



MY OLYMPICS

When the world's best athletes gather in London, records will be challenged, medals contested and lives changed forever. Alongside the triumphs or disappointments, lasting memories will be forged. We spoke with Olympians past and present about the moments they'll never forget

BY MAYA ZAHRAN

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES





Melanie Roche in Athens

Melanie Roche **(Australia, Softball) on Athens** **2004 and Beijing 2008**

“The most memorable game I played was the Gold medal game in Athens 2004 – Australia versus the US. The US team was formidable, unstoppable, impenetrable, overpowering. Here we were in the fourth inning with a score of 5-0, being totally crushed. Typically, a softball game consists of seven innings. If the Americans scored seven runs by the fifth, the game would be

called early and labelled a ‘mercy-rule’ victory to the US. I remember thousands of American fans chanting, ‘U-S-A, U-S-A, U-S-A!’ It was thunderous and deafening, as if it mattered under the crushing we were enduring. But the noise of the American fans rising up against us mattered to the Australian Team.

“Although we lost with a score of 5-1, we stopped the Americans scoring any more runs. That single run was the only run scored against the US at the Athens Olympic Games. Without taking away from the Americans, the Games provided the arena for a bunch of defeated women to dig deep inside themselves and be someone they had never been before.

“My most memorable moment came about as a result of softball being removed from the Olympic programme for London 2012 and Rio de Janeiro 2016. It was the moment when the three winning teams in Beijing [Gold for Japan; Silver for the US; Bronze for Australia] united together for a photograph at the conclusion of the medal ceremony. Out of four Olympic appearances playing for Australia, where teams like Japan and especially the US were the focus of my desire to conquer in the softball world, I now stood arm-in-arm with them in recognition of their work, love and dedication for the Olympic Movement and our sport.

“My most memorable moment was not a personal one, not an Australian one, but a world moment. To me, this is the true power of the Games.

“This year I’ll sit at home in Brisbane and be moved to tears as I watch all the magic moments roll out before me. I will also feel, see and smell the time softball returns to the Olympic stage – we embraced the belly of this Great Movement for 16 years and I have faith she will invite us back in again.”

Roche is a four-time Olympian who represented Australia at Atlanta 1996, Sydney 2000, Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008. She has four Olympic medals from her four Games appearances.

Caroline Wozniacki **(Denmark, Tennis) on Beijing 2008**

“Of course you always play with your country beside your name, but this time you’re *really* playing for your country. You’re trying to get a medal and you have other athletes supporting you and cheering you on. When I think about Beijing I think about [swimmer] Michael Phelps, who was unbelievably inspiring – winning medal after medal for his country. I’d love to win an Olympic medal myself! Of course, I would love to win a Grand Slam too, but winning an Olympic medal would be an amazing achievement.”

A former world number one tennis champion, Wozniacki represented Denmark at Beijing 2008.

Wendy Schaeffer (Australia, Equestrian) on Atlanta 1996

“When we won Gold, we certainly had far greater press coverage than I had ever experienced before. As a sport, we were even depicted favourably compared to the swimmers in a newspaper cartoon where a horse was on the swimming starting blocks with the caption: ‘Australia’s best chance in the pool?’

“Aside from the obvious amazing moment of standing on the dais to receive our medal, the most memorable time was at the flag-raising ceremony for the Australian Team in the Olympic Village. It was the first time I participated in the ‘Aussie, Aussie, Aussie, Oi, Oi, Oi!’ chant – literally a hair-raising experience. It was then that I truly felt I had made it and was part of the team.”

Schaeffer won Gold for Australia in the Equestrian Three-Day Team Event at Atlanta 1996.



Caroline Wozniacki in Beijing

Steve Moneghetti **(Australia, Marathon) on** **Seoul 1988 and Sydney 2000**

“As I left the warm-up track to go to the start of my first Olympic marathon in 1988, I remember my coach, Chris Wardlaw, saying, ‘I’ve done everything I can. Now it’s up to you.’ It made me realise that while I had a strong team around me, at the end of the day it was just me – my heart, lungs and legs, and years of developing them – that had got me to this position and would decide my race result. It was quite sudden but somehow quite enlightening.

“My most memorable Olympic moment wasn’t in competition but when

the Australian Team assembled in the gymnasium next door to the Olympic Stadium in Sydney 2000. Our flag bearer, Andrew Gaze, was running around proudly waving the Australian flag – it was a very unifying moment for the Aussie team members.”

Moneghetti represented Australia at Seoul 1988, Barcelona 1992, Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000.

Natalie Cook (Australia, **Beach Volleyball) on competing**

“It’s all about getting your physical, mental and emotional preparation to come together at a predetermined moment. With national and international tournaments, you can close your eyes at night and say, ‘Maybe next week.’ But with the Olympics the opportunity won’t return as quickly.

“At the age of eight I told my mum I wanted to win an Olympic Gold medal... who would have thought? Going to one Olympics is an amazing feat; I am lucky to have been to four.

“Each Olympics has its very own magic moment: in Atlanta walking into the Opening Ceremony to a crowd of 110,000 screaming people; in Sydney joining the Olympic Gold medal club and going on Roy and HG’s *The Dream*; in Athens standing in the Acropolis, the birthplace of the Games; and in Beijing watching the Chinese prune the grass at the Olympic Village!”

Cook won Bronze at Atlanta 1996, Gold at Sydney 2000 and finished fourth and fifth at Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008 respectively.



Steve Moneghetti in Sydney



Natalie Cook in Atlanta



Cadel Evans in Beijing

Cadel Evans (Australia, Cycling) on London 2012

“It always strikes me as incredible being in the dining hall with all the best sportspeople in the world. As a cyclist, we go to races nearly every day of the year and see people we know. But then you go into the dining hall and you have the gymnast standing next to the basketballer, standing next to the weightlifter – from three different corners of the world – it’s an incredible thing to be part of.

“For London, I anticipate and hope that I will be a useful teammate to our team leader, Matthew Goss, in

the road race. I’m also hoping to have an optimal time trial where the responsibility for the result will be on my shoulders... and legs!”

Evans competed in mountain biking at Atlanta 1996 and Sydney 2000, and in the road race at Beijing 2008.

Jessica Crisp (Australia, Sailing) on Sydney 2000

“Everyone wants to do their best and in the end the person with the strongest mind wins – my event goes for ten days! It doesn’t matter how many Olympics you go to, the pressure is



Jessica Crisp in Sydney



Sara Carrigan in Athens

always the same. What I remember most is celebrating my birthday during the Sydney Olympics – on the way out to racing, my family pulled up on a boat with balloons and signs and started singing ‘Happy Birthday’ to me. This year, my goal is to get a medal. Last time I said ‘third time lucky’ and I was close – now I’m going with fourth time lucky!”

Crisp competed at Los Angeles 1984 when women’s sailboarding was a demonstration event, then at Sydney 2000, Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008.

Sara Carrigan (Australia, Cycling) on Athens 2004

“My most memorable Olympic moment is definitely racing around the Acropolis and taking the honours in

the birthplace of the Games. Crossing the finish line was such a mix of emotions, with elation, shock, excitement, disbelief, happiness and then a quiet moment of realisation and pride that I had done it. The many years of commitment, hard work and persistence had allowed me to achieve my dream: Olympic Gold!”

Carrigan won Gold in the individual road race at Athens 2004, and also raced for Australia at Beijing 2008.

Kieren Perkins (Australia, Swimming) on Sydney 2000

“One of the overwhelming memories for me in Sydney was being on the pool deck before the final race – that enormous crowd of people in the stands and the noise that was being

generated by them created an amazing amount of energy. When I got to Sydney I'd been struggling in the way that I was racing, and Don Talbot, who was our Australian head coach at the time, said to me, 'You don't have to feel good to swim fast.' It was quite a revelation for me because, having been a young and enthusiastic up-and-coming athlete up until that point, you always do associate feeling good with the capacity to swim fast. Your preparation was designed to get you to that point where on race day you felt fantastic. It doesn't happen when you get old, unfortunately; you have to manufacture that a bit, and I think that was key in what Don was saying – you've got the experience, the knowledge and the capacity to do it, don't just



assume because you previously just felt it that it'll happen again.”

Perkins won Gold and Silver at Barcelona 1992, Gold at Atlanta 1996, and Silver at Sydney 2000.

Natalie Coughlin **(US, Swimming) on Beijing 2008**

“My most memorable moment was defending the 100m backstroke title in Beijing, and specifically being on the podium. I'm not usually someone who gets emotional but I was on the podium and they were raising the flag and my teammate Margaret Hoelzer was tearing up and I started crying. By the end of the victory lap I was sobbing like crazy – I was embarrassed by it, but it goes to show you how overwhelming the Olympics are.”

Coughlin is an 11-time Olympic medallist who represented the US at Athens 2004 and Beijing 2008. ■