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TEAM BEHIND THE ATHLETE

Scotty James:
Snowboard Halfpipe World Champion



MESSAGE FROM THE CEO	03
MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER FOR SPORT	04
INTRODUCING OUR NEW CHAIRMAN	05
TEAM BEHIND THE ATHLETE	06
EXCELLING IN SPORT & LIFE	07
FOOTY GETS THE BOOT	08
NOT THE FIFTH FEMALE ANYMORE	09
THIRD TIME'S CHARM	10
KYLIE ANDREW: FUELLED PERFORMANCE	13
STACY'S STYLE	14
A PRODIGIOUS TALENT	16
MING'S DYNASTY	17
SOME LIKE IT HOT	18

Australian snowboarder Scotty James capped off his remarkable 2017 season when he won halfpipe gold at the World Championships in Sierra Nevada in March. It made it back-to-back world titles for the VIS athlete in a breakout season that included an X Games victory, Winter Olympic test event win in South Korea and overall World Cup crown.

Scotty will head into the next World Cup season as the man to beat again and will eye off becoming the first Australian man to win a halfpipe medal at a Winter Olympics, at the PyeongChang Games.



**There was no chance
of a post-Olympic/
Paralympic slumber as
our magnificent Winter
Sport athletes have been
taking center stage.**

ANNE MARIE HARRISON

CEO, Victorian Institute of Sport

Congratulations to the Olympic Winter Institute of Australia (OWI) and Ski & Snowboard Australia (SSA) on the performances of their athletes across a range of disciplines one year out from the Games in PyeongChang. Particular mention to VIS athletes: Scotty James – Snowboard Half Pipe World Champion and Overall World Cup winner; Mitch Gourley - Giant Slalom Para World Champion and Overall World Cup winner; Aerial Skiers - Dave Morris who completed the season with a bronze medal at the World Championships Danielle Scott silver medalist at the World Championships and also finished the season ranked second on the World Cup standings after winning four World Cup medals including one on top of the Podium and Lydia Lassila who completed her return to competition with 3 World Cup wins.

Congratulations also to Kell O'Brien who was a member of the victorious Australian Cycling Team Pursuit World Championship team and won a bronze medal in the Individual Pursuit at his first senior World Championship.

Featuring in this edition of the Pinnacle and across our social media platforms is the "Team behind the Athlete". Whilst we celebrate the success of our athletes there are countless hours of work and support that goes on behind the scenes by the team to enable this success. We are proud to shine a light on the expertise and commitment which is delivered with passion by the staff of the VIS and our consultants. We also say thank you for their dedication to the athletes and their craft.

On the business front we have been delighted to welcome our Chairman Nicole Livingstone and new Board Members: Tina De Young, Nataley Matijevic and Amelia Lynch. They join the experienced Members: Prof Mark Hargreaves, Kathy McLean, Sue Noble and Michael Sayers. They have started the year developing our Strategic Plan and reviewing our Values, Vision and Mission, alongside confirming the core business of the VIS in supporting our athletes with "success in sport and life". There has been broad consultation across staff and athletes around this work and we look forward to sharing the outcomes with you in the near future.



As the Minister for Sport, it is a privilege for me to regularly meet VIS athletes from all over Victoria who are excelling in a wide range of sports.



**VICTORIAN
INSTITUTE OF SPORT**

THE HON JOHN EREN MP

Minister for Sport

Right now, our top athletes are world beaters and have put in amazing efforts in the past year, including Scotty James who won back-to-back halfpipe world titles with an emphatic victory at the FIS Freestyle Ski and Snowboard World Championships, and Carla Krizanic, who claimed two World Titles at the World Bowls Championships in December 2016.

Para-Alpine skier Mitch Gourley was crowned World Champion, winning the Super Combined event at the 2017 Alpine Ski World Championships, whilst Lydia Lassila made an incredible comeback to competition, winning three gold medals on the Aerial Skiing World Cup circuit. And a special mention to Mack Horton who topped off an exceptional 2016 by being awarded the Victorian Institute of Sport's Award of Excellence.

The landscape of Australian high performance sport is changing.

Last year, the Victorian Government commissioned a review of the VIS to look at the way we do things and how we can improve our practice going forward.

It found that the VIS contributes significantly to Australia's high performance sport success. In the four year cycle leading to the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, the VIS

supported the second highest number of athletes, achieved the second highest number of podium results, and was the most efficient of the Australian institutes with the best ratio of athletes serviced per podium result.

This is a great outcome, but there's always room to improve.

For example, there is an opportunity for the VIS to make stronger connections with the community through grassroots sports and to play a greater role supporting sports with talent identification and pathway development.

The VIS has much to offer, including sharing knowledge and expertise through VIS athletes and coaching staff.

The Victorian Government is a proud supporter of all Victorian athletes, whether they are performing on the international stage or at their local sports club.

That's why we're always working to ensure all Victorians have the opportunity to play the sport they love.

I look forward to joining all Victorians in celebrating even more inspiring achievements in the second half of 2017 thanks to the VIS.



INTRODUCING OUR NEW CHAIRMAN – NICOLE LIVINGSTONE

In late 2016, the VIS welcomed Nicole Livingstone OAM as our new Chairman. With over two decades of industry experience, there is no doubt she will play a key role in the future of the organisation.

Beginning her international career on the Australian Swimming Team at the age of 13, Nicole became one of Australia's most successful female backstrokers.

With an international sporting career spanning 12 years, Nicole's achievements include: three medals, 1 silver and 2 bronze, from three Olympic appearances; 6 gold, 2 silver and 1 bronze from three Commonwealth Games; and six Pan Pacific Championship appearances, winning 4 gold, 2 silver and 1 bronze medal. She also broke a world record in the 200m backstroke (short course) in 1992.

Nicole holds the record for the longest winning sequence of National titles by any Australian swimmer in history, for winning ten consecutive 100m backstroke titles between 1987 and 1996.

A great ambassador for Australian sport, Nicole has also received many awards during her career outside of the pool including the Medal of the Order of Australia and the Australian Sports Medal, a member of the Victorian Women's Honour Roll, and she was historically voted into the prestigious "Carbine Club" as one of two first-ever females to be admitted.

VIS CEO Anne Marie Harrison is delighted with Nicole's appointment as VIS Chair. "Given her range of experiences, most notably as a past scholarship holder, Nicole is a great source of knowledge, support and counsel, along with her profile and leadership which will steer us positively into the future," Ms Harrison said.

"She has brought commitment and energy to the role and is taking her time to understand how and why we do things, whilst driving us to be better in all facets of the organisation." she added.

Nicole juggles many commitments, as a mother of three, an expert sports commentator and host and as a board member of Swimming Australia, the Australian Olympic Committee and Deputy Chair of VicHealth. Nicole, along with her sister Karen Livingstone, founded Ovarian Cancer Australia after their mother passed away from the disease. She is now patron of the organisation.

An active member of the sporting community across a variety of levels, the addition of Nicole to the VIS administration is a big win for the organisation. Welcome Nicole!



One of the keys to the success that Mack Horton has achieved, is the relationship he has built with his Melbourne Vicentre Coach, Craig Jackson.

Craig, a former Olympic swimmer who represented South Africa in the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, saw the potential Horton had at the age of 12. "I saw him swim a 400 freestyle - he didn't swim particularly well but you could see there was a huge amount of room to improve, but the basics were there," he said.

Craig said Mack has always had the willingness to do the work and as a young swimmer he taught him to challenge what he thought his limits were, "He thrived on hurting himself during a session - he wasn't afraid to do the work and he loved to challenge himself in sets, he didn't shy away from working, and working hard."

When discussing Mack's development, Craig explains that his top priority was building a strong technical base, "The first part of his progression was setting his technique. He had the making of a really skilled swimmer, but we had to really work on his efficiency. We set that as a main goal and we did a lot of work around stroke count."

Mack's efficiency in the water is now probably one of the best in the world, travelling more than three metres per stroke, gripping the water like it's his home.

Over the last eight years, the two have grown and worked together to create an extremely successful partnership. Craig has helped Mack to reach the potential he showed at an extremely young age, and even though he reached the pinnacle of the sport in Rio, that is not where their journeys together will end.

THE TEAM BEHIND THE ATHLETE

When the world watched Mack Horton win the gold medal in the men's 400m freestyle at the Rio Olympic Games, their hearts and minds were overwhelmed with the pure bliss and splendour of this ultimate sporting achievement.

In that spine-tingling moment, we rarely consider the very long journey this athlete has taken to reach their final destination. However, just below the surface of every success, lies an intricate support network carefully assembled to help navigate the rocky terrain along which each athlete travels on their journey to that prized place in history.

An entire industry has been built around the provision of support for our most talented athletes and the VIS is very proud to be a major contributor.

Whilst Mack is an exceptional athlete, his feat would not have been possible without the dedicated support of his coaches, support staff, teammates, family and friends. It is the endeavours of this passionate group of people who work long days, early mornings and late nights to provide the support needed for him to perform at the highest level.

The training programming, the unrelenting measurement and assessment, the racing strategy, the mentoring, the ferrying, the psychological training & guidance, the friendships, the shoulder to lean on and everything in between. This is the Team behind the athlete!

This edition of the Pinnacle magazine shines a spotlight on some of the VIS staff who play a pivotal role in ensuring the most talented Victorian athletes perform at their best every day in training and on the big stage, to give them every opportunity to reach their maximum potential.



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EXCELLING IN SPORT & LIFE

When you consider data analysis at the VIS you probably think of things along the lines of sport science, coaching and the quantification of performance. But for VIS Business Services Coordinator, Alana Thomas, her daily data analysis involves numbers in the form of payroll and taxes on a spreadsheet, rather than how fast Mack Horton can swim 50m!

Passion for sport is something almost everyone at the VIS has, but a passion for sport and numbers like Alana's, is one that led her to the VIS.

As a young kid, Alana loved numbers, although she admits her teachers often used to highlight that her grades would be much better if she didn't spend so much time playing sport! Whilst sport has provided many great opportunities for her in life, numbers are her professional passion.

"I obviously knew that I loved numbers at school so accounting was an obvious choice," she said.

Working her way through the ranks at the biggest seed company in the Southern Hemisphere, from sales employee to management accountant, she dealt with the big numbers like Mack Horton deals with gold medals. Alongside perks like international travel and the opportunity to move to sports-mad Melbourne, Alana believes that working for an \$80 million dollar business, much larger than the VIS, gave her a really good foundation to build upon.

When the VIS Business role came up Alana says she would have been crazy not to take the opportunity to combine her two loves; numbers and sport, "I love sport. I love agriculture. I grew up on a country farm so I've had the life with working within agriculture which has been great and now I can chase my other passion

of working within sport," she said.

As VIS Business Services Coordinator, Alana looks after a range of tasks and responsibilities from payroll to GST and accounts payable. She says she finds her role particularly rewarding, and although she may not have a direct impact on athletes, she knows that helping and supporting those directly involved to ensure they are focused on the athlete, is something she finds fulfilling.

Her passion for sport isn't confined to working within sports administration, she's also an accomplished sportswoman in her own right. For five years, Alana played rugby at the highest level, representing Australia at World Cups and Test Matches in an experience she can only describe as special and a dream.

"It's just an adrenaline rush playing for your country; hearing the national anthem and wearing Australian colours, it's pretty special." Alana said.

Retiring from playing in 2011, Alana now coaches State Rugby Women's teams in an experience she finds challenging, but also very rewarding, just like her work at the VIS.

Alana brings her personal experience of the elite sporting environment along with her exceptional skills of data analysis into the role, offering a unique combination for the VIS Business team.

#TeamBehindTheAthlete



FOOTY GETS THE BOOT

Highly regarded Strength & Conditioning Coach, Will Morgan, has returned to the organisation where he originally learned his craft and began his career and it's clear that the Adelaide Crows' loss is our gain.

Will was a member of the VIS strength & conditioning trainee class of 2007 and then worked for the next two years with the VIS gymnastics, hockey and soccer programs before spending time with Essendon just prior to the James Hird coaching appointment.

He then headed to Adelaide and worked at SASI and the Crows until the lure of Olympic sports, and a return to the world's most liveable city, drew him home to Melbourne this year.

Will's career has turned the full circle and he couldn't be happier working each day at Lakeside Stadium where facilities are "absolutely fantastic and the culture of well-rounded excellence and hard work hasn't changed over time".

Will spent all of April training winter athletes, in particular he devoted a lot of time to our world ranked Aerial Skiers group.

His short-term focus was to prepare them for the water ramp

season which began in the US in mid-May, but longer term he is looking towards next year's Winter Olympics.

2017 World Championship bronze medalist and Olympic silver medalist, David Morris, is in his group and the hours he put into the veteran aerial skier typifies the work Will does on the floor of the high performance centre.

He says David is a "driven and experienced athlete and the chance for him to compete at the Olympic Games is a strong motivator". Will set the focus on "the training session of the day and its specific goals". A key factor in David's gym sessions was "incremental improvement from session to session."

David was asked to achieve specific training goals throughout April and he hit every marker that was set for him.

Strength and Conditioning coaches throughout the world of sport are learning from each

other and continually looking for improvement, but Will says it's not so much an "arms race" between the coaches and the sports, rather a case of "S&C coaches and the sports themselves getting smarter, more efficient and targeted in their training programs."

But is footy, with its apparently bottomless war chest, outpacing the Olympic sports in terms of conditioning?

Well not necessarily, "the VIS is a more diverse environment with different sports and programs working towards different goals. This fosters a creative environment with more experts in the same place able to share ideas."

Contrast that with AFL where the focus is more short term and immediate and consequently "everyone is under intense scrutiny, an AFL club is very fast paced with high demands on all involved".

On behalf of the VIS family, welcome home Will!



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NOT THE FIFTH FEMALE ANYMORE

It has been a remarkable journey for 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, with the likes of Kristie Marshall, Jacqui Cooper, Alisa Camplin and Lydia Lassila.

So who is David Morris? He finished 13th in the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver and then walked away from the sport for a year. After much perseverance he returned to the top flight, becoming the first Australian male to win an Olympic aerial skiing medal at the Sochi 2014 Games. David spoke to Pinnacle about his preparations for his third Olympics.

What does your schedule currently look like whilst you're here in Australia?

Currently we're in the middle of a strength and conditioning camp [April '17]... completing lots of weights training, cardio, body maintenance and recovering from the big winter of competitions earlier in the year. I'm in my third week of hard-core weights training, trying to put my best foot forward in preparation for the Olympics next year.

Returning from a number of overseas competitions where you've had some mixed results, winning a World Championship bronze medal earlier this year must've been special?

It was very special; World Championships are every two years. My first experience at a World Championships was when I was starting to do triple flips, I landed both my jumps finishing 16th which was great at the time. Each year has got a little better, this year I made the super final where I had a chance at a medal and got one! To have a medal in a World Cup, World Championship and Olympics is pretty special, I am pumped!

Performing these extraordinary jumps must be terrifying, how do you mentally prepare?

It changes every competition; some days I am really comfortable where I don't panic too much by going through the motions and sometimes the weather is a bit funny so it makes things scarier. We have our coach at the bottom, yelling at me whilst I'm in the air telling me I'm okay. In the end, I do this sport because it is scary. That adrenaline rush is what really does it for me. I want to find what my limit is as a person; at what point will I get up to a jump and not be able to turn to and go. I want to discover what my limit is as an athlete. It's a challenge every day, I won't say it gets easier, because it doesn't. So far, I have been able to turn and go every time. You know that all the training you've done throughout the summer will ensure you're fine.

Your Olympic campaigns have had their highs and lows, how will you use these experiences for the 2018 PyeongChang Games?

My first Olympics was Vancouver in 2010 and that was a valuable learning experience. Just missing out of the final by one place was heartbreaking, although it actually fuelled the fire because I was going to retire after that Olympics. I realised that wasn't quite enough.

Sochi was an interesting Games. It was a crazy day, everyone was making mistakes, I had a terrible morning of training to the point I was going to get up and walk home before the competition, it was that



bad. Competition brain kicked in and we were away...

I've always said I'm not the best, but I am very consistent at important competitions. Walking away with a silver medal was unbelievable. It was really rewarding to see the people that supported me along the way had been right from the start about my ability. To prove the believers right after so many years was more rewarding than anything else.

Looking ahead to PyeongChang, maintenance of the body, work through the required skills, play it safe, be smart and peak at the right time is the plan. Hopefully the experience of two Olympics will keep me from panicking too much. That's what it comes down to; do what you can control because that's what you're good at.

With a bachelor degree under your belt have you considered post-career plans when you decide to hang up the skis?

The Olympics is the highest point, so I haven't really looked past that point because we need all our effort going towards that. Post the Games I'd like to stay in the sport because I am passionate about it. I've started designing beginner programs for those entry level athletes starting aerials. I'm not 100% sure what path I want to go down - if its coaching or teaching - but I do know it's going to be assisting people within the sport, helping them to develop and improve. All the knowledge I've built up over the last thirteen years will be very valuable for the next generation.





MITCHELL GOURLEY: THIRD TIME'S A CHARM



Photo Credit: Ski & Snowboard Australia

It's about speed: electrifying, breathtaking speed. It's a sport that requires great courage and skill in equal measure; strength, agility, balance and technique.

There are no judges handing out scores, no marks awarded for style. It's all about timing. Specifically, the time it takes a skier to go from the top of the hill to the bottom, passing through a series of gates on the way down determines the outcome of each race.

Australia has a proud history in para-alpine skiing that is set to continue with medal aspirations at the upcoming Paralympic Winter Games in PyeongChang. Leading our charge is current World Champion Mitchell Gourley, a veteran of two Winter Paralympics and five World Championships, who still feels like he has a lot to learn and achieve.

"My skiing and my approach to being an athlete has changed a lot over the past 10 years,"

said Gourley, who was born a congenital amputee, with his left forearm ending a few inches below his elbow.

"I started out being a little bit crazy, going really hard and skiing way beyond my abilities. This got me a few surprise results in my first couple of years on the World Cup circuit, but eventually my technical deficiencies caught up with me and I was forced to take a step back and address them in order to keep improving."

Gourley has spent the past couple of years focusing on the basics to become a better skier, even if it first came at the expense of some speed and results. However, his hard work at perfecting his technique has paid off.

Gourley finally broke through for his maiden world title at the 2017

World Championships in Tarvisio, Italy — a title he'd been waiting a decade for. "I've been so close so often, heaps of fourths and fifths. But it all turned out right on the day," he said of his Super Combined win.

He will now be centre stage of the Australian team in Korea, "Ultimately, I'd like to win the Giant Slalom, however I'd honestly just love to produce skiing close to the limit of my capabilities in that particular week every four years that everybody else decides means something," Gourley said.

"The environment is always pretty challenging at the Games, but I'd like to think I've matured enough to cope a little better the third time around. I'll be content if I can put down some of my best skiing that week."

"Studying online has enabled me to pursue my studies and be overseas to compete at the same time"

Anabelle Smith - VIS Athlete/OUA Student.

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KYLIE ANDREW: FUELLED PERFORMANCE

With over twenty years of experience, Kylie Andrew leads a team of four nutritionists to fuel VIS athletes so they can literally live out the VIS motto of achieving success in sport and life.

Kylie tells Pinnacle, nutrition is something that directly impacts almost every part of an athlete's performance on and off the track. Kylie says that such a wide variety of aspects are taken into consideration when providing nutritional support to athletes: training schedules, medical results, their life outside of sport, their living situation and even cooking skills. All of these things directly impact the advice and support Kylie and the nutrition team provide to VIS athletes, so that they can perform at their best in all facets of their life.

"All of those things help to influence what the athlete eats...it's about making nutrition fit in with what their world looks like and being practical in the advice that we give." Kylie said.

Kylie says being a nutritionist at the VIS is about seeing each athlete as an individual and giving them tailored advice to fuel their own journey. The nutritionists work with athletes every step of the way, from initial consults to providing them with advice in the lead up to competitions and overseas travel, and providing support when they go through periods of change or injury.

Kylie first became interested in nutrition and dietetics as a teenager, when she began running with her



father, a marathon runner. She says there was always discussion in the house around diets for sport, fitness and for running in particular, sparking her interest in the impact of the foods we eat on our performance.

"Watching him plan his diet for marathons and what he was going to eat on race day, I guess that sort of inspired me." Kylie said.

These constant conversations around nutrition, alongside Kylie's own curiosity when it came to her own running, inspired her to follow the path towards becoming a dietitian.

Kylie never anticipated that she would get the opportunity to work with athletes at the peak of their careers. She loves working with elite athletes, whether that's here or at her other job, at the Richmond Football Club.

Kylie says the best part of her job is seeing her work contribute to an athlete's success, regardless of what field that is on or the level of the competition.

"Every time one of my athletes perform at their best, at whatever level that is, that's a success" she said.

"Seeing the results that they get from improving their diet to be able to improve their performance I think is really exciting." she added.

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STACY'S STYLE

In 2000, one of the best hockey player's Australia has ever produced, retired. A four-time Olympian representing Australia in a record 319 games, captaining his country on several occasions and receiving some of the highest accolades in hockey, Jay Stacy was a player of a generation.

When Jay stepped down from international competition for a split-second he considered moving away from the sport altogether. He wasn't sure if hockey was where he truly wanted to be, outside of playing the game.

"I don't necessarily think that being a long time international player will make you a good coach" he said.

For a little while, Jay played and coached in Europe before taking a full-time job as an account manager, a job which he says he truly did enjoy. But his passion for hockey was unstoppable; something of a reflection of his career.

"It was a deliberate choice to still keep my foot in the hockey fraternity by coaching in the Melbourne Premier League, but I wanted to have a look away from the sport to see if I wasn't, y'know, just looking through rose coloured glasses or taking the easy option of staying in hockey because that's what's comfortable." Jay said.

"But in the end, you gravitate back towards your passion and what you love, and that was hockey." Stacy said.

"I knew it was my passion as a player, but was it going to be my passion as a coach? By stepping away, I discovered that it certainly is a passion as a coach as well." he said.

Since 2010, Jay has been working at the VIS as Head Coach of the Men's Hockey program, with the first and foremost responsibility of producing and developing the next Australian players. He admits it's not an easy



job, it takes a lot of time and work, evaluating players, watching them and even a little bit of fortune-telling to see how they might perform in the future, but he believes the success that follows the challenge makes the work enjoyable.

As a coach, Jay says he has learnt a lot about empathy and listening, about treating players as individuals and shaping a program for them as an athlete and a person. This is something that he says he found really hit home while coaching in the Hockey India League.

Jay spent two years coaching a team with a mix of five nationalities, all speaking different languages and with different playing styles, individually and as a team. It was this experience of coaching in the Hockey India League, that pushed him to develop further as a coach.

"It really teaches you to be specific in your communication and what you want from the players." he said.

His drive and passion for hockey is pretty obvious. His never ending quest to develop professionally as a coach, reflects his motivations as a player of the sport.

Perhaps the moment that challenged Jay the most in his stellar career, wasn't his first game for the Kookaburras or going to the Olympics or getting

to captain his country, but being dropped from the Australian team in 1989.

After making the Australian senior side in 1987 and representing the green and gold at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, Jay found himself without a place on the Australian team. Not because of anything in particular, but a new coach often means new eyes that see different things and a different direction, neither wrong nor right, just different.

However, he wasn't prepared to take no for an answer and threw himself into making selection for the 1990 squad, and in the process set himself up to play some of the best hockey the world had seen.

"I wasn't prepared to let [my career] go that easily. Passion, self-driven to be the best athlete I could be, prove to the new coach that he got it wrong." he said.

Jay says he believes this passion, drive and work ethic are all elements of his character that different coaches and people in his career have helped mould and something he aims to instil in his VIS players today.

"I'm passionate about [hockey], that's what I love to do and it actually doesn't even really feel like going to work, which is a good thing," he said.



LUCAS HAMILTON: A PRODIGIOUS TALENT

Lucas Hamilton caught the attention of the cycling public during the queen stage of the 2016 Tour Down Under, where he launched himself from the group of favourites on the final ascent of Wilunga Hill. For many, it was their first sighting of a prodigious talent but for those within the cycling community, it was confirmation of his burgeoning challenge to the big names of the sport.

After the showing on the slopes of Wilunga, the rest of 2016 was all about learning his craft with the Jayco World Tour Academy, racing in the big U23 races in Europe. He showed his ability to adapt to different styles of racing placing 3rd at the An Post Ras Tour and 5th in Flèche Ardenaise, while also playing a pivotal support role for his teammates. However, his big goal was the Tour de l'Avenir, the premier race for U23 riders.

The youngster from Ararat was gearing up for a top performance but disaster struck as sickness hit early in the race. He lost over 20 minutes to illness on Stage 3 and was still feeling the effects when the road tilted skywards toward terrain that usually suited him. He managed to recover, pull away in some breaks and collect mountain points. On the final stage he found himself in the peloton with the favourites and race leader and managed to ride away from

all of them, only beaten on the day by a lone breakaway rider.

Despite not taking a standout win, Lucas became the first Australian in history to win any classification at the Tour de l'Avenir, when he pulled on the mountains jersey following the final stage.

Now regarded as one of the world's best emerging road cycling talents, Lucas has continued his white-hot form into 2017, winning the Oceania Championship and finishing on the podium in four straight Italian one-day races for the U23 National Team.

The constant search for improvement is a familiar theme for Hamilton and there is no doubt that if he maintains his current level of drive, performance and diligence to training, he could well find himself on the professional circuit and cementing his own as the biggest name of all.

Science & Cycling | Nick Owen

It is vital for elite riders to gain as much advantage over a competitor as possible, and to gain fractions of a second can mean the difference between a gold medal and no medal at all. We managed to track down Lucas' Sport Scientist, Nick Owen, to discuss the role he plays with the talented youngster:

What role do you play with Lucas?

Whilst Lucas is in Australia, I help design his race plan for the summer season and then design a training program that allows him to be at the peak of his fitness for all of his priority races. This year they were the National U23 road race (3rd) and the Oceania's road race (1st). Alongside his training program, Lucas undertook two altitude blocks and a heat training block leading into the Nationals Road race.

What is it like to work with Lucas?

Lucas has all the attributes that you look for in an athlete and is a pleasure to work with; he is mature beyond his years and understands the demands of being an elite cyclist. He manages his time very well and is always willing to do anything that will make him a better athlete. An example of this has been his dedication to improving his sprint, after finishing numerous races last season just off the podium and struggling to win small bunch finishes, a plan was put in place to rectify this. Lucas undertook a rigorous gym program under the guidance of Dr Harry Brennan, in conjunction with specific sprint sessions on his bike, resulting in a 200w increase in his max power.

What makes Lucas such a great athlete?

To be a world class cyclist you need to possess the required physiology, tactical awareness and technical ability, as well as the right attitude. Lucas possesses all of these qualities so his results this past 12 months aren't surprising at all.

What are his strengths?

His endurance is undoubtedly his greatest strength. He is widely considered to be amongst the best climbers in Australia and within the U23 riders worldwide. His tactical knowledge is also world class and this allows him to regularly be in positions where he can contest the finish and win. He is right up there with the best in Australia in terms of his power output. He still has a little way to go to be at the top end of senior elite races, but with his continued improvement I think there's every chance he will get there sooner rather than later.

What are his areas for improvement?

12 months ago his sprint and short term power were his main weaknesses, however, this has improved greatly. It still needs a little work and he is continuing this throughout the season. Lucas is continually developing and is on track to be signed by a professional team in the near future.



MING'S DYNASTY

Ming Gong hasn't been diving or coaching divers all his life, but it's hard for him to remember a time when he wasn't involved in the sport.

As a five year old, the VIS diving coach competed in gymnastics in China before transitioning to the sport that was to become his passion three years later.

Ming reached his high watermark in diving with a gold medal for China at the 1997 World Cup event in Mexico City. The event was the three metre syncro.

There is sweet irony in the fact that his diver, VIS scholarship holder Anabelle Smith, won a bronze medal in that same event at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

When pressed to nominate another young diver coming through the ranks, Ming nominates Anna Rose Keating who was just 15 years of age when she took the Oceania bronze medal in the 10 metre platform event two years ago.

Ming says Anna Rose never misses a training session and has reached every target he's set for her over the last three years. He predicts the 17 year old could breakthrough with selection in the Commonwealth Games team next year and the Tokyo Olympics in 2020.

Ming is working with a number of other promising young athletes and while he may not realistically be seeking to oversee a diving dynasty, he's certainly pursuing long term success for the VIS diving program.

Comparing sport in Australia to his Chinese experiences, Ming says there are significant differences. In his old country, sport is a full time paid job for the athletes, but in terms of training there are not significant differences, although the Chinese athlete "has more of a responsibility to a job and not love of the sport".

On a personal note, Ming came to Australia in 2011 and now has a family in Melbourne and has applied for citizenship. And what does he love most about Melbourne? Well, he says that's a hard question to answer because he comes from such a different cultural background. "The most attractive aspect to me is the people. The way they enjoy their life, the way they support their sport team and so on."

It's little wonder he gets on so well, there's lots to like about Ming as well.

SOME LIKE IT HOT

It's fair to say that Olympic 800m runner, Peter Bol doesn't like cold weather, but Victorians will be stunned to learn that the Bol family found it too cold even in Queensland!

When Peter was just six years old his family arrived in Australia as refugees from South Sudan. They settled in Toowoomba, atop the Great Dividing Range, where the mercury struggles to pass 16 degrees in the middle of winter.

For those who like it hot, really hot, Perth beckoned and the journey to the other side of the continent set in motion a series of events that led all the way to Rio in 2016.

Peter's first sporting love at St Norbert College in Perth was basketball, in fact he can still be found occasionally sinking three pointers on the Sprung Floor at the VIS...with extraordinary skill and precision!

He didn't start running until he was 16, when he fortuitously filled in for a St Norbert athlete who was missing in action at a sporting carnival.

Peter shocked onlookers of the 800m event when he thrashed the field to win by 50 metres. He took the gold despite a self-imposed handicap - Peter ran almost the entire race in Lane 2, unaware

he was permitted to move to the inside lane.

After that, his progress in the event was dramatic and within five years Peter was challenging for one of the most competitive spots on the Australian athletics team.

Victorians Alex Rowe, Luke Mathews, Jeff Riseley and New South Welshman Josh Ralph were also chasing green and gold selection in the two lap event.

All four were Australian champions over the distance. Rowe held a share of the Australian record, Mathews was sweeping all before him and Riseley was already a dual Olympian.

It was a huge task for young Peter Bol to squeeze out two of these guys and his 2015-16 season in Australia didn't provide much of a pointer to the shock that was to follow.

With the Rio Olympics commencing in August 2016, Bol waited until June to produce the run of his life. He eclipsed a 17 month old personal best in Germany and qualified for the

Games. Shortly afterwards the selectors gave him the nod.

Winning selection into the Australian team was a head spinning moment, Peter compares it to when he first arrived in Australia as a young boy and marveled at the new environment where "even the air was fresh".

In the whirlwind of Rio competition, Peter finished sixth in his heat of the 800m event, missing out on the semis. But the sweet taste of international competition has left him striving for more and determined to bring home some glory to his adopted country.

Off the track Peter has completed his Degree of Construction Management and has joined the VIS ambassadorial team, becoming a composed and confident public speaker. The young boy who "lucked his way" into athletics, is slowly adapting to the cooler Victorian climate and quickly becoming a sporting icon for the South Sudanese community in Australia.

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