

## OLYMPIC DREAMS NO HURDLE TOO BIG

By **BEV JORDAN**

There are 24 records that Nic Hough still holds at Hills District Little Athletics including age records in running, high jump, shot put, triple jump, long jump and, of course, hurdles.

The 27-year-old Baulkham Hills resident is due to compete in his first Olympics in the 110m hurdles this week. He did qualify for the Rio Olympics in 2016 but injury a few months before the competition kept him away.

Hough has represented Australia at four world championships and two Commonwealth Games and captured a Bronze medal at the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games in 2018 achieving a personal best time.

The former King's School Captain's international debut came at the age of 16 at the inaugural 2010 Summer Youth Olympics in Singapore, Hough won Gold in the 110m hurdles in a new personal best of 13.37 seconds to become the first ever Youth Olympic Games hurdles champion. He followed this up in 2012 with silver at the IAAF World Junior Championships.

He continued his international development and in 2014 competed for Australia at the Commonwealth Games reaching the final.

He then competed at his home Gold Coast Commonwealth Games in 2018, claiming a bronze medal, and most recently competed at the 2019 Doha World Championships securing



a semi-final spot. He is currently studying a combined degree of Bachelor of Information Technology and Bachelor of Laws at Sydney University.

Former Baulkham Hills resident and Hills Sport High student Brandon Starc is also representing Australia at the Tokyo Olympics, his second Olympics.

## GEORGIA'S BIG RACE

By **LAWRENCE MACHADO**

Georgia Winkcup, 24, who runs in the 3000m steeplechase, has a rich pedigree: Her grandmother Betty Moore was an 80m hurdles world record holder.

Moore set hurdles records for NSW during the 1950s while at university and travelled to England where she started training with the British athletics team, winning the British hurdles championship.

She was selected to represent Great Britain in the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome but was disqualified from competing because she had lived in Britain for only 22 months, two months short of the required time.

Her Olympic dream has now been passed down to her granddaughter who

juggles her corporate law career with her love of athletics

"I started athletics at Cherrybrook Little Athletics because my grandma had been a fantastic hurdler when she was younger and she encouraged my cousins, brothers and I to have a go," Winkcup says in her Olympic profile.

Initially a distance runner, in her teens she started steeplechasing under her then coach Ross Forster. She enjoyed the event and had some success.

She won the 2013 All-Australian under-18 2000m steeplechase title and was a finalist at the 2016 World Junior Championships. Winkcup's success is impressive as she had to overcome injuries and setbacks.

In 2019, Winkcup broke the national 3000m steeplechase record while winning gold.



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# STARS ON SHOW

RY FOR MANY TALENTED  
E 2020 TOKYO OLYMPICS.

Our representatives include Jenny Blundell, Georgia Winkcup and Rachel Lack (softball) - who all started their careers at Cherrybrook Little Athletics - while Matildas star Kyah Simon played for Quakers Hills Junior Soccer Club and Hills Brumbies and athlete Nicholas Hough from Baukham Hills has a list of titles to his name.

## BLUNDELL BORN TO COMPETE

By LAWRENCE MACHADO

Olympian Jenny Blundell will be one of Australia's medal hopes in Tokyo but her journey started more than 20 years ago at Cherrybrook Little Athletics.

Blundell, 27, who runs in the 5000m in Tokyo, made the semi-finals in the 1500m at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

She stood out at Cherrybrook LA, regularly smashing state records and remarkably at just 15, won the Australian 800m title in the U20 category. "I feel that in some way, athletics chose me, from such a small age, I had the talent and will to compete," she says in her Australian Olympic Committee comments.

The Cherrybrook Technology High student, who finished fifth in the 800m at the 2010 Youth Olympics, credits her club coach Valmé Kruger for turning her into a champion.

"I would not be the runner I am today without (Valmé's) guidance for 10-plus years," Blundell told The Aussie Runner podcast.

"She has bred me to be a low mileage but very good runner. There was never junk mileage and my now coach Jimbo (James Fitzgerald), he is very for that as well.

"Valmé bred speed into me, she didn't want me to touch the 1500m until I was in Year 11, Year 12, even though I was really good at cross country ... as soon as cross country season was finished it was like 'Right, 400s and 800s ... you'll never get this opportunity to do speed ever again in your life. You're in this for the long haul'.

"She knew I had talent and she just made sure that I was never pushed too much ... she is a gem."

Blundell speaks regularly to Kruger, saying she was like a second mother to her.

"I often reflect on the sessions we used to do and make sure that we are incorporating philosophies of that," Blundell said. "(Valmé) was very time-orientated, because growing up I didn't have too much competition so I was time-trialling all the time. So I did reflect on that over the last month to do my races by myself - it was very fitting to draw upon how I ran growing up."

She visited Cherrybrook LA last season to support the cross country runners.

- Top international photo finish official Janet Nixon is also associated with Cherrybrook LA as her children did athletics here.
- Cherrybrook LA season runs from September to March, offering Friday night competitions on a rotating roster of events for children aged 5-16 of all abilities.

Registrations are open during August. Details: [cherrybrookathletics.org.au](http://cherrybrookathletics.org.au).



Jenny Blundell has been racing for many years at the highest levels



Jenny Blundell and her former coach Valmé Kruger.

## TEAM PLAYERS SHINE

By LAWRENCE MACHADO

### KYAH SIMON (FOOTBALL)

KYAH SIMON, one of Australia's most capped and award-winning footballers, has battled injuries throughout her career. She never lacked confidence. At her first training session at Quakers Hill, Simon, then eight, famously told her mum she would one day represent Australia in the Olympics.

In 2011, Simon became the first Indigenous Australian to score a goal in a FIFA World Cup, having made her debut for the Matildas in 2007, aged just 16.

A veteran of World Cups, Asian Cups and the 2016 Rio Olympics, Simon has thrived in the top leagues in Europe, the US and Australia.



Matilda star Kyah Simon in action

The ace striker regularly runs coaching camps for juniors in the Hills and around NSW.

"I come from a rugby league-playing family and began playing football at the Quakers Hill Juniors where I was one of the two females in the team," Simon told me a few years ago. "I like to go back to the club and help them because they have given me the first opportunity to play rep football. It's a huge honour they have named the golden boot after me and that will always keep me tied to the club."

The Matildas play Great Britain in the Olympic quarter finals tonight (Friday, July 28).

### RACHEL LACK (SOFTBALL)

Rachel Lack, 26, who was named Softball Australia's Female Athlete of the Year in 2013, took to the sport aged nine.

Lack helped Australia win bronze at the 2014 World Softball Championships and in 2019, was named Most Valuable Player and Player of the Grand Final at the Australian Championships. Growing up, she also took part in hockey, cross country, football, futsal, netball and swimming.

Lack, who worked as an exotic animal keeper at the Zamboni Native Wildlife Retreat, said her stint at the University of Hawaii enhanced her game. "It was eye-opening," she says in her Olympic profile. "It definitely gave me a bigger perspective on the sport... it was a real learning curve."

Although beating Italy, the newly named Aussie Spirit team missed out on the quarter finals leaving host country Japan to win the Gold medal, USA claimed silver and Canada bronze.



Softballer Rachel Lack