coach I think you need to be really fascinated by that process of performance."

Alongside his job in a cancer research laboratory, Crosbee began coaching the GB Canoe Slalom Team part time. In 1999 he made the decision to take up coaching full time and was appointed coach of the National Irish Team through to the Sydney Olympic Games.

"Helping athletes, you're still a competitor; you're just doing it in a different way. When you see an athlete do well and you see the emotions that they get out of it and the satisfaction, it gives you that satisfaction for yourself."

Following the Sydney Games, Crosbee re-evaluated his career as a coach. Spending six to seven months away from home each year and with a child on the way, he found that the lifestyle was not ideal.

"I saw a job opportunity in Scotland with the Scottish Institute of Sport which is a multi-sport Institute, and it was purely out of fascination. One of the sports I was working with from day one was curling."

"Following a disappointing Vancouver Olympics, the British program had a

shake up and I was lucky enough to get the role as a Performance Director of British and Scottish Curling through to 2010."

When an opportunity presented itself at the VIS in 2014, Crosbee was ready for his next challenge.

"If you look at my career, it's never been a planned career as it were; it's been about opportunities and testing myself and just seeing other environments and whether they'll be interesting."

"My wife and I had spoken about living and working abroad. I found the concept of what was going on in Australia, with Australia's Winning Edge really fascinating."

"Melbourne is a wonderful city... It has that self-proclaimed sporting capital of the world and I can't think of another city where there is so much sport and activity happening non-stop. It's a pretty impressive environment to be in if you're involved in sport."

When asked what he enjoys most about his role at the VIS, Crosbee says he is fascinated by the variety of sports but also enjoys working with good people.

"Sport has a lot of good people on a technical level, that have a lot of knowledge, but just generally sport is populated by good people, people who are good to be around and nice to be around."





EMMA COX

After getting her shooter's licence at just 12 years of age and progressing to competitive shooting by 15, Emma Cox has enjoyed much success in the world of trap shooting.

Cox burst on to the international scene in 2013 at the Oceania Trap Championships, toppling her hero and Olympic gold medallist Suzy Balogh, to win gold.

In 2014, Cox competed at her first Commonwealth Games in Glasgow after a stunning performance at the selection trials. Cox finished sixth in the final of the women's double trap scoring 85 points, just six points short of a bronze medal.

She continued her success into the World Championships in September, storming through the final moments of her double trap event to finish with a silver medal in Grenada, Spain.

Her sights are now firmly set on next year's Olympic Games in Rio.

Already splitting her time between the family home in Mooroopna, and Bendigo, where she attends La Trobe University, Cox travels to Werribee twice a week to train at the nearest double trap layout.

The busy athlete is completing a degree in Education and also works at SPC Ardmona, Mooroopna during the fruit season.

With limited training facilities available for double trap in regional Victoria, the Shepparton Branch of Field and Game Australia has generously allowed Emma and her father David (who is also her personal coach) access to its Down the Line Trap, which David rigs to simulate a trench layout. While it is not the same as double trap and only throws one target, it provides a valuable chance to train locally.

LISA DE VANNA

Soccer player Lisa De Vanna is an exciting new addition to the VIS athlete list. Lisa is currently playing for Melbourne Victory in the W League and is a member of the Australian national team, the Matildas.

De Vanna has been a regular for Australia ever since making her debut in 2004 and is one of the most dangerous goal scorers in the women's game today, combining clinical finishing, lightning speed and acceleration, and sublime dribbling ability.

The talented forward is one of the highest scoring players in the Matilda's history (31 goals in 82 appearances) and has been a member of the Australian team at two FIFA Women's World Cups (China 2007 and Germany 2011) and the Athens Olympics in 2004.

She made a name for herself on the international stage at the 2007 World Cup, scoring four goals and helping Australia reach the quarter-finals. For her efforts, she was named to the tournament's all-star team and nominated for world player of the year.

Lisa was the first Australian to be nominated for FIFA's goal of the year in 2013, making the 10 goal shortlist. The nomination came after an impressive over-head strike while playing for her US professional side, Sky Blue FC.

A proven force at international level, the veteran striker has been handed a leadership role for the first time, appointed co-captain for next month's FIFA Women's World Cup in Canada.



SAOFAIGA SAEMO

For many people, constant workouts, rugby-filled weekends, and hard-hitting world tours would be more than enough, but rugby isn't the only string in Saofaiga ('Sao') Saemo's bow.

This tough on-field operative also balances another love in her life: beauty!

A beautician and owner of a beauty spa in Melbourne, Sao's glamorous look and soft voice conceal the astonishing talent and toughness of one of Australia's top female rugby seven's players.

Sao's dream of playing rugby for Australia was a while coming. She started her rugby career fairly late for a professional athlete, beginning in 2000 when she moved from Auckland to Melbourne.

Sao made her IRB Sevens World Series debut in Amsterdam in May 2013 and played a starring role as Australia won the Sao Paolo leg of the 2013-14 season with her destructive forward-running.

In the past few years she has fought her way to the top of the women's rugby union sevens competition and with rugby recently being added to the list of sports for the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, Sao now has her sights set on being part of Australia's newest Olympic team. And with the current women's sevens team's dominance on the world stage, rugby could be a real medal possibility for Australia in Rio.

For Sao, her beauty spa isn't work. Not only does she enjoy treating her customers, she likes to reward herself for her on-field achievements with off-field pampering!



TAMSIN YOUNG - FACILITY ADMINISTRATOR

They spoke of this amazing culture; an environment empowering women to be better, stronger, faster than they had ever been before. A place where all women, no matter their occupation or sporting experience, could achieve something they never thought was possible.

This was the world of roller derby. A world that Tamsin Young, Facility Administrator at the VIS wanted to be immersed in.

"It was very underground, very word of mouth kind of fun," said Young.

"I was going to the gym, getting bored and looking for a sport that would actually excite me. I saw the Drew Barrymore film Whip It and I was like yep, I want to do that."

Young has been involved in roller derby since November 2010 and has since made her way onto an Australian International Team that toured America.

"I quit my job because I wanted to train more and I wanted to get there."

"I put my out of office 'I've gone to be an international roller derby superstar' but before I'd even been selected for the team. And then I missed out on selection."

Lucky for Young, a team mate dropped out, securing her ticket to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania to compete in the East Coast Derby Extravaganza (ECDX).

"It's a big sanctioned tournament there. The teams that we played were expected to beat us by lots and we beat them by a lot and so that was pretty exciting for us and

soul destroying for them."

The team then travelled to New York to play against the Gotham Roller Girls who were ranked number one in the world before finishing the tour in Los Angeles.

"Jamming against Gotham was a really great experience for someone who's not an in rotation player. I was doing maybe four or five jams per games, rather than being on every second jam."

Tamsin is currently skating in the Victorian B team, the Victorian Queen Bees, after returning from injury. She hopes to re-join the A team in time for this year's World Championships.

"For me it's a minor blip on an otherwise upward trajectory."

"I was really focussed on doing the work and less so now but at the time I was really focussed on getting it done and getting it right. So having the input meant that I got to retrain myself pretty quickly. Now the hard yards are that I want to be at the World Championships this year, it's unlikely that I'll make that team, so now I've got an 18 month plan. You know resilience is the name of the game, head down bum up, get the work done to get it right for next year."



TRISTAN KNOWLES

As a new face at the VIS, Tristan Knowles brings with him a wealth of experience and international success. Knowles has worked his way on to a number of winning Australian wheelchair basketball teams, taking silver at the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games, gold at the 2008 Beijing Paralympic Games, gold at the 2010 World Championships and silver at the 2012 London Paralympic Games.

How did you first get involved in wheelchair basketball?

I lost my leg above the knee at the age of 9 due to bone cancer and two years later beat cancer a second time after relapsing when doctors found a tumour in my lung. I have always loved sport from a young age and my dream as a kid was to captain Hawthorn to a premiership. After I lost my leg I was lost without my passion; at the age of 15 I attended a 'come and try' night put on by a local disabled sporting group and wheelchair basketball was one of the sports I tried. I fell in love instantly!

How long have you been playing wheelchair basketball?

Sixteen years now and 13 years for Australia. I feel honoured and privileged to have found a sport that has shaped my life in so many ways.

What do you enjoy most about wheelchair basketball?

I love the team aspect, I love the skill required to play and I love the physicality and speed at which the game is played at the elite level.

What are you hoping to achieve this season? And leading up to Rio?

This will be my second season playing Vic (now playing with Kilsyth Basketball Club) and we are really looking forward to playing good solid basketball consistently. We showed last season that our best is good enough to compete with anyone in the League, however we struggled to put four quarters together; that will be our focus this season and if we can do that I think the results will be pleasing.

Obviously the big picture is Rio which is only 506 days away (at time of writing) and the team is extremely determined and hungry to maintain our no. 1 world



ranking and to go one step further than we did in London where we won silver.

What's your program between now and Rio?

I train five mornings a week, all before work. With National League around the corner an additional session will be added during the week and two or three games on weekends, so a pretty busy schedule. Our first check point will be Qualifiers in October so the NWBL season will be great preparation for us as we will be trying to send a message to teams at this tournament.

How do you settle your nerves before big competitions?

After playing for 16 years I still get nervous, nerves are good. I think you settle yourself by reminding yourself of all the hard work and sacrifices that have gone in to preparing you for that moment, if you have done the work then there is no reason to doubt your ability.

Are you involved in wheelchair basketball as a mentor/coach? If so, what do you enjoy most about mentoring/coaching?

One of the most satisfying things that comes from being involved with the sport for such a long period of time is seeing the young and emerging talent come through. I really enjoy working closely with those players as that was something I found really valuable in

my development when I started out. I think you have an obligation to leave your sport in a better state than when you found it and helping those new to the sport is an important ingredient in doing that.

What is the best advice you would offer to young wheelchair basketballers, starting out in the sport?

There are no shortcuts to any place worth going, the journey is long and full of twists and turns, so don't get discouraged when things don't go your way because if you work harder than your peers then it will be rewarded.

Is there anyone who has helped you more than anyone else in the last few years?

Starting out my parents were amazing supporters of mine and I owe them a great deal for the success that I have been so fortunate to experience, however, I couldn't continue to play in the sport now that I am balancing a work/sport life without the help, support and belief of my fiancé Gina. I also owe a lot to current Australian Rollers Coach, Ben Ettridge who has continued to develop my game and add elements to my game that only he sees.

When you're not training, what do you do in your spare time?

Love drinking coffee, I am a TV show addict, love getting out and about with Gina and spending time with our two dogs, Hank and Carlos.

JACK SWIFT – PARA TRIATHLON

Jack Swift is an athlete of many talents, shown by his successful move from athletics to triathlon. Swift made his international debut as a sprinter at the 2011 IPC Athletics World Championships and competed at the 2012 London Paralympic Games.

With para-triathlon making its debut as an event at the Rio Games, Jack decided to turn his athletic talents towards triathlon, one of the most demanding Paralympic events on the Rio program. Taking home the silver medal at the 2014 ITU World Para-triathlon Championships, Swift is a strong contender for the 2016 Rio Paralympic Team.

How did you first get involved in Paralympic sport?

At 21 years of age, I suffered a serious workplace accident, resulting in my leg being severed below the knee. After extensive skin grafts and months of rehabilitation my primary goal was to learn to walk again. I was fitted with my first prosthetic leg 6 months following my accident and was determined to get back to doing activities that I loved, including running, football and surfing.

I then had a running prosthesis (blade) made up and began training on the blade for a few months. I decided to go to a Paralympic search day and from then on became involved in athletics working with Tim Matthews.

What do you enjoy most about competitive sport?

I love to push my body to the absolute limit and love to continually challenge myself to train harder and smarter to keep progressing.

What event/s do you hope to qualify to compete in Rio?

Para-triathlon TRI4

What influenced your decision to move from athletics to focus on Para-triathlons?

Growing up I was always highly active competing in a number of sports including swimming, Australian Rules Football and cross-country running heavily focused on aerobic endurance.

With the introduction of Para-Triathlon for the Rio 2016 Paralympic Games I made the decision to switch sports, with triathlon being better suited to my natural all-round abilities and aerobic capacity.

What's your program between now and Rio?

At the end of the Australian tri season I had a 10 day break, then back into full volume training before heading to the USA for two months to compete and start the qualification period for Rio 2016. In full volume training we can cover up to 300+km a week, with 20+km swimming, 200-250km cycling and 50+km running.

How do you settle your nerves before big competitions?

Some nerves are good to get you ready to perform, but to be honest when you have all the training (300+km per week) under your belt you don't question yourself.

How do you cope with the travelling involved with international events?

It can be hard with time differences, but I have learned over the journey that as long as you get in the right sleep patterns in the first 24hrs generally you will be fine. Its not a bad way to see the world anyhow, doing what you love!

Is there anyone who has helped you more than anyone else in the last few years?

My girlfriend Jenna has been my biggest support since my accident. I am also fortunate to have a great family and support base of sponsors that allow me to devote so much time to training.

When you're not training, what do you do in your spare time?

I love to head down the coast for a surf.



RUSSELL MARK

Six-time Olympian Russell Mark OAM announced the end of an outstanding shooting career in late 2014, choosing to retire after his double trap event at the 51st ISSF World Championship in Granada, Spain.

Mark made up his mind to end his professional shooting career on a high by finishing at the pinnacle international event for shooting.

Russell has had a stellar career that has included two Olympic medals, two World Championship titles, five World Cup titles, a World Cup Final title, two Team World Championship titles, a Commonwealth Games title, ten Oceania Championship titles, and 34 Australian National Open titles.

Russell caught up with VIS Marketing & Media intern Kasey Stephenson:

How did you get involved in shooting?

My family always had some interest in the shotgun sports.

What do you enjoy most about shooting?

The fact that it was an Olympic event and you could compete against the best in the world and see if you were good enough.

What is your proudest achievement/career highlight?

My career highlight was winning the World Cup in Los Angeles in 1991. It broke the barrier for all future Australians as it was our first win at World Cup level.

What influenced your decision to retire from competitive shooting?

It was time to spend more time with my family and my businesses.

What do you miss most about competitive shooting?



The many friends I made whilst travelling and competing around the world.

What fills your days now that you aren't training?

Kids, kids, kids and the two hotels I own!

Have you taken up any other sports in your free time?

I've starting to play some social golf again.

Are you still involved in shooting recreationally and/or as a mentor/coach?

I am still involved with shooting in a coaching capacity, and currently coaching an up and coming competitor

called James Willett from Corowa. He's a very good talent!

What is the best advice you would offer to young shooters, starting out in the sport?

Set realistic goals, learn from your mistakes and take responsibility for your performances.

Thank you Russell – you are undoubtedly one of the greatest shooters Australia has produced and comfortably placed within the upper echelons of the sport; congratulations for all that you have achieved throughout your stellar career.

Kasey Stephenson

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FAREWELL SHARELLE

The sun set on one of netball's most influential players of the modern era when Sharelle McMahon announced her retirement from the sport in July 2013.

Australian netball fans will forever have the image ingrained of McMahon shooting that last second goal at the 1999 World Championships in New Zealand and the celebrations that ensued with her teammates.

Along with the five premierships with the Melbourne Phoenix and the 2009 ANZ Championship victory with the Melbourne Vixens, McMahon has achieved every possible accolade the sport has to offer and is recognised as one of the nation's most admired female athletes to have graced the world sporting stage.

McMahon finished her career as Australia's second most capped international player, making 118 appearances in the green and gold while captaining the Diamonds between 2008-2011.

With a career spanning two decades, numerous title winning moments and a variety of teams along the way, McMahon said it was difficult to pinpoint the best moments but there are always a couple that stand out.

"I always find it really hard to pinpoint things but two experiences with the Diamonds, winning the World Champs in 1999 and winning the Commonwealth Games gold medal in Manchester in double extra time were two real highlights with the Aussie team," McMahon said.

"It's hard from a club perspective because it was all so different, but certainly the 2009 Premiership with the Vixens was a really special one with how we actually got there and achieved what we wanted to achieve as a team."

Making a name for herself for performing under pressure, holding her nerve and shooting the final goal in matches decided in the slimmest of margins, her incredible athletic ability, remarkable speed and agility and absolute determination, made McMahon a handful for any opposition.

Sharelle was a once in a lifetime athlete who was widely regarded as one of the best shooters to ever take the court for Australia. She was ruthless on the court and was a player that never ceased to amaze and inspire many around her – her team mates, young netballers, her State and her country.

RETIRING ATHLETES

DREW GINN - ROWING

Four time Olympian and three time Olympic Gold medallist Drew Ginn OAM announced the end of his competitive rowing career in December 2012.

Ginn shot to fame as part of Australia's men's coxless four when they won gold at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. He went on to medal at various world championships in the men's eight, coxed four, coxless four and men's pair.

At the 1999 world titles, Ginn and James Tomkins became pair champions, setting themselves up as favourites for the 2000 Olympics. A back injury forced Ginn out at the eleventh hour.

With Ginn's tenacity and perseverance, he was back in form two years later and, in 2003, was again a world champion before winning Olympic gold in Athens.

Ginn and new partner Duncan Free won the 2006 and 2007 world championships, and despite suffering back problems again leading up to the 2008 Olympics, he went on to win another Olympic title.

A back operation and a break followed Beijing, with Ginn claiming silver in the men's four at the London Olympics.

Ginn rated his golden experience with Free and leading the tight-knit 2012 four to silver as the proudest moments of his career.

Following his decision to 'retire', Ginn immediately commenced in the newly established role of National Head Coach – Integration, at Rowing Australia, under the guidance of his own long-time mentor Chris O'Brien.

And as the ultimate recognition of his exceptional international rowing career, Ginn was awarded the Thomas Keller Medal in 2014, the most prestigious award in world rowing.



RYAN THE UNRUFFLED

Ryan Ruffels is no ordinary 17 year old, and while his name and pedigree come from the highest echelons of tennis, he is carving his own name as a golfer.

He is the son of tennis stars Ray Ruffels, the former world no. 26 who represented Australia at the Davis Cup in the 1970s, and Anna Maria Ruffels-Fernandez, who won five doubles titles in the 1980s. Sister Gabriela is also a rising tennis star, but Ryan followed a different path.

Ryan was born in the US and lived there until he was 11, when his father was appointed to coach at the AIS in Canberra and returned to his native country with his family.

Ryan grew up hitting tennis balls and had a future in that game - he was the no. 1 ranked U12 player in Southern California when he was 10. He pursued tennis, with golf in the background until his mum entered him into his first golf tournament and something clicked; he hasn't looked back since.

Ryan is now one of Australia's most talented junior golfers with a burgeoning resume.

At the age of 15 he became the youngest ever male to represent Victoria in senior competition at the 2013 Interstate Series in Tasmania. In 2014, he won the Junior World title (15-17 boys), finished fourth in the Asia Pacific Amateur Championship and became the youngest player to win the prestigious 106 year old Riversdale Cup. More recently, he captured his second consecutive Australian Boys Amateur Championship with a stunning 15 shot victory.

His talent is unquestionable; however it is his uncommon maturity that astounds his coaches and mentors.

VIS Golf Head Coach Marty Joyce has seen his fair share of young talent come and go and has become pretty good at sorting out who will make it, and who won't.

"On and off the course he seems a lot older than he is. I think from a technical point of view though, he's fantastic. One of the nice things is he's really open to learn and wants to know how to do things better not just on the course, but off the course as well."

Joyce says one story sums up Ryan's extraordinary appetite for competition.



"There was one occasion when I was caddying for him in the interstate series, he was one down with two to go, and he hit it into trouble off the tee, and said 'this is exactly where I want to be'.

"I looked at him and said 'I'd prefer you to be right in the middle of the fairway', but he loved the idea of being the underdog and trying to get it done, and he hit a great shot on the last to win."

Joyce says Ryan can be as good as he wants to be and the goal is to be no. 1, but it's not going to happen tomorrow or even in the next five years. They both know it's a long journey.

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THE RISE OF RISELEY

VIS runner Jeff Riseley was the standout performer at the 2015 Australian Championships in Brisbane, becoming the first man since Simon Doyle in 1991 to win the 800m/1500m double.

Having put national record holder Alex Rowe to the sword in the 800m decider on the Saturday night, Riseley backed up with a dominant win in the 1500m.

In sixth spot with a lap to run, Riseley swamped the field, flying past long-time rival and fellow VIS athlete Ryan Gregson to win in a hand-timed 3mins 43.8sec.

He became the first man to win the middle-distance double in 24 years; "It shows how good a shape I am in and I'm happy. We probably haven't had an athlete since Simon that could do both, and it makes me feel good that I am in that sort of company," said Riseley.

It hasn't, however, been all plain sailing.

The 27 year old Victorian had been a perennial disappointment in major competition and was growing tired of not performing at the big meets.

He questioned his future in athletics after failing to make the semi-finals of the men's 800m at the London 2012 Olympic Games. He finished fifth in his heat in 1 min 46.99 secs, more than two seconds off the personal best he ran in Italy only three weeks earlier.

Riseley went to the 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games seeking answers about whether he could still cut it at the top.

Tall and graceful, Riseley finished just .09 sec off a bronze medal in one of the greatest 800m races seen at a Commonwealth Games. He ran a brilliant tactical race, sitting behind world record holder David Rudisha the whole way and at the 20m mark he was coming third, before fading slightly to end up fifth place in 1min 46.12sec.

The long-striding Victorian declared his impressive performance in the final as a coming of age; he proved something to himself and left Glasgow knowing he belongs.

Riseley will contest both the 800m and 1500m events at the 2015 Athletics World Championships in Beijing, China in August.



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MACK THE KNIFE SLICES SECONDS OFF PB

Mack Horton's sensational swim in the final of the 1500m at the Australian Championships in April, when he stopped the clock at 14:44.09, sliced more than four and a half seconds off his personal best.

It also catapulted the Melbourne Vicentre teenager and VIS scholarship holder to the top of the historic world list of 18 year olds over that distance (without full length suits).

Horton is more than four seconds faster at this stage of his development than Grant Hackett, and even quicker than 18 year old Kieren Perkins.

To some older swimming fans it doesn't seem that long ago that breaking the 15 minute barrier for the 30 lap event was a benchmark that swimmers struggled with.

It wasn't until 1980 that the legendary Russian Vladimir Salnikov went under the mark and since then the record has been in free fall with Perkins and Hackett lowering the figure four times between them.

China's Sun Yang now holds the world crown with a time of 14.31.02.

Putting Horton's Sydney swim into more historical perspective he reached the 800 metre mark in a quicker time than Perkin's world record over that distance 25 years ago.

His 200 metre split would have beaten Mark Spitz for gold in Munich.

At the Championships, Horton was nearly five seconds faster than his silver medal swim at the Commonwealth Games last year.

To many people Horton's steady improvement is nothing short of breathtaking, but it's no surprise to support staff who have worked with him in recent years.

In 2012, as a 15 year old, he took silver at the Australian Championships and the following year the VIS was abuzz

with the news that Horton had captured the 200m, 400m, 800m and 1500m crowns at the Junior World Championships in Dubai.

Clearly we were witnessing the emergence of a special talent. We may get a glimpse of just how special when Horton swims at the World Championships in Russia this August and, all going according to plan, at the Rio Olympics next year.

Horton will be only 20 years of age in Rio, so obviously his peak is still a few years away.

Just how fast can he eventually go? Grant Hackett said after the Sydney swim he has no doubt that the youngster can one day shatter the 14:30 mark "if he wants to".

Horton's sensational 1500m final was so impressive it relegated his other events in Sydney to "footnote status".

However, they are some very impressive footnotes indeed.

His 3:42.84 in the 400m freestyle is the best time in the world this year. Horton was more than a second faster than silver medallist David McKeon. It was also a PB.

The 400 metres final was on the opening night of the Championships and it was sign of things to come. A few nights later he took gold in the 800m.

Australian swim fans, in particular those at the VIS, can't wait to see him challenging the older stars of the toughest event in the pool, the 1500m.

It may come in Russia, maybe it'll be Rio, but one day Mack the Knife will slice off a major piece of sporting history.

MY FAVOURITE MARTON

Three members of the marvellous Marton family from Ferntree Gully are hoping to make the Australian Taekwondo team for the Rio Olympics next year. Caroline is 31, Carmen 28 and little brother Jack is 22. We caught up with them recently.

In 2013 Carmen became the first Australian to win a Taekwondo World Championship. What did it mean to you?

Caroline -Carmen's breakthrough win was a reward for years of sacrifice, dedication, courage, complete trust and unwavering focus on the mats.

Jack - It proved that anything is possible even when the odds are against you. She has paved the way for us.

Carmen how has your life changed since 2013?

Caroline - It has become harder. I put a lot of pressure on myself to train harder and lift my intensity towards my next goal which is gold at the Rio Olympics. However by increasing my load physically and mentally, I ended up getting sick and injured. So it has been tough. It has taken nearly 18 months to find the right balance again.

2016 looks like being a huge year for TKD?

Caroline -Next year Taekwondo will participate at the Rio Olympics. Australia will also have its Olympic Selection in 2016 so I'm working hard to achieve consistent podium performances which means there'll be no question about me making the Rio cut.

Jack - Rio selection (and preparation!)

Caroline -2016 will be a massive year for Taekwondo. We will all be fighting tooth and nail for one of four places allocated to our sport for our Oceania Region. Regardless of who qualifies we will still be preparing for Rio and supporting each other.

Your father Andrew has spent decades coaching and inspiring his children. Do you think he has a "favourite"?

Caroline -Carmen is dad's favourite, for sure. He travelled to the World Championships in 2013 and was going crazy in the crowd when Carmen landed that turning kick to the head of her Korean opponent with just two seconds remaining on the clock. I think that sealed the deal!

Jack - 2013 secured Carmen's spot as dad's golden child. He already had a soft spot for her!

Carmen - I still believe its Caroline. She is a female freak in terms of the kicks she can pull off. Usually only boys have that sort of power, explosiveness and technical ability, which

I know my dad is secretly so proud of. In all honesty though, my father loves and supports all of us.

(Ed.- it's Carmen, 2-1)

What is the toughest aspect of Taekwondo, a contact sport which relies a great deal on self-discipline?

Caroline -Sometimes shaving (weight – sic) to fight all the time takes a toll on you physically and being in that "combat state" can also have a big emotional and mental impact. However when you have a fight against a top player or a session when you are "in the zone" and set up a five kick combination to the body and head there's no greater feeling in the world.

Jack - It's a challenge competing against the world's best and pushing your mental and physical barriers while you try to outsmart your opponent. Dieting, smashed bodies and constant travel are also challenges.

Carmen -Throughout my career different aspects have been tough. At times it has been lack of funding, a lack of coaching or leadership at international events, or a lack of sport science and strength and conditioning programs specific to our sport. Managing relationships can be tough too, whether personal or within your sporting team. Fighting deep fatigue recently has been one of my biggest challenges.

Athletes in "contact sports" are instructed not to show pain. Is it the same in TKD?

Caroline - Absolutely. Your opponent can capitalise and score if you show pain. Also not only do you receive a half point penalty if you fake an injury and fail to continue to play but if you take longer than a minute to recover from contact or a fall you can be disqualified.

Jack - 100%. If you see weakness in an opponent you can take advantage of that and break him down mentally and physically.

Carmen - Definitely. There is a big culture in Taekwondo to suck it up and always be strong. In combat sports however a lot of the time you have that much adrenaline pumping you don't even acknowledge the pain. Thankfully though our sport has evolved where we feel more comfortable to voice



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our concern if we are worried the pain is turning into a potential injury.

Putting Carmen's victory to one side, is Australia improving in the sport?

Caroline -Everyday Australia is kicking goals in Taekwondo.

Jack - Absolutely

Carmen -YES YES YES! Our support team has grown, our funding has increased and Australia has been consistently up on the podium at international events! We can feel other countries are worried. There is a new focus on developing juniors too which is really exciting.

What role has the VIS played in your career?

Caroline -The VIS has a long history of supporting top Victorian TKD fighters even when the sport had no funding or programs. VIS has provided the foundation for me to be a competitive athlete by offering sport science and financial support. They also treat me like a professional athlete in sport and in life. VIS has given me the foundation to take on the world.

Jack - VIS has had a big impact on my career, initially with access to the altitude chamber, gym and recovery. Now, as a Future Talent athlete, I feel like a true professional with significant help in keeping my body in one piece, getting nutrition advice and pursuing my studies.

Carmen -I have been with the VIS for nearly 12 years! They have supported me with facilitating a high performance environment which includes the awesome training facility, sport science, physiotherapy, massage therapy, sport doctors, surgeon recommendations, dietitian as well as Personal Excellence support during my university study. They have allowed my training partners to train with me at the VIS and access acclimatisation sessions in preparation for the London Olympics and past World Championships. Financially their support has allowed me to travel the world and compete at an international level so I can keep improving my game. Most importantly they have listened to my needs and to my concerns and made me feel valued not only as an athlete but as a human being.

*Sydney based Safwan Khalil is married to Carmen Marton. He rose to number three in the world rankings in 2014 and "medalled" at eight international meetings.



CAROL'S LIFE CYCLE

When Carol Cooke was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis 17 years ago, and told to prepare for a life of inaction, her first thought once the shock had passed was to use "sport" to fight back.

Fast forward to 2015 and the extraordinary Carol Cooke is continuing to tick-off triumphs in life and sport.

This year her 24 hour Mega Swim charity is set to top the \$7 million mark!

Mega Swim began in 1999 when Carol was determined to raise \$10,000 to pay for scholarships for five young MS sufferers. But the event was so successful, raising \$22,000, that friends persuaded her to do it again.

More than 15 years later she's still devoting long hours to organising the events and, the toughest part of all, deciding which applicants should receive the scholarships.

Carol says their MS stories are so moving they keep her going, even when she's swimming laps in the middle of the night at Fitzroy pool.

Her hectic schedule is even busier this year with some major Para-

cycling meetings coming up on her calendar. There are two UCI Paracycling events in Australia and New Zealand, World Cup competitions in Germany and South Africa and the big one, the World Championships in Switzerland, where she'll chase her third crown.

Carol says the ultimate goal is to achieve enough points for Australia this year to earn places on the starting line at Rio in 2016.

There's a bonus waiting for her if she does make the next Paralympic team. In London when Carol won her gold medal she had to compete against the men. This time around there'll be men's and women's races so she'll be targeting wins in the road race and the time trial.

Unlike other athletes though, winning gold medals is more than a dream. There's a practical application to all her hard work as well - it literally keeps Carol on her feet. Without continual exercise

she would most likely still be in her wheelchair.

Carol admits that fact alone is a pretty good motivating factor although she's learned that "motivation" can come and go. So her focus tends to be more on commitment. She sets goals at the start of the year and then commits to achieving them.

One particularly challenging goal she set last year was to write about her amazing life story. After countless hours of hard work the book, "Cycle of Life - A Gold Medal Paralympian's Secrets to Success" has now been published.

Carol says the book is aimed at anyone who is looking at how to "accept major change in their life, overcome adversity, find your hidden courage and create a winning mindset."

We're hoping she'll have to add another chapter after Rio.

DAVID MORRIS

– Award of Excellence 2014 winner

It has been a remarkable journey for effervescent VIS athlete David Morris. For years he was a lone male wolf in the sport of aerial skiing, which was dominated by women in Australia. Kirstie Marshall. Jacqui Cooper. Alisa Camplin. Lydia Lassila. David Morris? He finished 13th in 2010 in Vancouver and then walked away from the sport for a year, but persevered and came back to become the first Australian male to win an Olympic aerials medal, at the Sochi 2014 Games.

Morris capped off his standout performances in the sporting arena in 2014 by taking out the coveted VIS Award of Excellence, the third VIS aerial skiing athlete to win the Institute's top award after sporting legends Alisa Camplin and Lydia Lassila. Here's what winning the award meant to him;

When the public watch all of our sports they're naturally amazed, but people are easily impressed. It takes more than that to turn the heads of athletes and even more so to raise the eyebrows of those at the VIS who see excellence every day. To win this award amongst a group of outstanding individuals is truly something, and it was an award I have actually been working for. To be noticed and recognised by those who truly know how valuable our performances are and how hard we've actually worked is humbling. It was a great year for me, so I'll proudly accept, but congratulations to everyone who performed amazingly last year as well, you continue to inspire me.



MEN'S HOCKEY

– 2015 VIS European Tour

By George Bazeley

It's dark. The rain is horizontal and, as I look to the distance, the snap of lightning has illuminated the night's sky. I have a dilemma; a requisite 10m dash from the safety of the car to the international departure terminal of the Tullamarine Airport. Upon reflection and with the luxury of hindsight, getting wet was probably the least of my problems. Melbourne's unruly skies would set off a chain reaction in what would turn a relatively straight forward commute into a marathon effort spanning three days including an unscheduled layover in Dubai and a "misplaced" passport. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you, the 2015 VIS European Tour.

Sixteen athletes (with a relatively modest "barbecue crew" consisting of three coaches; Jay Stacy (VIS), Andrew McDonald (TIS), Lachlan Anderson (Victorian U/21 and Footscray HC) and ably supported by physiotherapist, Keith De Souza) set out for Eindhoven, The Netherlands to test our skills against Europe's best.

The tour presented a rare opportunity; a chance to expose the next wave of athletes to different playing styles from across the globe. We Australians tend to be focused on playing expansive hockey with vision, flair and intensity. This is in direct contrast to the European take on the game. They, God bless them, like to focus on ball possession with a high technical skill element. This creates a great contest and something opposing parties find extremely challenging.

In addition to the matches, athletes were also able to gain exposure to some of the finest specialist coaching Europe has to offer. The goalkeepers worked with Frank Leistra (former Dutch international and current Belgian GK coach), while the exponents of the "drag flick" had their techniques scrutinised by Toon Siepman, a coach credited for the success of Maartje Paumen (FIH Player of the Year 2011 & 2012) and Mink van der Weerden (Dutch international).

In all, we played seven games whilst over there. From Belgium we matched it against Royal Léopold THC, KHC Dragons and Waterloo Ducks HC. From The Netherlands, HC Den Bosch, HC Tilburg and Schaeweijde HC. We also mixed it with the best young talent The Netherlands had to offer with a hit out against Jong Oranje (Dutch U21). Results varied, however, what we were able to take away from each game was a number of key learnings; most notably that protection of the ball is paramount, game awareness can save you heart ache, and that the jump to the next level isn't as great as some might think.



OUR PARTNERS



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