

Dreams do come

Selena Hagan, winner of the Massage & Myotherapy Australia (formerly AAMT)/AIS Soft Tissue Department Postgraduate Sports Scholarship shares her exciting experiences at the Australian Institute of Sport ...

I have had a lifelong fascination with the human body, its movement patterns and its ability to do amazing things. I remember watching the Olympics as a young child, in awe of the talents of the athletes, their strength, their endurance, their persistence and their determination. I studied Sport Science at university with a thirst for knowledge on anatomy and how the body works during athletic performance, and wanting to be involved in the whole industry. Being told at the age of 20 that your chances of working at the Australian Institute of Sport as a Sport Scientist, or anything else for that matter, were next to none, had a profound effect on me.

Fast forward 20 years and I found myself at the AIS as this year's recipient of the Massage & Myotherapy Australia (AAMT)/AIS Soft Tissue Department Postgraduate Sports Scholarship!

Imagine my excitement the day I arrived on site at the AIS fulfilling my lifelong dream! I spent the afternoon wandering the campus, taking photos, getting familiar with where I needed to go the next morning and absorbing the vibe of the place.

From the moment I entered the High Performance Centre I was made to feel welcome by everyone. Massage & Myotherapy Australia Director Vince Cosentini, soft tissue therapist, and my supervisor for the eight days, took me on a tour of the facilities and introduced me to fellow soft tissue therapists and physiotherapists.

Four words can be found scattered around the grounds that epitomise the functioning of the AIS and what it stands for: Exceptional, Relentless, Ingenious and Daring.

Exceptional

From day one I was in the clinic, treating athletes. The Centre of Excellence squad of youth football (soccer) players were regularly in the clinic as part of a study run by Physiotherapist Martin Wollin. This study measures the effect of match play on hamstring strength and hip range of motion. We were

required to take five standard range of movement (ROM) measurements each visit, record the results and treat the athlete according to these results. I was re-introduced to the Goniometer and Inclinator (angle measuring tools) and soon became comfortable using these instruments before each treatment.

During my stay, I met many of these exceptional 15-17 year olds, the next influx of Socceroos or English Premier League hopefuls. I was privileged to watch one of their games against Canberra United. It was interesting to watch through different eyes. I took note of the athletes I had treated, remembered their particular areas of restriction, and watched how they moved and played.

I also worked extensively with some of Swimming Australia's Paralympic athletes. I was honoured to treat five of these athletes, two of them with cerebral palsy, one blind, one with intellectual disabilities and one double leg amputee. Each of these athletes have their own challenges, strengths and weaknesses that we sometimes just don't think about. During one training session, Vince and I photographed some of their warm up and rehabilitation exercises that I was to collate into an individual booklet as a visual reminder for the athletes. These exercises were specific to their conditions and were modified to suit the individual. I was amazed at how smooth they all looked in the pool during their time trial afterwards. I watched as each of the athletes sat poolside with their coach and analysed their technique from the video taken by the moving camera next to the pool. All these swimmers made the Rio Olympics finals and one of them won Gold and Bronze medals.

Relentless

Athletes are on busy schedules. Their lives consist of a relentless program of training, eating, treatment (physio and/or massage), having specialist training in movement or rehabilitation, eating, training or competing, sleeping. Constant dedication with the end goal of representing their country at the peak of their chosen sport and a Gold medal.

My schedule wasn't quite as relentless, but it was packed with a lot of variation. My time consisted of treatments on football players, swimmers, and basketballers; tutorials with physios on what to look for in ROM in swimmers and how to treat specific areas, load management and medial tibial stress syndrome; tutorials with other soft tissue therapists on how to treat specific muscles more effectively; Pilates sessions with the Pilates instructor and movement educator on how to combine Pilates and martial arts into movement patterns for athletes; meetings with medical and therapy staff, observing treatments, attending basketball and football games, training sessions and recovery sessions, working on projects, and reading the many articles I was given.

Ingenious

The facilities at the AIS are incredible. I had a particular interest in seeing the Physiology lab. The Head Physiologist took me on a tour of the physiology testing area, where engineers purpose-built a treadmill that can take a bike; the Biomedical lab where testing for erythropoietin (EPO) blood doping was developed, now recognised worldwide; the Altitude House, where athletes can live for extended periods of time at altitude (studies show that an athlete needs to live at altitude for an accumulative period of 12 hours to have an effect on the oxygen levels of the blood); and a full body 3D scanner.

Vince introduced me to instrument assisted soft tissue mobilisation that is being increasingly used to break down scar tissue and fascial restrictions. Metal instruments are used to 'scrape' the skin superficially as the client takes the joint and muscle through its range. Vince used this technique to treat a tender spot in my right forearm extensors. It instantly went away and I can honestly say the tender spot has not returned.

Daring

So much research is being conducted at the AIS. So many aspects of athletic performance are being studied, scrutinised, reinvented, and

true!



| Selena Hagan with Massage & Myotherapy Australia Director Vince Cosentini

discovered – all for gaining that slight edge in competition. Physios are daring to question previous studies. Ben Raysmith, Physiotherapist for Athletics Australia, took a tutorial on his speciality of Medial Tibial Stress Syndrome, previously known as Shin Splints. He and others have been questioning previous treatment approaches. His current approach is to teach the foot that it isn't just a 'slab of meat'. He suggests to treat the soft tissue areas of the medial shin and calf to reduce load and tension and prescribe four foot exercises that isolates the toes and suggests to the foot that it is moveable and dexterous like the hand. This decreases overall load on the muscles of the shin, allowing the foot to work more during running activities. This was valuable information that I could use immediately in my private clinic back in Hobart.

Many people have asked me what was my favourite part of my ten day placement? My answer has not been of a single moment. What I enjoyed the most was being able to follow through with many of the athletes I treated or observed in their daily routines.

For example, I started off my third day observing the Centre of Excellence Men's Basketball team in their strength and conditioning session in the huge gym on site. Later that day I observed a couple of the players in the High Performance Centre being treated for an elbow injury and a knee injury. That evening I watched the team play their SEABL league game against the Hobart Chargers (my home team!). And finally I accompanied the Recovery Physiologist to the purpose-built recovery centre where I observed the team wind down and go through their specific recovery routine in the warm and cold pools.



It was fascinating to be a part of the whole process and witness just a small amount of what these athletes go through day to day. It was also a fabulous experience as a therapist to be able to observe these athletes doing what they do, to see how they move in their chosen sport, to see what their sport requires of them biomechanically, and relate it back to when they are on the table getting treatment.

I would like to thank Massage & Myotherapy Australia (AAMT) and the AIS, in particular Vince Cosentini, for the fantastic opportunity I was granted to be a part of the AIS for 10 days. It has opened up my life to a whole new world of possibilities and for that I will be forever grateful.

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