



Let's talk...

Olympic Heroes



Most Australians can remember where they were the moment that Cathy Freeman won gold in the 400m final at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. On the eve of the London 2012 Olympics, this fact sheet celebrates some of the other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Olympians and Paralympians who have contributed to Australia's success.

Meet... Patrick Mills

Patrick Mills will be a key player to watch in the Australian Basketball team for the 2012 London Olympic Games. He was the top scorer for the Boomers at the 2008 Games in Beijing, and after spending the last two years playing in the National Basketball Association (NBA) in America, he may be able to lead the team to its first Olympic medal.

Patrick Mills was born in 1988 in Canberra. His mother is Aboriginal and his father is Torres Strait Islander. Basketball has always run in the family; Patrick's uncle Danny Morseau played in the Australian basketball team at the 1980 and 1984 Olympics. His parents were also involved in the sport, establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander basketball club called "Shadows" which Patrick started playing for when he was four years old.

When he was in grade 10, Patrick was selected to go to the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) and, only a year later, at age 17, he became the youngest ever member of the Australian national basketball team in July 2007.

After three years as an AIS athlete, Patrick was offered a scholarship at St Mary's College of California and he went on to be named the West Coast Conference's 2008 Freshman of the Year.

In 2009, Patrick joined an elite group of Australians drafted to play in the NBA, when he was selected by the Portland Trail Blazers. Mills currently plays for the San Antonio Spurs.

When Patrick's uncle Danny Morseau, a Torres Strait Islander man, represented Australia as an Olympian, the Torres Strait Islander flag did not exist. Three decades later Patrick will be flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander as well as the Australian flags. The Boomers first game will be against Brazil on 29 July, the second day of Olympic competition.

Did you know...?

- From 1870 to 1912 Aboriginal sprinters dominated professional athletics and were able to win significant prize money. For many it provided an escape from the controls placed on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples under the Protection System.
- Kevin Coombs was the first Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Paralympian. He first represented Australia in wheelchair basketball at the 1960 Rome Paralympics and at four subsequent Paralympic games.
- The first known Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Olympians were Adrian Blair, Frank Roberts and Michael Ah Matt who competed at the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo. Blair and Roberts competed in boxing and Ah Matt played in the Australian Basketball team.
- At the 1984 New York Paralympic Games, Peter Kirby became the first Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander athlete to win a Paralympic gold medal as part of the Australian men's 4X100m relay team.
- Nova Peris became the first Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander athlete to win an Olympic gold medal when she was part of the Australian women's hockey team at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta.

Some quick statistics...

43 The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes that have represented Australia at the Olympic and Paralympic games up to 2008 (37 Olympians and 6 Paralympians).

29 The number of medals won by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes at the Olympics and Paralympics (2 gold, 4 silver and 5 bronze in the Olympics and 5 gold, 6 silver and 7 bronze at the Paralympics).

11 The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes in the Australian team for the 2012 London Olympics and Paralympics (9 Olympians and 2 Paralympians).

9.93 The fastest time set by an Australian sprinter over 100m. The record is held by Patrick Johnson.

London calling...

In 2012 there will be 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes representing Australia at the Olympic and Paralympic Games. They are:

Cameron Hammond - Boxing
Damien Hooper – Boxing
Jesse Ross - Boxing
Joel Carroll - Hockey
Ben Harradine - Discus
Josh Ross - Men's 4x100m relay
Beki Lee - Athletics
Patrick Mills - Basketball
Khalen Young - Cycling BMX
Amanda Fowler - Paralympic swimming
Torita Isaac – Paralympic athletics



Take action

- Send a hero message to one of the eleven Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes competing at the London 2012 Olympic Games:
<http://heromessage.telstra.com/olympics>
- Vote for an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Olympian or Paralympian as sportsperson of the year in the 2012 Deadly Awards. Voting opens on 20 July:
http://www.vibe.com.au/index.php?option=com_content&id=4744/
- Volunteer as a Role Model or donate to the National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy: <http://nasca.com.au/>
- Read 'Black Diamonds: The Aboriginal and Islander Sports Hall of Fame' written by Colin and Paul Tatz

Reconciliation Australia would like to thank the Australian Sports Commission and the Australian Paralympic Committee for their assistance in developing this fact sheet.

Note: All of the information contained in this fact sheet is based on current records kept by the Australian Sports Commission and the Australian Paralympic Committee. There may be other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes not known to the Commission or the Committee.