**July 2020**

**Matthew Hearne**

I turned the big 21 in July 2020, and this also marks my third year living out of home, in metropolitan Melbourne. I was born and raised in Wollongong, NSW and I took part in junior sport (mainly football and swimming) from 5 years of age, until my departure from Wollongong when I graduated from high school in 2017.

I played club football for Figtree Junior Football Club and served 10 seasons with the club, which was where my passion for football really began and I was still playing for Figtree when I was picked up by the NSW CP football team and a few years later, the Pararoos. I have been very fortunate to play with the NSW Paralympic Football team for the past six years being a part of the championship winning team each of these years.

I completed my schooling at Wollongong High School of The Performing Arts where as well as beginning to really get serious about my football, I was competing more and more seriously in swimming as well, representing my school and state at both CHS and School Sport Australia championships. At a club level, I competed for Wests Illawarra Aquatic Swim Team, achieving great success by regularly swimming PBs and gaining medals at the NSW Country, NSW State and Australian Age Championships. When I was in Year 11 in 2016, I narrowly missed the qualifying time for the 100m butterfly to make the Australian team for the Rio Paralympic games. After this, I decided to stop competitive swimming to focus on my study for the HSC, while continuing to pursue my passion for musical theatre and focusing on maintaining a position in the Pararoos, so I could continue to represent my country in football. I first represented Australia in Football at the World Cerebral Palsy Games in Nottingham in 2015, as a member of the Young Pararoos. In 2016, I was selected onto my first senior national team for a Paralympic football qualification tournament in Denmark.

As I started to really find ‘my people’ in high school, I began to develop a passion for the performing arts that would see me cross over between the field and the stage as I had discovered that I really loved singing, acting and dancing on stage, which was a feeling for me that I could liken to lacing up my boots to play a football game for my country. I have performed in musical theatre productions for my school and for a few community theatre groups in the Illawarra. I have won two Canberra Area Theatre (CAT) Awards for my performances in school productions: Warner in Legally Blonde in 2016 and Jean Valjean in Les Misérables in 2017. Upon completing my HSC, I decided that I wanted to pursue a career on the stage. I was successful in my audition to study musical theatre in Melbourne.

I moved to Melbourne to train full time in musical theatre, but also needed to maintain my football training as I wanted to maintain my spot within the Pararoos squad. I have undertaken training at the Victorian College of Arts and am now in my second year of study at Patrick Studios Australia. This involves classes in dance, drama and singing. The classes this year have been a mix of face to face and zoom classes when the pandemic started. Prior to the pandemic, a typical day would involve a gym session in the morning, with cardio and weights, a full day of classes – with dance, acting and singing. I would sometimes have another gym session in the afternoon, depending on the classes I had in the day.

Since moving to Melbourne, I have grown so much as a result of both my football and musical theatre pursuits. I have found that the things I learn from one thing will almost certainly apply to the other.

Being in isolation with the Coronavirus lockdown has really given me lots of time to reflect upon some of my proudest moments with the Pararoos, one of which was scoring my first senior international goal in the same game that the now retired vice captain Chris Pyne was awarded his 100 th cap for the Pararoos. Training during this period has also been challenging and has involved many online dance classes and pilates sessions whilst I’ve also developed a real love for long distance running as it gives me a chance to really take in the environment around me and appreciate the things that I am still able to do to make the most of during this pandemic.

**​**