

## 5 minutes with... Ruth Anderson

Head of Psychology Services, Headquarters Australian Medical Team, London 2012



Ruth Anderson (right) with Dr Lyndel Abbott, London 2012 psychologist at the Women's Basketball.

### Describe your work and a typical day during the Olympics

The one certainty at an Olympics Games is there is no typical day. Every day at the Olympics presents different challenges and issues, so work was based on the priorities of the day. In my role this might include sessions with athletes in the medical clinic in the athletes' village, consultation with coaches, liaison with the Recovery Centre or attendance at training or competition.

### Was this your first Olympics? If not, how did it differ/compare?

London was my second Olympic Games, as I was in the same role for Beijing in 2008.

The significant difference in my role from 2008 to 2012 was the increase in services for psychology which facilitated a proactive approach to service provision. This enabled a greater capacity for direct servicing to athletes and sports, alongside the development of resources and information on psychological recovery, relaxation and sleep.

### How did your training/background equip you to provide sports medicine services at the Olympics?

Working at the Olympics Games provides the opportunity to utilise a wide range of professional skills, and the challenge is

to adapt services appropriately to best meet the needs of the athlete and the sport. One of the most critical psychological aspects of performing at the Olympics is the ability for the athlete to adapt and cope effectively with the pressure of the environment. Most importantly for me is my training and professional background in mental health, which alongside my experience in high performance sport, provides the opportunity to assist athletes to both maximise performance, and enhance psychological wellbeing.

### What were the most significant issues you dealt with?

A diverse range of psychological issues present at the Olympics Games primarily related to performance, as athletes make efforts to ensure they are able to perform at their best under pressure. Psychological skills to maximise wellbeing and cope effectively are as important as performance skills at the Olympic Games to enable athletes to adapt to, and cope effectively, in the environment.

### What was your greatest highlight of London 2012?

A highlight in London was the successful integration of psychology services into the recovery centre. For the first time we had a psychologist, Dr Lyndel Abbott working with me providing services from the Recovery Centre. This enabled the Headquarters Psychology Services to reach more athletes and teams, and facilitated a proactive approach to the enhancement of psychological wellbeing.

### What was your greatest challenge of London 2012?

Being able to prioritise time and servicing to ensure that all athletes were able to access the services they required to facilitate their performance.

### What will you do now that the Olympics are over?

Now I'm back from London, I'm busy planning for the next Olympic cycle to develop athletes for Rio. I am currently in the midst of my PhD investigating the optimal psychological state for peak performance. I will use the experience and insight gained at the highest level of sport competition and will be integrating this into my applied practice and research.

**Ruth Anderson** is a Senior Psychologist at the Australian Institute of Sport, and alongside her private practice, she has worked with Olympic and professional athletes at all levels of international competition. Ruth was the Head of Psychology Services for the Australian Olympic Team for the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games and 2012 London Olympic Games.