

# Going for Olympic gold ... and an HSC

*The AIS makes sure its students achieve academically and athletically*

The eyes of the world have been focused on the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, but as the talented athletes from across the globe pushed their bodies (and their minds) to the limit in the quest for gold, there were a number of competitors in the Australian team who were aiming for more than a medal.

These gifted young athletes were not just coping with the stress of a high profile sporting career, they are also balancing the demands of their HSC studies. Among the competitors are two members of the Australian archery team, Lexie Feeney and Jane Fuller. Here we look at the personalities behind the bow and we profile a talented young boxer, Cameron Hammond who was hand-picked by AIS officials for the 2012 Games in London.

## The path to success...

Balancing an exhausting training regime with study is something many of our nation's elite athletes can relate to but making it onto the podium on an international stage is something very few achieve. It takes more than just talent – you need the backing of skilled educators, top coaches and a tried and tested support system.

Over the years, The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) has perfected its approach to athlete development. The result is a wholistic blend of motivational techniques, sports science and a firm belief that balance is the ultimate key to success.

More than 200 young hopefuls live on campus at the institute, putting their faith in the organisation's programs to hone their skills in sports from swimming and archery to cycling and boxing.

Many of the athletes on board with the AIS come from rural and regional areas where facilities are few and raw talent sees them progress through the ranks.

Once identified as having potential, the young athletes leave family and friends behind to follow their dreams to become the next big thing, representing their country in the ultimate competition – the Olympic Games.

As the world turns its attention to the glorious pursuits in the pool and on the track at Beijing, the AIS continues to groom tomorrow's heroes with their sights firmly set on London in 2012.

One such athlete is 18-year-old Cameron Hammond, who stumbled on his talent after



*Olympic boxing hope Cameron Hammond with Sydney Swan Adam Goodes*

tagging along to a PCYC boxing session with a mate in his hometown of Moree because he had nothing better to do.

In a few years time he hopes to step into the ring at the London Olympics, after being hand picked by officials at the AIS as one of the nation's most promising young athletes.

As an indigenous teenager growing up in country NSW and attending Moree High School, Cameron admits he had no real plan for his future before he discovered boxing.

So when the AIS selectors recognised his raw talent during a week-long training camp in Canberra early last year, Cameron jumped at the chance to "give it a go".

"There's no way I would have thought I could make it this far, not ever," Cameron says with more than a hint of pride in his voice.

"I surprised myself – I just went to a training session and stuck with it and here I am now."

Just two weeks after attending the talent camp, Cameron said his goodbyes to family and friends in Moree and settled into his new training schedule at the institute.

"It was a really big move for me leaving the country, but I like it here in Canberra."

General Manager of National Talent Identification and Development with the Australian Sports Commission, Dr Jason Gulbin said the institute was buzzing about the potential of 18-year-old Cameron.

"He was specially brought in with the London Olympics in mind," Dr Gulbin said.

"He has an outstanding technique and great hand speed. What stands out most of all is Cameron's uncanny ability to read the fight in his opponent."

But while Cameron's natural ability shines, it is the groundwork, put in by Moree trainer Danny Cheetham that laid the foundation for his current success.

However, being surrounded by elite athletes has done wonders for Cameron's motivation since moving to Canberra and the specialised training sessions have taken his performance and stamina to another level.

With almost 15 training sessions a week, Cameron finds the short, sharp exertions exactly

what he needs to improve.

"We do a lot of running and track work as well and some aerobic workouts too," he said. "Part of it here is that I can't just train, I have to study as well."

Dr Gulbin explains that for athletes to perform at their best a work/life balance must be maintained, so education or employment is a must for anyone participating in the AIS scholarship programs.

"Getting the results from these athletes requires that we maintain the right environments for them," Dr Gulbin said.

"A lot of it is about making the actual sporting facilities available to the athletes, but it goes far beyond that. The athletes know that they can't just train all of the time, it doesn't work that way."

The AIS career and education unit also ensures the educational needs of younger athletes are met while older participants, like Cameron, attend vocational training, or work.

"I only went to Year 9 in Moree, so when I came to Canberra I completed Year 10 and now I am doing my Certificate 3 in fitness," Cameron said. "I want to have something to go back to after my boxing is finished and I'd like to be involved in fitness instructing, or training others."

Another young athlete with a vision for the future is 18-year-old Queensland archer Jane Waller who joined the 433 athletes in Beijing.

After being introduced to the sport as a 10-year-old by her dad John, Jane was selected to train at the AIS in 2004 and is currently studying Year 12 over two years at Lake Ginninderra College, ACT. Her teammate and fellow archer Lexie Feeney is also juggling the HSC with the pressure of Olympic competition.

At 19 years of age, Lexie, like Cameron, has already secured a strong future for herself by becoming qualified as a Grade 1 archery coach and balancing her own training with the coaching of others. She plans to study management at university after returning from Beijing.

Securing a career after competition is an important consideration for all AIS athletes according to Dr Gulbin. In addition to building on their training and education, he said creating the right environments for success meant giving AIS athletes access to the best specialists and clinicians available. Nutritionists, sports psychologists, biomedical practitioners, sports scientists and leaders in sports medicine are all on call to tailor a program of diet, training, motivation and emotional support for the developing athletes.

"That's where the technology we can access here takes their progression ahead in quantum leaps," Dr Gulbin said. "It's something they don't have access to outside of the metropolitan areas and it makes all the difference. So they're not wasting hours training when another method could take less time and be twice as effective."

Dr Gulbin and his team are charged with the task of ensuring our nation is represented across

## Young archers combine HSC and training



Lexie Feeney



Jane Waller

### LEXIE FEENEY

**Secondary Education: Lake Ginninderra College, ACT. Currently completing HSC**

#### Career highlights

- Came second at the European Grand Prix in 2006 to win the Women's Recurve silver medal (Sassari, Italy).
- Making the World Championship team in 2007.

#### Interesting facts

- Her introduction to archery was with her father while on holidays in Fiji at the age of 10, both continuing the sport on their return from the trip.
- She had just completed the beginner's course when Simon Fairweather won his gold medal at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. His success motivated her to keep going and after eight years in the sport she made her Olympic debut.
- In 2006, just days after celebrating her 17th birthday Lexie won her semi-final to place second at the European Grand Prix in 2006.
- Her first Open National title came in 2007 in the match play. She has been NSW Junior Champion in the Target every year from 2000 to 2006, except for 2002 and the Australian Junior Target Champion in 2002, 2004 and 2006.
- She competed at the 2003 and 2005 Australian Youth Olympic Festivals, taking silver in 2005.
- A qualified Level 1 archery coach, Lexie coaches junior archers at her Club, giving back some of the support she has received during her sporting career.
- Lexie is hoping to study management at university after the 2008 Olympic Games.
- Her father has maintained his involvement in the sport and is the NSW and National Pathway Co-ordinator for Archery.

### JANE WALLER

**Secondary Education: Lake Ginninderra College, ACT. Currently studying year 12 over two years to finish in 2009**

#### Career highlights

- Winning the Cadet Recurve at the Junior World Championships in Mexico in 2006 with a 114 in the gold medal match.

#### Interesting facts

- She was introduced to the sport in 2001 aged 10 by her father John, who was president of the Mt Petrie Bowman Archery Club at the time.
- January 2004, selected for a scholarship at the AIS, moving from her home in Queensland to Canberra at 13 years of age. For the first two years she stayed on residence until her father, who is a teacher, transferred to Canberra to support her.
- January 2005, selected to compete at the Australian Youth Olympic Festival where she finished fourth in the Individual event and second in the Team.
- In early May 2005 she had a serious allergic reaction to antibiotics prior to a training camp in Korea. She was in intensive care for a week and spent over a month in hospital, losing almost 10 kilos from her 57 kilo frame. With concern that Jane might never shoot again, it was five months before she was back on the archery field. She returned to shoot an impressive 1300 at the Australia Day shoot in 2006 at the Canberra Archery Club. Only six Australian women have ever shot a 1300.
- She was just 18 years, one month and a handful of days when she arrived in Beijing. This made her the youngest Australian female archer ever to compete at the Olympic Games.



*Breeding ground for winners: the AIS fosters healthy attitudes towards sport and education*

many sports well into the future.

“Our job is all about looking ahead,” he said. “We are trying to find the diamonds in the rough – they might already be competing in the sport and with the right coach and the right talent development they can become the best competitor they can be.”

Dr Gulbin said because the AIS was concerned in investing in the right athletes, most of its programs targeted non-early specialties.

“When you look at taking athletes from a very young age it can be difficult to identify the characteristics we are looking for. Our prognostics are useless.

“You could take a child that is maybe 13 or 14 and they might have a decent skill element needed to get them there but you need to give them time to experience that skill and begin to develop it. Our approach is to pick up the athletes when they are a little older. It is only from about 14 or 15 that they really begin to specialise and even then it is important to note that they are not doing 24/7 in the one sport.”

And he said while hand-picking tomorrow’s champions was reliant on science, it was the art in the science that would give an athlete the winning edge.

“That’s when we take the raw results and

data and start to look at other factors which contribute to an athlete’s success.”

For Cameron, it’s the “tiger factor” that he believes will get him to London in 2012.

“Every boxer needs to have it,” he quips, “Otherwise you’d be flattened after every fight”!

And with the Commonwealth Games as a stepping stone on his way, this determined young athlete has his eyes firmly on the prize.

“This will be my first year as a senior at the nationals in December, so I’ll see how I go,” he says. “The ultimate for me would be to get a medal at the Olympics – I don’t care what colour but I suppose gold would be nice.”