



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

ACE

ATHLETE CAREER AND EDUCATION ENHANCING YOUR SPORTING LIFE



Amber Halliday is an Australian elite athlete, an Olympic and world champion rower turned cyclist. She has also struggled to find a job at times. The transition from living a life planned around training and competition to paid employment and nine to five work can be difficult. Developing a good balance in life, finding room for education and career planning as well as friends and family, is one of the biggest challenges an athlete takes on during their sporting career.

This is Amber's story, sharing some of her highs and lows in her sporting career and how the Athlete Career and Education (ACE) program helps her achieve her sport and life goals through integrating learning, work and sports performance.

AMBER HALLIDAY

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 nobody, 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 (SASI). 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.

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 the 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.



‘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.’

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 the 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.

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.

‘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.’