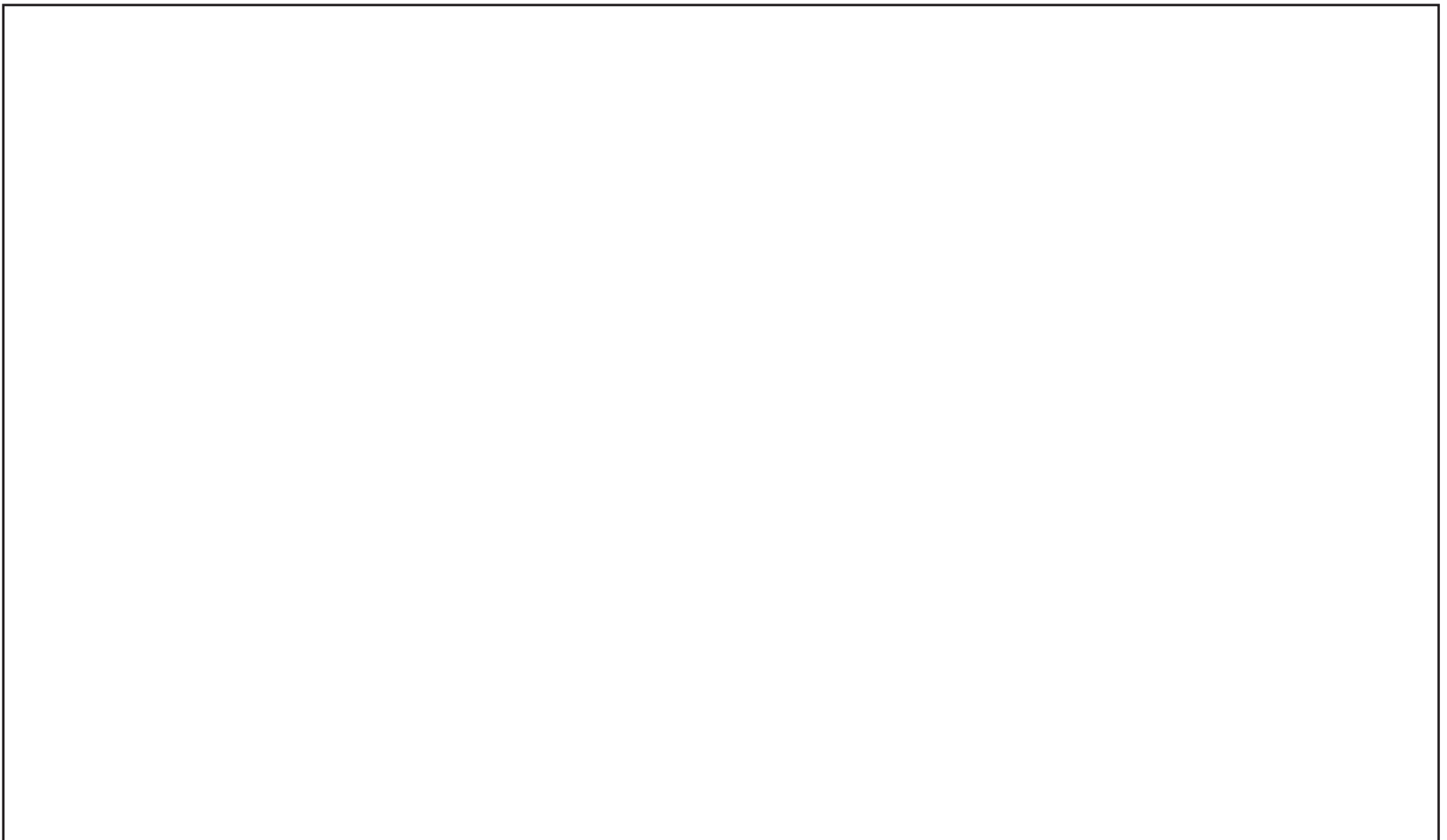


# Paddle power

PHOTO COURTESY OF TREVOR CHAPMAN



Olympic bronze medallist Tim Brabants talks to Martyn White as we continue 24SE7EN's build-up to the Commonwealth Games





Tim Brabants is an Olympic bronze medal winner and a world record holder in sprint kayaking. His story – a contrasting mix of inspiration, heartache and perseverance – had Jersey’s Commonwealth Games team on the edge of their seats during the final team building session ahead of the Games in March.

Watching a re-run of his medal-winning race at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, Jersey’s athletes couldn’t help but get caught up in the rousing commentary, as they saw Tim win Britain’s first ever Olympic medal in his sport. Motivating and emotional, it left Jersey’s sportspeople in no doubt that their Commonwealth Games experience would be just as electrifying.

## ‘You’re not going to get a free car or loads of cash from doing it, so you may as well enjoy it’

“Watching that video still sends shivers down my spine,” says Tim, a doctor at the A&E department of the General Hospital. “It gets me eager to perform again and to train hard. It picks me up on the coldest of days when the water freezes on my paddle!”

“Winning the bronze medal was actually a very surreal moment,” he continues. “When I crossed the line I didn’t know whether I was fourth or third, so when I saw my name appear in third place I was ecstatic. All of the pain and muscle fatigue disappeared as soon as I realised I’d won a medal.”

Winning bronze was the reward for combining a tough training schedule while studying hard at medical school in Nottingham. Luckily, his lecturers were very supportive despite his passion for sport, rather than studying.

“Training has always been my priority over work, although I always manage to get my work done as well,” he says. “Being in that situation actually makes you more organised. You have to be organised otherwise you’d fail.”

Failure is something Tim has experienced as well, though. At the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, he broke the 1,000m sprint kayak world record

in the heats. As the fastest qualifier, he was expected to win gold, but the final went horribly wrong. Finishing in a disappointing fifth place, Tim is still haunted by the experience, yet he is determined to turn it into a positive one.

“It was purely mental,” he says of the reason for not winning a medal. “I still beat myself up a lot about that because I was physically well prepared. After setting the world record and being the fastest qualifier I believed I could definitely win a medal.”

It was a harsh lesson and one that Jersey’s sportspeople can learn from. “Really and truly you can’t perform as well as you want to every time,” says Tim, who first picked up a paddle in Surrey as a ten year old. “Sometimes your mind or body will let you down. It’s something I’ll always be very disappointed with. I’ve turned it into a positive now though, and even though I look back on it as a disappointing race, it’s motivating me to get that gold.”

Tim is hoping to race in the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing. Next month he finishes his stint at the General Hospital to focus full-time on achieving his objective. “It’s about more than just taking part,” says Tim. “It’s about performing better than you ever have done before. If you always finish 39th and at the Games you finish in 38th then you have achieved better than you ever have before, which is a result.”

Possible obstacles for Jersey’s athletes will be dealing with the press, signing autographs and coping with boredom between training sessions, says Tim: “The Jersey team will probably be surprised at the level of interest and the amount of autographs they’ll be signing. But it is exciting, it is motivating and having the interest, publicity and spectators lifts the whole country and provides a great atmosphere while you’re there.”

His one piece of advice is for the Jersey team to simply enjoy being at the Commonwealths: “Enjoy the experience, because it won’t last for long. You’re not going to get a free car or loads of cash from doing it, so you may as well enjoy it as much as possible.”

For Tim, the ultimate enjoyment at his next major Games would be to win gold. “I certainly think I’ve got unfinished business,” he says with purpose. Let’s hope Jersey’s sportspeople don’t feel the same after coming back from Melbourne.