**November 2017**

**Ben Atkins**

I am 26 years old and went to Shoalhaven High down the coast. I have been fortunate enough to have represented Australia over 50 times, my current goal would be to get to the next World Cup in Spain in 2019 in the only real sport – Football! (Soccer).

My proudest sporting moment was the first time I was given the captains armband in Abu Dhabi and when I was announced as the VC [Vice Captain] for the tour to Holland at the ripe old age of 18.  When I grow up I want to be a good person, who would always be there for family and friends. Career wise – I am a Financial Adviser, I want to be able to have an impact on the world in such an important area of life.

An interesting fact about me is I’m addicted to psychology, understanding what motivates people to do what they do. Self-improvement and mindset and PODCASTS (I’ve listened to over 1000 hours at last count lol)

We recently competed in Argentina at the World Championships, which was a very interesting experience. Personally, competing there was the culmination of a very long road. My goal going into the tour was to have my best tour both on and off the pitch. If I’m honest, I consciously set myself the lofty, almost unattainable goal of being the best in the world. Then the first game happened, 20min in and we’re down 3-0.

My head is swimming. I’m numb. What happened? I’d done all this preparation and I’m playing my worst game in years… We eventually lost the game 6-0 and I went to a very dark place, questioning decisions, motives, whether I still wanted to play, whether that goal was ever in the realm of possibility. I seriously considered leaving the team; my family the Pararoos and sport I had played for 20 years. I wish I could say those doubts were elevated straight away but it took 4 more long gruelling, soul searching days to realise how important this team is to me. 3rd group game against North Ireland, we’d lost 2-0 to them only last year in a hard fought, physical match.

This time round was going to be different; we scored early and completely outplayed them across the park, eventually winning 2-1 and was lucky enough to be on the end of a well worked team goal to seal the victory. Singing the team song in the dressing room after the match almost brought tears to my eyes after such a rollercoaster week. In hindsight, that game would be the turning  point of our tournament and we would go on to play Argentina (hosting nation and 4th in the world), for 9th playoff.

After finishing the game 1-1, we went to extra time, conceded a goal, had a player sent off and missed a couple of narrow opportunities to take the game to penalties. Last time I had played them we lost 13-0. It might sound strange to some but being able to be on a level playing field and competing with the best in the world, them getting frustrated and worried that we could beat them, was a very special moment for me.

David Barber and Ben Roche and I embraced after the game - two people I have looked up to and idolised since I was a kid. It is a moment I will cherish for the rest of my life. We finished 10th, our highest finish since 2007. Overall, an intense, rewarding tour.