

A Tribute to Nick Garratt

Nicholas Richard Marshall Garratt was born in Perth and educated at Aquinas College from where he matriculated in 1965. He then began a degree in Business while continuing his rowing.

Nick's rowing career, while not as illustrious as his later coaching career, is still one we could all hope to emulate, including stroking the Western Australia King's Cup crew for three straight years.

I will comment first on his achievements as a rowing coach and then, because he is so much more than a "mere" coach, on his qualities as a man.

The Coach

Nick has coached Australian crews in four successive Olympic Games, starting with Sydney 2000. He has coached six World Champions or medallists in Junior, Under 23 or Senior A (elite) world championships, starting in 1995. He has coached over 26 Australian National Champions.

While this record over such a long time is obviously impressive – to commit to excellence and to hold to such standards takes not only complete dedication but also constant adaptation and improvement – it does not really tell the story.

Nick's crews – individuals or in bigger boats – have distinctive characteristics: they are always technically excellent as he is demanding of the highest standards; they are always totally fit, as he is fond of saying that, "The only place where success comes before work is in the dictionary". If an athlete, even a novice, will commit to Nick's program, he or she will be rewarded with complete attention and dedication; and they are always, always ready: Nick's crews have won races when objectively they had no reason to even get on the podium because he prepared them to race and to believe they could compete. That is never better illustrated than by this year's 2017 NSW King's Cup crew, who grabbed control of a race that any of three crews could have claimed, and laid down the gauntlet to destroy the opposition by the 500 metres.

Even that does not capture it. While he enjoys coaching mature elite athletes such as the King's Cup 8, what really makes Nick remarkable, even unique in Australian coaching, *in any sport*, is his ability to take young or immature but willing athletes and to bring them from rank novice to representing their country.

There are many examples, but three show what he has achieved. Nick recruited Peter Hardcastle as a 15 year-old boy from a non-rowing school on Sydney's northern Beaches. He taught him from scratch. Peter eventually grew into a magnificent physical specimen, but he also had superb sculling technique, so much so that he represented Australia in three Olympic Games, in three different boat classes. Peter was an inspiration to all boys and girls of his era; that they too could learn this sport in a club not at school, and excel at it.

Amy Clay's story is actually even more impressive. Amy is not a big woman; she is 175cm and only 71kg. She rowed eights at university in the U.S. and came down to Mosman one day just to take a look, and to stay fit. She asked Nick what she should do if she wanted to row at the elite level. Nick took her under his wing in 2006 and she improved so rapidly that she forced her way into the Australian team in 2007, only one year later, when their quad scull qualified for the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Amy was never a favoured athlete – “too small”, the experts said – but under Nick's tutelage she again forced her way into the crew in 2008. Then, in the run-up to the 2012 London Olympics, Nick changed her training program two years before the Games to build her strength and despite the experts being aligned against her – still “too small”! – she again won selection in the quad scull and stroked the boat to an unlucky fourth place against athletes who were on average 10kg heavier.

Tom Schramko is, like Peter Hardcastle, from a non-rowing school and was taught by Nick from his first stroke aged 15. He is now a World Champion in the Under 23 quad scull, stroking the boat to victory aged only just 20, and is in line for Senior A selection.

Peter Hardcastle never would have been in the sport without Nick, and he took him to the top. Amy Clay was brilliantly trained, and believed, to achieve her highest potential. Tom Schramko is capable of becoming, like them, a double Olympian. All of them will readily say that Nick Garratt made it possible. They had to do the work; but it was his program and it was his commitment to technical excellence that enabled them to win.

There are many other examples, over thirty years.

The Man

Some people, often but not only schoolteachers, influence young peoples' lives beyond their formal roles. They are mentors; guides; counsellors; confessors; and inspiring examples of how to live.

Nick Garratt is in that company. An educated man, a man of wide interests and cultivated tastes, he chose to dedicate his life to being a rowing coach, especially of young people. He knew that it is not a path to riches, not even a path to much financial security, but this is what he wants to do.

I have watched him over the years, guiding and shaping young men and women into strong, resolute characters who are not only tough athletes but are self-aware, honest and good people. Occasionally, he must yell at them – I remember one time when he lit into some rowers who boasted that they'd made it home without being caught after driving with a few too many beers. "You weren't lucky not to be caught; you were lucky you didn't hit and kill someone!" Chastened faces all round...lesson learned.

For Nick, it is quite simple: good character and sound values are worthwhile aims in their own right, but they also translate into superior athletic performance. A rower who is prepared to be totally honest, with self and with crew mates, to stand up and take responsibility, to be humble yet full of self-belief, will be a tough competitor, on the water and in Life.

His charges see his superb photography; his wide range of books and interests; his endless curiosity; his generosity (purchase of a bike here; a stopwatch there, all out of his own pocket), and are inspired to make as much of themselves as they can.

He is universally admired and esteemed by his coaching peers, and loved by nearly all the rowers who have rowed under him. A man without jealousy himself, he brings out the better qualities in others – the sport of rowing and the wider community, and especially for the last 12 years, Mosman Rowing Club, are better for having known Nick Garratt.

He goes on to his next gig at the ACT Academy of Sport with the Club's blessings and our gratitude, and we are sure he will continue to weave his magic among the young athletes there as he has done for the past 30 years.

Go well Nick, and good luck from Mosman!