

## HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

THURSDAY 17<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2016

### RIO OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC GAMES

**Mr PEDERICK ( Hammond ) ( 12:34 ):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I, too, will acknowledge your marathon effort in the last day or so. Well done. I would like to acknowledge the motion from the member for Reynell that this house wishes well all Australian athletes, particularly those from South Australia, competing in the Olympics and Paralympic Games in Rio. Certainly it has been outlined that many of the Olympic athletes came from South Australia, and we do have a very good quota of them, and I commend them for everything they do, whether it is at the Olympic level or the Paralympic level.

I am certainly pleased that in latter years the Paralympics has gained much more coverage and the coverage that they deserve. Sometimes it is people you would probably never expect to be competing in a Paralympics but, when they get the opportunity, they grab it with both hands and get right into it. Some of the sports you watch, especially with the wheelchairs, are pretty ferocious, and I commend them for the way they take to their sport and compete on the international stage.

I want to talk a bit about James McRae, an Olympic rower from Murray Bridge. It was a privilege to catch up with James and his mother, Chris, the other night in Murray Bridge at a combined Rotary Club dinner, where they both talked about James, his Olympic dreams and aspirations and what he has managed to do over the years. It was extremely inspiring. I had the privilege of sitting right next to him and I said, 'Are you going to keep going?' He replied, 'Yes', and I said to him, 'Well, you need one more for the boxed set.' He said, 'That's right,' and I said, 'No pressure, mate, no pressure,' because the one he is missing in the box is the gold.

He is 29 years of age. He grew up in my electorate in Murray Bridge and completed all his schooling in Murray Bridge before commencing a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering degree at the University of Adelaide in 2007. He did say to me that it was nice to get away from rowing for a moment because, as with every Olympic athlete, it consumes your life—as it has to, so that you can be competitive on the world stage. He said, 'It's just nice to do something that I've trained for, that I've been educated for, to have the opportunity to do that.' He certainly has not lost his spirit or his keenness to row, he is certainly keen to do that, but he said that it was just nice to be able to do something else for a very short period of time.

His siblings Jessica and Anna are also Australian rowers with various South Australian Sports Institute scholarships and Australian titles, along with international competitions. James had a major involvement with the Murray Bridge Rowing Club and was coached by Adrien David, a former international oarsman. In 2009, he was awarded life membership of the Murray Bridge Rowing Club, and this was awarded to him for being the club's most successful rower and the club's first Olympian since the Murray Cods, who competed in Paris in 1924.

Anyone who is not aware of the Murray Cods' story needs to have a look at it. It is about blokes who had been off to war and who returned and formed the eight for the Murray Cods and competed in Paris. They had to borrow boats and a whole range of things, but they improvised and still competed on the world stage. It was such an achievement for back then in 1924.

Along with his sisters, James McRae is also a South Australian Sports Institute scholarship holder, and from 2008 to 2016 James was part of the South Australian men's

eight. In both 2007 and 2011 James was chosen to contest the interstate men's single scull in the President's Cup, and in 2011 he won this event and rowed in the open men's quad scull, which won the national title. He is a very proud Murray Bridge and South Australian world rowing champion, three time Olympian and a medal-winning rower.

Before he won a medal they were a close fourth in Beijing in 2008, then he won a bronze medal in the Olympics in London in 2012 and in the Olympics just gone, the Rio Olympics, he got the silver. I think it was six international races that the Australian quad scull team competed in, and the only one they lost out of that six was the Olympic race in Rio. He said it was just one of those days and it is just what happens. Even though there is a fierce rivalry—and I think their main competitors were the Germans, who won the race—he also said that there is a great camaraderie between the teams because obviously they see each other in many places around the world. As he said, 'Look, on the day the Germans were the better team.'

James is keen to keep training for Japan in 2020. As I said, he needs to get the boxed set; that will be a fantastic achievement, but that does not deny what he has already done. He has put in a great effort for Murray Bridge, for South Australia and for Australia. It is great to see this favourite son of the rowing club do so well, especially as the rowing club is looking at their major expansion works.

They have managed to receive some grant funding. They are attracting schools up to Murray Bridge, where they will have new facilities that they will lease out to various schools, and obviously they will have a bay for themselves. I congratulate the Murray Bridge Rowing Club on its foresight. Craig Christian and Stacy Seidel, as two of its lead people, are doing so much work to move this rowing club into the future.

In talking about Rio, I did say to James, 'What's with all the media you get about how rough Rio is?' He said, 'They do it every time. There's always a story from an Olympics; it doesn't matter where it is.' Obviously, we saw the media reports of how supposedly dangerous Rio was. He said, 'Look, it was fine.' He said that he actually did not stay in the village. They got some accommodation because they were a fair distance away. I think it was something like an hour or further from the Olympic village to where they had to row, so they managed to get some other accommodation with some other people who were doing water sports, close to the water where they had to compete. He said that was pretty good. He said negotiating with Kitty Chiller is not easy, but they managed to do that.

I certainly wish James the best in all his endeavours. I congratulate all the Rio Olympians, and not just the medallists; just to compete is a fantastic effort. I congratulate their families and support staff who support these people. I, too, would like to acknowledge Katrina Webb, another Murray Bridge person, for her involvement in the Paralympics for many years. She works at a governance level now. I run into Katrina around the place from time to time.

**Mr Whetstone:** She is climbing up Mount Everest.

**Mr PEDERICK:** Yes, she is climbing Mount Everest. I think she is going to base camp, from memory. She is a real inspiration, and another inspirational person from Murray Bridge. She has been a great asset. She is a physiotherapist by trade and, when I had my hip operation several years ago, she was my physio. It was nice to have a little joke with her about, 'How would you be?' She has done great work. She is doing great work at the governance level, being involved with the Olympics. As I stated, she is going to go to base camp at Everest. I wish her all the best for the future and acknowledge everything that she has done for sport in the past.

I acknowledge James McRae for everything he has done in the past and wish him and the team all the best heading into Japan 2020. All our potential Olympians do give up a lot. They do not get paid at all really. They might get the odd little bit of funding to live, but that is about it, and it is a struggle. I do commend them for the great work they do for this state and the country at all levels, because it certainly is not easy on a range of fronts. I commend the motion.