

Take a chill pill and let gold times roll

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AUSTRALIA'S Olympians are lining up for psychological support and relaxation advice as pressure mounts around a London campaign widely assessed as underwhelming in the early days - and the worst since Atlanta in 1996.

The Australian Olympic Committee is fiercely defending the team effort that, after the fourth day of competition, had reaped one gold, three silver and two bronze medals, and insists a top five ranking in the medal table remains realistic because the best is yet to come.

Athletes on the 410-member team, meanwhile, are contending with their own pressures - some dealing with the AOC's controversial decision to ban the use of sleeping medication Stilnox on the eve of the Games, and others looking for methods to settle their nerves.

For all his talent and status, James Magnussen is one who has been suffering. After inexplicably fluffing his role as team leader in the men's 4 x 100 metre freestyle relay on Sunday night, the 21-year-old world champion admitted he had struggled to sleep for two days before competing and that nerves had overwhelmed him. The AOC, however, is denying any links between its last-minute imposition of rules on sleeping tablets and the large appetite for information on relaxation techniques it reported yesterday.

Australia has set up a more elaborate recovery centre in London than at any Olympics before, taking over the John F. Kennedy School and opening it 24 hours a day. On hand is a clinical psychologist, Lyndel Abbott, two recovery physiologists and three massage therapists, while Ruth Anderson - the team psychologist for the Beijing Olympics - is embedded in the village with the athletes.

"We checked with our doctors yesterday and there's been a huge request for literature on the relaxation techniques that we've been promoting. Relaxation techniques leading to sleep," deputy chef de mission Kitty Chiller said.

"A lot of the section managers, a lot of the athletes individually, are seeking out Ruth Anderson our psychologist, and the doctors, to get information on that. And relaxation CDs, which we're really happy with."

While taking the opportunity to rub in the fact that Great Britain was a "lowly" 21st on the medal table, Ms Chiller deflected criticism of Australia's medal count, which had it ranked 12th after four days. It is the country's worst start to a Games since Atlanta in 1996.

"It's very early days. We're only just starting the second quarter today ... we've got rowing, we've got track cycling, we've got sailing, genuine gold medal hopes, three in each of those events," she said. "We're certainly not panicking."

Chef de Mission Nick Green has urged fans to be patient and the message from the AOC boss John Coates is that Australia is not far from where it expected to be - even if it is four medals below where it was at this stage in Beijing and eight behind Athens, where Australia won six gold medals in the first four days.

International results tabled at the end of last year saw our athletes gathering 15 gold medals, which put

Australia equal fourth for gold with Great Britain and Germany but eighth on the overall tally with just 35 medals.

Swimming was predicted to produce two gold medals, seven silver and two bronze.

The cyclists were predicted to win six gold and two bronze medals, while sailing has not yet deviated from a course that predicted three gold medals - and could go one better.

with Caroline Wilson

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/olympics/news-london-2012/take-a-chill-pill-and-let-gold-times-roll-20120801-23fph.html>