

For Australia Second - June 2004

I have always felt a sense of pride when I look back at any of the photos or video footage of my victory at the 1996 Olympic games in Atlanta. It wasn't until recently that I was totally honest with myself and remembered just what I was proud of. One would assume the obvious answer would be that I was proud to have won the Gold Medal for my country. You would also assume that the tears that rolled down my face as I stood on the victory dais watching my nation's flag being hoisted up the pole were being shed because I was a proud patriot relieved to have won a glittery prize for Australia. Let me be totally honest. The tears were for me personally, not for my country.

Now hear me out before you brand me as just another ungrateful former Australian sportsman who has adopted a very bad attitude in retirement. Atlanta was my third Olympics. In Seoul in 1988 I was happy just to get a uniform that had five colourful rings on it. I wore those t-shirts and track suits wherever I could for the next couple of years. I can assure you everyone in my neighbourhood knew I was an Olympian. Unfortunately having to compete in Korea ruined a good holiday for me and I finished appropriately well off the pace in 15th place. By the time Barcelona had rolled around in 1992 I was well up the world-ranking list having won the World Cup the year prior in Los Angeles. In my mind I was going to take home one of those 'Golden Holden's' that GMH were offering to all the first place getters. I should have known that things were going to go bad for me in Spain. I was on my way to Tullamarine to leave when I was held up in the traffic in my hometown of Werribee because the local Holden dealer's car yard was on fire. True story! I finished 9th, two points behind the Gold Medallist. The only Commodore I was getting was a charcoal black one from the fire sale.

By 1996 I had smartened up a lot. I forgot this notion that you have to win for your country. I didn't care about all the material things such as cars and cash that an Olympic Gold Medal would bring. Winning at the Olympics is totally about winning for you. The only person that I thought of during the 1996 Olympic Final was me. It may sound selfish, but that's the truth. I would bet anything that Kieren Perkins, Cathy Freeman, Kathy Watt and Susie O'Neill would tell you the same story if they were to answer you honestly. Once you have won it is a different story, then I believe we are all proud to have received the medal on behalf of our country.

Trust me when you are looking into Jana Pittman or Ian Thorpe's eyes on the starting blocks in Athens in a few months time the last thing that they will be thinking of is that I must win this for my country. They will be competing for themselves first and their country second.