



Aussie insight provides British with the edge in Rio

One of the most highly-regarded opinions in sports psychology and a sought-after commodity among elite national sporting programs, Ruth Anderson has broken ranks to join the Great Britain Cycling Team as they look for an edge against their oldest rivals ahead of the 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

The challenge of working for one of the most respected and successful sporting teams in international sport was a driving force in Ruth's decision to make the move to the northern hemisphere.

"Sport psychology service delivery within Australia has significantly fallen behind the world in recent years and urgently needs to catch up with what is occurring in the field within elite sport internationally," Ruth said.

This comes with the Rio Olympics a little over six months away, and as the Australian Olympic Team looks to improve on their 10th place finish on the medal table in London – the worst result since the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

The search for the all-important edge has seen growth sports look outside the traditional exercise science space to sports psychology to fine tune their athletes for the pressures of Olympic competition.

Ruth, a Bachelor of Social Science graduate at ACU, believes sports psychologists prepares the athlete mentally, much like strength and conditioning staff prepare the athlete physically.

"The role of the sport psychologist is to prepare athletes to achieve performance excellence and be able to thrive under pressure. The greatest contribution you can make is to equip athletes with the psychological skills to constantly perform at their best under the pressures of the highest level of international competition," Ruth said.

“Cyclists are required to manage performance anxiety, control their thinking, stay confident, maintain focus, and execute their technical skills flawlessly under the pressure of the Olympic competition environment.”

Drawn to working in the sports industry after experience in welfare and mental health, Ruth found her passion working with individuals to maximise their potential, and to understand psychological factors that contribute to enhanced performance across sport, work and life. This led her to the Australian Institute of Sport.

In her eight years at the home of high performance sport, Ruth implemented a counselling service for athletes in residence and was appointed Senior Sports Psychologist to Olympic programs. This would see Ruth play a key role in Australian Olympic Team as Head of Psychology Services at the 2008 (Beijing) and 2012 (London) Olympic Games.

A fixture in the Australian high performance landscape, Ruth craved a new challenge and an opportunity to continue to work with the world’s best teams and athletes which led her to England.

In June 2015, Ruth was appointed Lead Psychologist of the Great Britain Cycling Team and moved to Manchester, England, to help prepare the team ahead of the Rio Games in August of this year.

“British cycling is recognised internationally as (the) leader in elite sport,” she said.

“I decided to move to the UK as the opportunity to work with one of the most successful Olympic teams in history was too good to decline. I’m motivated to work with a team that is committed to being the best they can be, not by the nationality of the team.”

No stranger to the tales of challenges and distractions in the carnival that is life in the athlete’s village, Ruth said she was quick to understand the need to provide athletes with the mechanisms to remain focused and cope with the enormity of the Olympic Games.

“The experience has taught me you can’t anticipate every issue that may arise at the Olympics,” she said.

“What athletes can do, however, is develop the skills to adapt, and cope, with any situation that does arise, and they will be able to perform.

“I will be in Rio to ensure the athletes are able to execute their competition plans under pressure.”

It will be this presence that Great Britain will be hoping can give their athletes the edge as they look to continue their dominance in international cycling, with a little help from one of our own.