

**Elite athletes ACEing
life and sport**

**ATHLETE CAREER AND EDUCATION
ENHANCING YOUR SPORTING LIFE**

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I think during your sporting career as an athlete, it is important that you have a balance in your everyday life. Whether you are devoting your time to study or working towards other personal goals, this helps keep you grounded in the real world, rather than living in the often crazy bubble that is the world of sport.

Kurt Fearnley, Paralympian and qualified teacher

‘The crazy bubble that is the world of sport’

We often hear about athletes who fall from grace, and the challenges they face after their competition days are over. However, these stories are outweighed by the many more inspiring ones where good planning and support have helped elite athletes achieve their life goals.

2009 marks 15 years of the National Athlete Career and Education (ACE) program, during which time we have assisted over 20 000 athletes Australia-wide.

To celebrate this anniversary we are sharing 15 amazing stories.

Every year, thousands of elite athletes across Australia compete to represent their country as part of a national sporting team in events such as the Olympic Games, Paralympic Games, World Cups and world championships, or Commonwealth Games. Many relocate from their home towns and need to build new support networks; others overcome injury or personal difficulties to achieve championship results.

The ACE program provides support to athletes to manage their personal and professional development during their sporting career. ACE assists athletes to achieve their educational goals; develop and plan career pathways; and up-skill to manage their sporting and non-sporting commitments.

The ACE program is managed through the Australian Sports Commission and is jointly funded by the Australian and state and territory governments.

This booklet is designed to:

- celebrate the success that elite athletes experience within and beyond their sporting careers
- recognise the range of transitions athletes navigate as part of their sporting pathway
- reinforce the need for current athletes to plan for their future both within their sport and beyond their competitive careers.

Thank you to all the athletes who have shared their personal stories and achievements with us.

Year of birth: 1975

Sport: Swimming

Occupation: ACE Adviser

Major achievement: Two-time Olympic medallist, OAM

Daniel Kowalski

While in the midst of my career I didn't understand the importance of balance. I wish I had, because I truly believe it would have made me a better athlete. I thought all I needed to do was swim — nothing could have been further from the truth. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.



I come from the proud sport of swimming. I initially got involved in the sport from following my sister Shevaun to the pool as a way of meeting people. We had just moved to Australia from overseas so it really was a social thing. I was not a great age-group swimmer, but I just loved it. I loved the feeling of swimming and the friends I made from it and I was always inspired by the history and tradition of the sport in this country. Just being a member of the national team and being part of that history is an extremely memorable achievement, as was medalling at two Olympics.

To Melbourne and back

I left home at 17 and moved from the Gold Coast to Melbourne. It was really hard as my family was not keen to see me move away, but I knew that for my swimming it was the right thing to do. Over the years I have relocated a lot for my swimming. After four years with my coach in Melbourne I had to move to Canberra to the Australian Institute of Sport to find a new coach, which was tough.

After 18 months it was time to go back home to the Gold Coast, back to my original coach and to be closer to family and friends. Once back in Queensland I also realised that my career was winding down and I really needed to look to the future, so I started my degree.

Aside from moving coaches and towns I also experienced a lot of transitional changes through injury. I had chronic shoulder problems and ended up having four surgeries.

Working as an ACE adviser

I didn't see the importance of career and education post-sport until late in my career, which is one of my biggest regrets.

I worked in different roles, predominantly marketing-type roles and while I enjoyed them, I did not find them satisfying or as fulfilling as I find working as an adviser for the ACE program.

The consistent thing about all my employment is that it has all been sport-related. Sport and people are my passion, so I have found the perfect fit.



Over the course of my swimming career I also had major self-confidence issues, brought on by my success and also through eating disorders. It was really hard for me, because I knew I had problems but was too scared to do anything about it — this was a weakness and athletes are not meant to show weakness. Once I acknowledged the fact that I needed help I sought it, and it definitely helped me become a more rounded person.

This process really helped me see things differently when it came to my results in the pool as well.

Other important life skills that I learnt through sports are the day-to-day skills such as time management, attention to detail and sacrifice, as well as the importance of honest communication.

Back to school

I didn't want to be that person — the one not able to let go when it was time. Surgery was a wake-up call to get back to university and finish my degree. I contacted the university I previously had been attending and was lucky to be reinstated.

I needed support and I used it. The people providing this support for me were people from all facets of life whom I respected. Now I wish I had gone back to the university five or six years earlier, as that is how far behind I feel I am compared to other people my age in terms of work experience.

Didn't think ACE was for me

I did not utilise ACE the way it should be utilised. I didn't feel I needed to, nor did I want to use ACE for most of its services. I did a few short workshops on cooking and media training (which really did help), but I just didn't think ACE was useful. Man, was I wrong!

My best advice to athletes considering their career is, don't be scared. That was my downfall. I was one of those athletes who was so used to excelling at the most important thing in my life (at the time) that I was too scared to even consider going to uni or getting some form of tertiary education. Fear of failure — I didn't want to not do well.

Year of birth: 1987

Sport: Gymnastics

Occupation: Marketing
Administrator/PA

Major achievement: Gold at the
2002 Commonwealth Games,
bronze at the 2003 World
Championships

Stephanie Moorhouse

Use your support network in all aspects of life. Don't think that you are going through issues alone — there is always someone to help you. Never give up on anything you want to achieve, because hard work and enjoyment will always get you there.



I started gymnastics at the age of four. I started because my older brother Nathan, who is two and a half years older, was doing recreational gymnastics at the time. I thought it looked like fun and wanted to do whatever he was doing, so I asked my parents if I could start. Nathan finished after a year and I kept going. I made my first Australian team at the age of 12, but my three highlights were winning a gold medal at the 2002 Commonwealth Games, winning a bronze medal at the 2003 World Championships, and being an all-around finalist at the 2004 Olympic Games.

Retired at the age of 18

The main transition issues that I have been through were at the age of 15. I changed gymnastics clubs and schools in order to take my gymnastics to the next level. The other challenge was when I retired in 2005 at the age of 18. It was very challenging to leave the sport and life that I had lived for so long. However, with the assistance from a great support network, I managed to get through.

The main skills that I have learnt throughout my gymnastics career and have taken into my life after sport are time management, discipline, a 'never give up' attitude and the ability to have a well-balanced and healthy lifestyle.

A new career in the sporting industry

I have completed my Bachelor of Business: Sport and Leisure Management degree and am now working full time at the Carlton Football Club as the Marketing Administrator/PA to the Sponsorship and Sales Manager. Having done sport my whole life I could not see myself being involved in any other industry.

Starting a new career after gymnastics was challenging at times. While it was a very exciting time it was also quite daunting. The main support I used throughout this period was my sport psychologist and family. I spent a lot of time speaking to them and with their assistance I have been able to find new challenges and new interests in life. I was also in contact with the Victorian Institute of Sport ACE program to assist me with my future studies and job prospects.

ACE for support and ideas

The ACE program has helped me balance my gymnastics, schoolwork and training. It has helped me understand my options for my career path and life after gymnastics. I would sit down with an ACE adviser to go through the opportunities and prospects that were out there for me. Four years after retirement I am still in contact with them for support and constant ideas.



Year of birth: 1979

Sports: Rowing, cycling

Occupation: Freelance journalist and full time athlete

Major achievement: Three-time world champion and two-time Olympian (rowing)

Amber Halliday

Having something outside of sport is so important. If you can sit down with a book and forget about your sport problems for a while, it helps you forget about the stress that you endure in training and competition. It's important to get a balance that is right for you, but my advice is to start off at the upper end of commitment if you can (for example, full-time study or full-time work) and then you can always drop back from there to find your right level.

I encourage people to have faith in themselves that they can perform in two areas simultaneously. I read a Chinese proverb that says 'if you want something done, give it to a busy man'. I have found that to be surprisingly true.



I discovered rowing at school

After trying lots of sports and being bossed around, I liked the role reversal of being a coxswain and bossing around the kids in the boat! Dad was a rower and I had friends in the sport, so I think there was a natural affinity. My most memorable achievement in rowing was at the 2002 World Championships in Seville. I was rowing with my great friend Sally Causby in the lightweight double (an Olympic event) for the first time and we got up and won when no-one (not even ourselves) was expecting it! It was a textbook race too.

I am now doing a bit of cycling. I have always cycled for cross-training and often jealously watched the cyclists ride past the lake as I sat on the water in my boat. After the disappointment of Beijing I was doing a bit on the bike to ride out my frustration, and a friend who is a rower-turned-cyclist encouraged me to do a cycling lab test at the South Australian Sports Institute. The coaches were pretty happy to have me after that! After an encouraging start I had a major victory in New Zealand that helped me win the Amy Gillett Foundation scholarship and get a ride with the national team. But most importantly it's fun and I enjoy the culture of cycling.

Sport skills for life and career

In sport you learn to work well with other people, you become tolerant of different personalities, you learn to deal with adverse situations and be time efficient. You learn how to survive and channel your work ethic, you learn how to be successful, you get in touch with your emotions and you know yourself very well.

I studied psychology and media at university. I had a bit of my writing published in magazines, but also worked in student recruiting and media/communications to pay the bills. I was the editor of a national rowing magazine, which was great as I could take that on the road with me as long as I had an internet connection. I had a column in the *Sunday Mail* in the lead-up to Beijing and they employed me to do a stint as the social/gossip writer after I came back.



A humbling experience

I had a major transition in 2004 after the Athens Olympics when I decided to look for full-time work. I had been through uni and had heard about the Olympic Job Opportunities Program from former Olympians. I expected to be able to walk into a job, being an Olympian and having two degrees, but the new program only wanted to know about my work experience, which was not very much. Job hunting was very humbling and I was still unemployed in February the following year. I did eventually get work with help from Brendan Tammo at the South Australian Sports Institute (SASI) ACE department.

When I went back to rowing in mid-2005 I was working full time and looking forward to both commitments. After morning training it was good to forget about rowing and think about work and by the time work was over I was keen to get back to training.

How ACE helped me

It is good to know that ACE is around. I often touch base with staff there, see them around the gym and run ideas past them. I think having someone to bounce ideas off is really valuable.

ACE helped me get a job at Adelaide University in their student support unit and they encouraged me through my studies. My studies kept me grounded, and I actually got my best results at uni when we were travelling with the team. For me it's no good if my coach demands that I be a full-time athlete. I know I perform better when I have another focus besides my sport. It keeps me grounded and gives me the perspective that I need to stay sane!

I realised that one of the times that support is required most is after major events like the Olympics, where you need to have a plan for your return. Whether it's an adventure holiday or work, you need something structured but challenging to return to. I was lucky that the short-term contract with the *Sunday Mail* came up, as writing about celebrities and local gossip was way out of my comfort zone at the time!

Quite often after Beijing, our ACE coordinator at SASI would give me a call to see how I was going. It was good to know that somebody still cared.

Year of birth: 1982

Sport: Cycling

Occupation: Full time athlete

Major achievement:
Representation of five sports
at state, national and
international levels

Chris Martin



Commit yourself to being strong both in mind and body. Love what you do and enjoy yourself. Always look to learn, grow and improve, and help others to do so. This is the key for a happy and successful journey for me.

Start a journey, make choices based on the best info you have at the time, work hard at your goals and enjoy yourself. Make something special of your life just by doing your daily habits well. All choices in life are half chance. You may make choices that you think take you in the wrong direction or you may get it right the first time, however unlikely. The most important thing is that you grow from all your experiences.

As a sportsperson, be prepared to suffer, physically and mentally. This is the life and it is rewarding.

I'm a road cyclist. I have had a road bike since completing school in 2000 and have ridden hundreds of kilometres a week since then simply because I love it — it makes me feel good and I hate cars. I have participated in multiple other sports in the last decade, but never considered cycling an option as I thought I was too big, so I just participated for fun. But last year I travelled to Italy on a cycling holiday and raced with my cousin. I won some races, cycled over some amazing European mountains and ever since then cycling has become my whole life.

I was subsequently recycled from the South Australian Sports Institute (SASI) rowing program into the cycling program and now I've quit work and left Adelaide to race in Italy for the rest of 2009 in the hope of going pro one day.

Road riding and racing is the most honest, brutal, physical, addictive, technical and inspiring sport I've ever tried or competed in. My most memorable experience in cycling to date is completing the Gran Fondo Dolomiti stars race. It was a 170-kilometre ride over five mountain passes in the Italian Dolomites. It was, without comparison, the most physically demanding and beautiful day of my life, and I'll remember it and the people I shared it with forever.

Parents, brothers, sister, family, coaches and ACE

Every time I made a decision or a choice about a sporting or career move I spoke to as many people as I could. I spoke to parents, friends, brothers, sister, coaches, SASI staff members, bosses, etc. I weighed up the pros and cons and made decisions that would make me happy and would let me develop the type of lifestyle I want while taking into account the people that matter to me.

I spoke to the SASI ACE coordinators on several occasions over my SASI sporting career, which has now lasted 12 years. The ACE coordinators assisted me with advice in sports and career choices and helped me develop résumés and market myself. They also assisted me to maintain important balances with sport and work, develop time-management skills and manage 'many masters' and expectations from different aspects and people in my life.

Changes and challenges

I have participated in five sports at state, local, national and international levels. The transitions from sport to sport all occurred for different reasons but made me very resilient and adaptable. Sport has always been the focus of my life, but I have always had to work simultaneously to support my selfish sporting lifestyle choices.

Having to change sports several times has also meant that I have had to change my body shape to suit the sport and this was, and continues to be, a huge physical and mental challenge for me.

The recognition I have received for my different sports at different times has also been an up and down transition. One day I'm playing a South Australia NFL football grand final in front of 30,000 people, getting slaps on the back from a large audience, and the next minute I'm rowing a local regatta as a mature-age athlete getting my arse kicked by 15-year-olds and receiving nothing but confused stares from a handful of committed spectators.

All of my sports have hardened me to handle anything. Hard work, adaptability, time management, an open and enthusiastic personality, leadership and resilience — I can handle it all.

And one last thing — be good to everyone, and especially be good to everyone while you're on the way up, so that they'll be good to you when you're on the way down.

Year of birth: 1972

Sport: Swimming

Education: Bachelor of Commerce and Bachelor of Law

Occupation: General manager, technology firm

Major achievement: OAM, Olympic gold medallist



Chris Fydler

One of the hardest transitions in life is moving from living an elite athlete's life to that of the 9 to 5 workday. By preparing yourself during your years of sport you can make the transition easier. From a career perspective, sport should be used as a key to open doors to the corporate world, rather than something to hang your hat on and say, 'Hey, give me a job'.

One great way to give yourself a head start in life is to study, whether it is full time, part time or by correspondence. It can be a university, TAFE or another institution, it doesn't matter. Every subject that you do now is one less that you will have to do when you retire from sport.

IMAGE: 'Beagle' (Bondi Rescue), Susie O'Neill, **Chris Fydler**, Sandra Morgan-Beavis - All Time All Stars, 2009 Telstra SKINS Provided by Swimming Australia Ltd

As a youngster I played a lot of sports. Growing up in Kingscliff on the NSW north coast I particularly enjoyed surf lifesaving and competitive swimming. I chose swimming because it was the sport that I felt I was most consistent at. It took a convincing word from swim coach Greg Salter to 'concentrate on the pool' and the rest is history.

I would have to say that my most memorable moment in the pool was the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games gold medal (men's 4 x 100-metre freestyle relay).

Aspirations in sports and career pulling in the same direction

Growing up with my family on the NSW north coast for the best part of my adolescence provided me with a solid network of support.

At the completion of my high school certificate I didn't know how to best combine study, part-time work, training and competition. As the years rolled by I could see that swimming was certainly not going to last forever, nor were the amounts that I earned going to support me for the rest of my life. I needed to plan for the future. For me it was university, for some it is a trade or other profession, but it is important for any athlete to have something to fall back on at the end of their sporting career.

ACE assistance without compromises

The national ACE program assisted me with achieving my educational and vocational aspirations without compromising my wish to explore athletic pursuits. They provided me with great assistance (for example, assisting with time management, goal setting and career counselling).

There is a famous quote, often used in sporting circles, that you can always study when you've finished playing sport. The reality is that most people don't start and few actually finish. The lessons learnt while playing sport are invaluable both in business and life. Skills such as time management, discipline and commitment are attractive to any potential employer; however, it will be of bigger benefit to you if you can also bring some credentials to the table. Give them an excuse to employ you.

Discipline, work ethic, patience, commitment and focus — the lessons learnt while playing sport are invaluable in business and life, and are attractive to any potential employer, colleague or partnership.

With the support of my school career counsellor and the national ACE staff, I decided to get the wheels in motion and plan my future. I commenced a Bachelor of Commerce and a Bachelor of Law at Bond University in January 1992 and completed my studies in August 1997.

During my swimming career I studied at university, and worked as a barman and a sales assistant. This helped me balance my life, which is part of the reason why I didn't find my relocation to Sydney in 1997 (due to my sport and career aspirations) such a big deal.

I landed on my feet working as a part-time lawyer with Blake Dawson Waldron and had the opportunity to train alongside Scott Miller at the University of Sydney under the guidance of Brian Sutton.

Although I had moved from the north coast to the city I did not find the transition a difficult one due to the close network of friends I had established throughout my swimming career. Nonetheless I did miss my family, the home-cooked meals and the laidback lifestyle that the Kingscliff community had to offer.

After balancing my career and sporting aspirations for a couple of years I decided to take a year off work to concentrate on swimming. It was during this time that I began to think about my career after swimming, and look at what I really wanted to do for the rest of my life.

Retirement and a new passion

I retired from swimming in 2001 and, wanting to use my commercial skills a little more, I accepted a role as in-house counsel at a telecommunications company. It was during my three years with this company that I found a real passion for marketing and sales and I suppose I never looked back.

In 2004 I took up the opportunity to become General Manager with Oriel Technologies, which was a medium-sized system integration business in the IT industry. Oriel is a company that specialises in partnering with its customers to deliver IT infrastructure solutions. I found my new role both challenging and rewarding and soon became an equity partner with the company.

Year of birth: 1981

Sport: Athletics, marathon

Occupation: Full-time athlete, qualified teacher

Major achievement: OAM, three-time Olympic medallist (gold in the marathon in Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008)

Kurt Fearnley



During your sporting career as an athlete it is important that you have a balance in your day-to-day life. You really need this balance and sacrificing time from training for sport and competition is actually very beneficial. Whether you are devoting your time to study at either university or TAFE, or working towards other personal goals, this helps to keep you grounded in the real world, rather than living in the often crazy bubble that is the world of sport.

For the love of sport

I was born with lumbar sacral agenesis (where the bottom part of my spine was missing) but I knew from an early age that I wanted to play sport because I loved it. I started road racing and working with my coach, Andrew Dawes in 1995. A big opportunity came about for me in 2000 with special events included in the Sydney Olympics as well as the Paralympics. I have worked hard and love the thrill of competition.

My most memorable achievement to date was winning back-to-back marathons at the Paralympics (Athens in 2004, Beijing in 2008) and my goal is to make it three in a row in London in 2012.

Transitions

I took three years out from study when I moved from country New South Wales to Sydney. It was a transition in terms of relocation that was not always easy, but I was fortunate in having some family living in the big city as my support network. I also knew that to succeed in my sport I did not really have a choice, as Sydney was where I needed to be.

When I started my tertiary education (a Bachelor of Education degree at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst) my coach was very supportive of me studying and training. I also had a burning desire to become a school teacher.

ACE

When I made the decision to go to university, the people at ACE helped me with choosing a course and they did a lot of the interactions on my behalf, sending out letters of support and generally helping me with the enrolment process. When I lived in Sydney I often used to pop into ACE at the NSW Institute of Sport and the staff there would listen to me and help me.



I had known that I wanted to be a school teacher since I was in primary school. There were special teachers there who had made a huge difference to my life, and I decided then and there that I wanted to be a teacher myself one day so that I could help and inspire others.

The three years in Sydney was a nice break from study, but getting back into the books was something I found quite straightforward. I especially liked being in the classroom during the practical periods. I spent time at three schools – Campbelltown High, Blainey High (my old school) and Walgett High, which has a large Indigenous community and is located seven hours west of Sydney.

Full-time student and 100 per cent athlete

For me to achieve in both my studies and my sport I needed the full support of my coach. Having been with Andrew for a number of years, I was able to negotiate with him a balanced schedule in terms of training and competition. I had complete faith in him and we targeted my races during the university holidays. I spent two full years studying and training before heading to the 2004 Paralympic Games in Athens. Charles Sturt University was equally supportive and I came back to finish my final year of the degree when I returned from the Paralympics.

Setting goals

Sport has helped me with goal setting. Achieving success in sport is just like achieving success in other areas of your life. You have to plan well and take small steps to get to where you want to go. I also think that dealing with anxiety, motivation, success and failure in sport overlaps into a person's general life. Managing pressure in sport has always helped me to put things into perspective and manage my life away from sport.

Year of birth: 1979

Sport: Diving

Occupation: Undertaking a Bachelor of Medicine

Major achievement: Olympic medallist

Robert Newbery



You can do whatever you want to do. It is possible to fit it in, though it might take a bit longer. It takes significant time to excel in your sport, so you need to expect it will take time to excel in study or work.

It's important to have goals outside sport to pursue as well. Make the most of your opportunities. There is no one path, as there are multiple options.

Two definite highlights in my career as a diver are the Olympics in 2000 and 2004.

At the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, Australia returned to the glory days in Olympic diving after more than three quarters of a century, with bronze medals being won by me and Dean Pullar in the men's synchronised springboard and Rebecca Gilmore and Loudy Tourky in the women's synchronised platform.

In Athens 2004, Australia was the second most powerful diving nation, with six medals (one gold, one silver and four bronze), behind China with nine medals. Chantelle won gold in the women's platform, and I won two bronze medals in the men's synchronised events to bring my Olympic medal tally to three. Thus, Chantelle and I became the first Australian husband and wife to win medals at the same Olympic Games.

It started with bombs

I used to do tumbling around the backyard, and liked trampolining. Mum thought I might be a gymnast, but there wasn't anything in the local area. When I was 12, we saw some diving, and she thought of diving as a sport and looked it up in the yellow pages. I really loved it because we started by doing bombs off the boards and it was a lot of fun.

I kept at it all through high school, and coaches thought I was pretty good. I joined an elite squad and training, competing and school filled up my time.

Diving didn't pay the bills

When I finished high school and I was 18, my coach Hui Tong moved from Adelaide to Brisbane to be the Australian Institute of Sport coach at the diving program, so I joined him. That was a major transition, as I didn't have my family support nearby, and had to adjust to getting around Brisbane, travelling for competitions, and studying.

I always knew I had to do something as well as diving. Diving would never pay the bills, so I enrolled in a Bachelor of Science and studied part-time. I had always been goal oriented for my sport, but sometimes found it hard to carry that over into my study. Often it was because I was just so tired. Still, I completed the degree in 2003.

New priorities

Life changed a lot when Jet was born in 2002, when I was 23. After the birth of a child your priorities change, and there are many more things you have to think about. You can't just pick up your stuff and go. At times when Chantelle and I were both competing overseas, we would travel via Adelaide and drop him at my parents. We now have two children, and life has more challenges.

When I finished my degree, I wasn't sure what job would most interest me. I was interested in biology, and still wanted to compete at the Athens 2004 Olympics. So I studied to sit the GMSAT to get into a medical degree. I was successful and started the training for that while training to compete at the 2006 Commonwealth Games. I also started working as a personal care assistant for the Spinal Injuries Association.

Retirement and new start

For the Beijing Games, I deferred my medical studies. After Beijing, I decided to retire from diving and pursue my medical studies full time. I still have some way to go, but should complete it in 2010.

Retiring is a special challenge. After the relief of not having to train so intensely and travel, you do have a sense of loss and miss the competition and associated contacts. But I have always had other goals — family and study — to keep me focused and looking ahead.

Role models

The physical role model is often held up as something young people relate to. I agree that my sport has taught me discipline, goal setting, psychological skills, being dedicated to one thing, and how to deal with setbacks.

However, what I have seen through my science degree and now through medicine, I am so impressed by other achievements, and I sometimes think there is a disproportionate amount of attention focused on sport achievements, rather than on some of these other fields of activity.

Still, diving has allowed me many opportunities, and skills to deal with it. The goal focus following injury is really important. You will do whatever recovery is necessary to get back into competition.

Impossible without support

The Australian Institute of Sport, Diving Australia, coaches and scholarships provided opportunities that would not be possible otherwise. Chantelle and I had support from them, especially when the children were sick. Family and friends have all pitched in too.

I have had contact with ACE all through my career. I've done workshops and presentations. They would check up to see how I was travelling life wise. However, I've always been studying or enrolled so haven't needed as much support and guidance as some others might have.

I got my first job in 2006, and I've always been a strong supporter of education, so I didn't need much convincing.



Amanda Fraser

Year of birth: 1981

Sports: Swimming, athletics

Occupation: Sales

Major achievement: Paralympic medallist

Late in 2007, I decided that I would retire after the Beijing Paralympics the following year. I was determined to do well in Beijing so I trained hard and left no stone unturned. I won a silver medal in discus and came fourth in shot-put. It was easy to walk away from the sport because I knew what I had put in.

Grateful to ACE

I am grateful for the help and advice that ACE offered me throughout my time at the AIS. When I was in high school I couldn't stand up and speak in front of people. The speeches and lessons that ACE organised for me helped me overcome my fear and I now enjoy sharing my story with people. Yes, I have a disability, but look what I have done with it. People who have watched me grow up say that sometimes they can't believe that I am the same person.

Growing up with a disability was very challenging. I had low self-esteem when I was younger, so adapting to changes was often difficult for me. The first major change in my life came when I started swimming. My two younger sisters had been beating me at most things all my life. In swimming, however, I had found something I excelled at and I began to gain confidence.

Swimming in the Paralympics

At age 15, I relocated from my hometown of Emerald to Rockhampton. I moved for both my swimming and my education. In Rockhampton, I began doing swimming sessions eight times a week and gym sessions twice a week with my new coach, Otto Sonneleitner.

After two years with Otto, I changed coaches to Gary Knight. Gary helped me make it to Sydney in 2000, where I won my first individual Paralympic medal – bronze in the 50-metre freestyle. Before Sydney, I was shy, young and in some ways unhappy, but competing in my first Paralympics changed my attitude towards my disability and I learnt to appreciate it. It was an unbelievable experience and I didn't want the memory of those moments to diminish, so I stopped swimming.

New city – new sport

My mother moved to Canberra in 2001 to coach the AIS women's wheelchair basketball team. The head coach of the athletics team, Chris Nunn, asked my mother if I would like to try athletics. I moved to Canberra in April 2001. It was a risk that I am glad I took.

Scott Goodman was my first athletics coach and it was difficult when he told me that he no longer had time to coach me. This was a setback, but it spurred me on to prove that I could achieve great things. With the help of my new coach, Alison O'Riordan, I went on to win gold and set a world record in discus at the 2006 World Championships.

Life after sport

When I retired after the Beijing Paralympics, I moved back to Queensland and I now work full time in sales for Telstra. I worked casually for Telstra while I trained at the AIS, a job that ACE helped me organise. I didn't think that there were possibilities of achieving anything outside of sport, but now I am being considered for real estate work.



Jo Allison

Year of birth: 1976

Sport: Orienteering

Occupation: Public Servant working for the Dept Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

Major Achievement: World championships in Denmark in 2006

Don't worry if you don't know exactly what you want to do for a career. The best way to find out is to try different kinds of work. You can always change careers, and everything you try gives you more experience. Talking with ACE staff is a good way to help assess your options.

Orienteering is a sport that combines cross-country running with navigation. I got involved in it through my family from a young age and got hooked. My most memorable achievements are the competitions I have run overseas. The highlight was finishing fourth in the relay at the world championships in Denmark in 2006.

Living overseas

I spent 18 months living in Sweden where there were a lot of great opportunities for competing and training. It was a valuable experience, but also one of the most challenging. Living away from family and friends can be hard, but living on the other side of the world can also give lots of new useful perspectives.

I think that the motivation and discipline required to train hard in sport can be applied to other areas of life. In training for orienteering I was always looking for ways to improve. Being an athlete teaches you to analyse performances, learn from mistakes and identify steps towards achieving goals.

ACE helped with career thoughts

I have always studied and worked throughout my orienteering career. However, about five years ago when I returned from Sweden, I became more focused on finding a long-term 'career' job. I started focusing more on the future and my life after sport.

I talked to people, including ACE staff at the ACT Academy of Sport, about options and tried to identify what it was I really wanted to do. I also did some work experience to get a feel for what sort of work was around.

I am now employed within the Public Service, working with mapping at the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

Time for a break

I still really enjoy the sport, but over the last few years I found that my motivation for the amount of training required to be able to compete at a high level starting to dwindle. Last year I achieved some results internationally that I was really satisfied with and finally it felt like a good time to take a break. I decided to take this year off competing and I am now very excited to be pregnant with my first child.

While there are things about orienteering that I miss, I am enjoying having a very different focus for a while. Orienteering has been a major focus in my life for the last 15 years.

I am undecided at this stage if I will try and make a return to competing internationally next year or if I will enjoy participating in the sport at a more social level.

Candice Liddy



Year of birth: 1990

Sport: Hockey

Occupation: Studying physiotherapy at the University of Melbourne

Major achievement: NT Institute of Sport scholarship holder for four years and representing the Northern Territory in Hockey every year since 2000

Through participating in sport I have developed strong social and interpersonal skills, which allows me to easily interact with people from varying backgrounds. Being heavily involved in sport has also developed my time-management skills, due to my hectic NT Institute of Sport, NT representative and club training schedules. I also learnt to balance my time for study, for family and for the social aspects of life.

I would advise athletes to use every resource the ACE program offers them in order to find which career option is best suited to their personalities and lifestyle.

I play field hockey, which is a fun and challenging team sport. I got involved in hockey through my sister, who also plays. My most memorable achievement was scoring the winning goal for the Northern Territory in the U18 national final in Darwin, and although the Northern Territory came fifth that year it was a huge achievement by our team and our wonderful coach Gordon Clarke. This memory is so special because I was able to share this moment not only with my teammates but also with my family and friends, because the tournament was held in Darwin.

Studies and relocation

I completed year 12 at Casuarina Senior College and attained a good Tertiary Entrance Ranking. I am currently studying physiotherapy at the University of Melbourne. I will be living in Melbourne for at least the next four years in order to complete my degree.

I have been extremely fortunate to be able to utilise the resources at the NT Institute of Sport, such as the ACE workshops and physiotherapy sessions to rehabilitate my hockey injuries.

Use ACE!

During my time as a scholarship holder with the NT Institute of Sport, I utilised the ACE resources to the fullest. This assisted me in choosing a career path after I finished year 12. I am also very grateful to the NT Institute of Sport psychologist, Liz Grylls, for her awesome support and guidance, which helped me to successfully complete my year 12 and also combine my heavy commitments to my hockey scholarship, representative teams and club team.

Simone Liddy

Year of birth: 1987

Sport: Hockey

Occupation: Intern Pharmacist at Royal Darwin Hospital

Major achievement: 2009 Northern Territory Young Achiever of the Year, 2008 NT Young Australian of the Year, 2007 NAIDOC Youth of the Year

Utilise the ACE facilities to help you choose a career and to get through the tough and stressful times. Take every opportunity that comes your way, never say no to an offer. Listen to advice and learn from people who have done the walking. Give 100 per cent effort in everything you attempt. Have no regrets. Most importantly, be happy, carry a smile on your face even when times are tough, and learn from your mistakes. That's how I've gotten this far in my career to date.

I started playing field hockey at the age of eight, following my friends into the sport. My most memorable achievements include my 2002 and 2008 premiership wins with the Saint Mary's hockey club, and winning the NT Institute of Sport 'Boost your Career' award. I am also very proud of having represented the Northern Territory every year since the age of 11 and captaining U18 and U21 teams.

After graduating from Dripstone High School I attended Charles Darwin University and am now the first Indigenous person to have completed a Bachelor of Pharmacy in the Northern Territory. I am currently completing my one-year internship at the Royal Darwin Hospital Pharmacy, after which I will be a registered pharmacist.

Confidence and time management

As a child I was extremely shy and quiet. Team sport has built my confidence and interpersonal skills to enable me to communicate and interact effectively with all kinds of people. Sport has also developed my great time-management skills, balancing my sporting commitments, with my studies, family, social and extracurricular commitments (that is, being a member on two councils, part-time work, professional development trips, and work placements for uni).

Sideline assistance from ACE

On completing my secondary studies I utilised the sports psychologist at the NT Institute of Sport to map out an appropriate career path. I am extremely happy to have chosen pharmacy as my career, and I thoroughly enjoy working in this field.

I was fortunate to gain the support of a cadetship with the Department of Health and Community Services, which provided me with financial assistance during my studies and work experience at the Royal Darwin Hospital Pharmacy for 12 weeks each year throughout my degree. And of course without the support of my mum, dad and sister I would never have made it through.

ACE assisted me in choosing my career, and attending many of the workshops helped me to be a healthy, happy person and cope with the stress of my many commitments.



Kelly Fong

Year of birth: 1978

Sport: Judo

Occupation: Employed at Department of Natural Resources

Major achievement: Representing Australia at world championships

Plan or map out what you expect to achieve and what you hope to achieve career-wise in the future. Try to continue your studies or your trade while competing and training as much as possible, so you will have something to fall back on if your sporting career ends unexpectedly.

Transitions

Some of the transitions I have been through are the change in employment status, and the transition from normal Darwin girl to well-known judo athlete in Australia for a long time. My employment status changed from a full-time career with the Australian Customs Service to working part-time with other organisations. I was a full-time athlete who relied heavily on my work, Northern Territory Government funding and support from my parents.

My experiences in sports began in gymnastics, but my interest shifted to judo quite early, a transition I really enjoyed. Judo is an Olympic sport that involves throwing, strangling, arm locks and hold downs. I became involved because my brother Bradley was doing judo at the time. I found judo more satisfying as an athlete, as I enjoyed winning, being good at what I did and being competitive. My most memorable achievement was unexpectedly winning Oceania and nationals in 2006, which allowed me to represent Australia at the junior worlds in Portugal. Also, representing Australia for the senior world championships in Brazil was quite special for me.

Important life skills

Being involved in sport adds so much more to your person than just the physical fitness. Skills I learnt through judo, which I now apply in other aspects of my career and life in general, are the importance of discipline, motivation, having the drive to finish my goals, and the willingness to take chances in life.

The downgrade from full-time to part-time work involved a lot of support from my family and having a very understanding employer (Surf Life Saving Northern Territory). During this time, I chose to defer my university studies as I was frequently away overseas and I needed to focus on my work while I was in town in order to pay my bills.

ACE assistance to re-focus

ACE assisted my career by providing me with support in helping me focus on my career path. Also, ACE provided some assistance in returning to a career after my judo career and to realign my focus back into university and trying to seek other opportunities.

I am now working at the Department of Natural Resources, Environment, the Arts and Sport and have also just been selected to compete at the Deaf Olympics in Taipei in September 2009. This is a great opportunity for me as it will be the first time I compete at a special event such as this, and I am excited to understand more about myself as a person with a severe to profound hearing impairment.

IMAGE: Jaana Peter and Frank Thomas holding Kelly Fong



Darren Balmforth

Year of birth: 1972

Sport: Rowing

Occupation: Lobster fisherman

Major achievement: Olympic medallist

The most important thing is to make your career one of your passions. To achieve at the top level in sport you have to be passionate about what you do, and this is the same with a chosen career.

ACE — a very helpful program

I started working with the ACE program when I was on a scholarship with the Tasmanian Institute of Sport. ACE has helped me in many ways, from getting CVs organised to helping with sponsorship proposals. I know from dealing with athletes as a coach that the program is very helpful, especially with the athletes who are at the age of finishing school, job hunting or dealing with university issues.

I first got involved in the sport of rowing with a group of mates as a coxswain at high school. I remained a coxswain until I got too heavy, then changed seats and started pulling an oar myself.

I played many different sports at school, but was somehow attracted to rowing. I loved the water and the challenge. I was not a natural at rowing, but believed if I worked hard I could get there.

I have had many memorable moments in rowing, but representing my country for the first time overseas was a real stand out. The other would definitely be a silver medal at the Sydney 2000 Olympics in the lightweight four.

From one boat to another

The sport of rowing was a big part of my life from age 14 to 35, from coxswain to athlete to eventually a national coach. From growing up in Tasmania to living in Canberra and all of the overseas travel, it has to be a passion as it requires so much of your life.

While competing I completed a building apprenticeship and ended up running my own building company. After that I became a full-time coach for the Tasmanian Institute of Sport and Australian Institute of Sport, before deciding I needed a seachange. I am now fishing for lobster in southern Tasmania, enjoying being my own boss.

I have learnt that everything is 'one stroke at a time'. Basically everything in life is done in steps, whether it is building a house from the ground up, or coaching rowing, where the athlete must learn the basics first.

New challenges

I have always loved anything to do with the water, and after politics started ruling my coaching career I decided it was time for a change. In 2006 I relocated from Canberra back to Tasmania to start my own fishing business.

I think because of my drive and enjoyment of a challenge, something that is natural in any sportsperson, I decided to make a change and started my fishing business from scratch. Normally a person would work on someone else's boat and learn the ropes, I wanted to do it all by myself. It has been a long road with many mistakes, but that is how you learn.

Year of birth: 1972

Sport: Rowing

Occupation: State Development Officer, Rowing Tasmania Inc

Major achievement: Four-time Olympian, OAM



Anthony Edwards

I first represented Australia in 1992 at the age of 19. I look back over the years and tally 19 years of representation at an international level, with only three years that I did not compete, for my own personal reasons, being time for life outside of sport or family.

During this time I competed in four Olympic games, 1996 (bronze) 2000 (silver) 2004 (silver) and 2008 (ninth).

Today I think about it, could I keep going. I was one of nine athletes at a 4th Olympics in Beijing. A 5th Olympics could put me in such a unique sporting world. Yet life goes on and the world keeps turning. Sport has given me everything that explains the person I am. Its highs are so grand and its lows tell of an incredible struggle. That along with the journey of life with being a husband and a father of two children assists me now to know that whatever the struggle, no matter how hard, I will always make it though. So I simply take three deep breaths and keep moving with the world.

Achieving my goals

I was born in Ballarat, Victoria, and spent most of my sporting career floating on the waters of Lake Wendouree. I became a member of the Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS) in 1993. I was a single sculler at this time with an occasional part-time coach. My goals were to represent my state, to represent my Country and to stand on the podium at the Olympic Games. I wrote these goals down in 1992 following the Barcelona Olympic Games and handed them to my coach. His wife showed me this following my Bronze in 1996 at Atlanta.

The Olympic Games is such a high, a buzz of emotion and energy all in two weeks every four years. After each Olympics I have always had my lows. During 1995–2000 I got involved with the VIS ACE program, completing a number of short courses and learning a great deal about myself. I look back on this as a vital period of learning in my life because 2001 brought me a great low. I had given up work to compete at the Olympics. My income came from speaking engagements through the VIS Speaker Bureau and Sportspersons in Schools program. In 2001, after winning silver in Sydney (or some may say the crew that missed gold by 0.41 sec) I discovered a reality of life. I had the glory of sport. I had everything sport provided. But deep down I had nothing. I had to move back home.

Back to reality

All I had was my Olympic medals with a great story attached, yet the world keeps turning on me and

I have to do something about it. I started coaching and before I knew it, I was in the right place at the right time, twice in fact in a matter of two weeks. Firstly, I met my wife Felicity, and secondly, a lady named Tracy approached me about work as an events officer. I now had a zest for life again and a reason to wake up each day.

A rower once again

In 2002 I won the Lightweight Single Scull National Title. This was the beginning of another chapter in my life. Felicity had not seen my life as a rower and I was motivated to show her all about it. 2004 became my ambition. I not only made it in the Lightweight four boat for the Athens Olympics, but our crew won a silver medal. This is my favourite Olympic moment. It lasted ten seconds. I was sitting on the starting line for the Olympic final. There were many rowing legends surrounding me, one being Eskild Ebbersen, a Danish lightweight rower who had won eight world championships and Olympic gold and bronze. I sat alongside him in the Aussie boat with Olympic silver and bronze. Whoever won this race would be the greatest lightweight rower in the Olympic World. For a brief 10 seconds I looked around and smiled, this is the greatest place to be at this one moment in time. It is etched in my memory forever. The race was run, 1st Denmark, 2nd Australia. Eskild is a legend and always will be in my eyes.

Family and new waters

After proposing to Felicity on the top of Mt Del Altissimo in the Italian Dolomites, we married in January 2005. Twelve months

later we had Alannah, a beautiful daughter and a new challenge in life. Later in 2006 a job as a state development officer appeared. It made me think and assess myself again. I was working in Ballarat as a school sports director. There was no water in Lake Wendouree. It had dried up from the long drought, work was frustrating because the rowers couldn't row on the lake, the students couldn't play sport on the ovals as they were deemed dangerously dry and hard. I wanted something else. We had always talked about moving to Tasmania one day. The time was now.

In November 2006 I began a new job for Rowing Tasmania as the State Development Officer. Within one month of moving to Tasmania, Felicity and I had decided that I could still do it, still have an impact in rowing at Olympic level. The biggest thing was Felicity's support to me. I began training and before I knew it, I had made the 2007 national team and had to move to Perth for training. It was an enormous challenge for me to leave family and job behind. Felicity supported me the entire way, as did her parents Ngaire and Leon. There was also the constant support of Rowing Tasmania.

My representation in the Beijing 2008 Olympic Team can only pay tribute to Felicity, Ngaire and Leon for the way they assisted me. I loved my crew but hated my rowing coach. Why did I have to be put through such ridiculous training methods when I could be at home with my family. I actually collapsed once during a running session and cracked my head open. I wanted to give it away. Felicity told me that if I was to walk away from it, it must be for my own reason and not that of my coaches. In many ways my 9th place at Beijing was an incredible low. I had to deal with a rib stress fracture the final month of the campaign and knew deep down that it (the 4th medal) had slipped away. Competing was about pride, completing the task. That 9th place really hit me hard three days after arriving home, and I just wanted to disappear and forget Beijing actually happened. I'm so glad I had my family. They helped me to talk things through and have a better perspective. Felicity was already four months pregnant with our second child.

On 29 January 2009 my second child Hamish was born. Life continues.

Year of birth: 1984

Sport: Hockey

Occupation: Student

Major achievement: Competing in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing

Shelley Liddelow



You don't have to decide straight away when you are coming through school on what you want to do. There is pressure to make decisions in year 12, but after school you can still think it through and there is flexibility to do something that you might not have thought of earlier. So look to see what support is available and how you can achieve what you want. Even if you think you can't do something, like go to university if you didn't finish year 12, there are ways to help.

I come from a small country town, and my mum and older brothers played hockey. I started playing when I was about seven with my brothers.

My most memorable achievements were with my national team commitments, such as the Beijing Olympic Games. I was one of the team reserves and one of my team members was injured before the competition and I was called up to play. This was really hard, as of course it was my goal to play in the Olympics, but it was my friend's goal also. That was challenging to deal with.

I still really enjoy state and club hockey, being with a team over time and qualifying and competing in finals.

Tough transitions and important learning

I grew up in Manjimup, three and a half hours south of Perth. When I got to senior high school it was a huge travel commitment for my parents to drive me back and forth for training and games, so for year 12 I left and moved to Perth, staying with a family friend. The lady I was staying with was studying at university, so it was a huge learning curve for me to still finish my year 12 studies at a new high school, plus organise myself to get to hockey commitments, and learn how to live independently without close family support. I finished successfully, and learnt a lot in the process, but it was a tough year.

ACE advice

The ACE service helped to identify options for me and step me through career planning and determine directions. They also helped with counselling when I had my injuries, so I have worked with them quite a lot.

Time management is a major skill I learnt from sport. I have to make sure I'm at training on time and organise my life, including uni study, and working part time. I've also had to learn to deal with hardship. I feel that I am more prepared to deal with decisions or circumstances that don't go my way, and to respond positively to that. Things that come to mind are team losses, then refocusing for the future and dealing with expectations. I had a lot of injuries in 2007 — torn quad, foot injury and a stress fracture in my femur — and these were major setbacks. So I had to learn how to manage the injury, stay positive and then regain my form. I think now I'm more resilient and more able to deal with setbacks.

Uni worth doing

After finishing year 12, I took a year off and worked at the WA Institute of Sport in the reception, to help give me time to figure out what I wanted to do. After this I decided to enrol in a Bachelor of Science, and hope to work in a lab or in research. I've been studying part time and hope to finish at the end of 2009.

While I was having a year working, I spoke to career advisers and counsellors at the WA Institute of Sport to help me decide if I should keep working or do more study. I decided it would be worthwhile to go to uni and during the first two years I took first year units to help me decide which ones I enjoyed the most. Physics was not for me, so I have gone for the more biological study.



Year of birth: 1979

Sport: Water polo

Occupation: Managing Director,
Bluewire Media

Major achievement: Athens
Olympics 2004, Montreal World
Championships 2005

Toby Jenkins

My best advice to athletes in the midst of their career is, don't be afraid to ask for help! I gained great advice and support from ACE. The program and the advisers are there for you, so be sure to take advantage of it.

When you decide that you will no longer pursue a career as a full-time athlete, it is important to have something lined up to replace that intensity and immersion. I started my web design business, Bluewire Media, 18 months before I finished my water polo career. My responsibilities and the time requirements increased steadily and the business now looks after more than 300 clients around Australia.



A new town and new challenges

I experienced a number of transitions during my water polo career. The first one was relocating from Queensland to Canberra to start training at the Australian Institute of Sport. I had just completed year 12 and ACE's support in the university transfer was really important to help me continue my studies.

During this time one of my greatest challenges was being out of my comfort zone, away from my friends and family in this all-consuming sporting environment. Attending the Australian Institute of Sport as a young athlete was a huge learning experience. Not only did I learn about myself as an athlete, but also about myself as an individual.

Life as a professional in Europe

Playing professional water polo in Barcelona, Spain, was one of the most extraordinary experiences water polo offered me. Living and playing in a foreign country, learning to speak a new language and trying to complete my university degree all combined to make my Barcelona experience something that will stay with me forever. I had two subjects to complete for my university degree while playing in Barcelona. To have discipline enough to work on my studies each day, alongside the training and trying to adjust to another culture wasn't always easy, but is something that professional athletes often have to deal with while living abroad. It was an exciting opportunity that broadened my perspective on life.

I really enjoyed playing all team sports when I was growing up. I got into water polo simply because my sisters were playing it and it is an exciting, physical sport.

My most memorable water polo experiences are from the Athens Olympics in 2004. Walking in the opening ceremony, living in the athlete's village and playing Greece in front of their home crowd in Athens were all incredible experiences.

Winning the National League championship twice is also up there on the list of memorable moments.

Career choices

The world outside of water polo has always interested me. Business, study, music and other sports such as surfing, were great ways of getting my mind off my training. After starting Bluewire Media in January 2005, I juggled work and water polo training to go to the World Championships in Montreal. In 2006, I wasn't selected for the Commonwealth Championships team and was forced to take a six-month break from the pool due to a head injury. During the six-month break, my focus really shifted to the business and when it came time to make decisions about 'a come back', I realised my goals, ambitions and interests had changed – the business had become my new passion and the fundamental drive to make the national team simply wasn't there.

The idea for Bluewire Media was a result of a brainstorming session with some friends. I had completed my commerce degree and was seeking ways to put it into use. We sought, and were granted, government assistance to start up the company in 2005. We are now working in the digital marketing industry with a focus on servicing companies in the property, health and mining sectors.

I still love playing water polo in the National League – staying fit and helping some of the young guys coming through. But there is no doubt the focus has changed and I have relished the new challenges outside of the pool as much as those in it.

