

PERFORMING UNDER — ISOLATION —

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO ADAPT
AND SUCCEED DURING
COVID - 19



WAYNE CORLIS



PERFORMING UNDER ISOLATION

It was April 2020 and about 3 weeks before we had been told by the Australian Government that they would be enforcing some sort of shutdown and isolation strategy, the sort of thing you would only expect to see in the movies.

The rules around social distancing were clear! We must keep a minimum of 1.5 meters from the person near us, we couldn't be in confined spaces with more than 5 people, we couldn't go the gym, track, pub, pool, and even going to the shopping center was fraught with caution....just getting a coffee was now socially awkward!!

So where did that leave us as Athletes, Coaches, Therapists etc.? For all of us it raised questions –“How do we provide healthcare?”, or “How do we perform as athletes? and, excel under extreme circumstances?” These are the questions we needed answered, we had to learn to adapt and pivot with this fast, and somehow still get the performance outcomes we needed in our chosen fields.

In this edition we see how some well-known personalities here in Canberra have adapted to the sudden changes, and what their experience can teach us about performing under the cloud of isolation.

Where we are
TODAY



PRESENTING

PETE GARBUTT

Owner of Enhance Healthcare Canberra, Former President Federation of International Chiropractor of Sports, 2016 President of Sports Chiropractor Australia, Rio Olympics Chiropractor.

MEGAN HALL

High Performance Para Triathlon Coach, South African Olympian Athens 2004.

EMILY TAPP

Australian Para triathlete PTWC, 2018 - Gold Coast World Championships Final - 1st, 2018 – Commonwealth Games – PWTC – 2nd.

MICHAEL ROEGER

Rio 2016 1500m, currently holds four World Records (1500m, 5000m, 10,000m & Marathon) in the Paralympic class T46.

WAYNE CORLIS

Owner of Capital Peak Performance, Soft Tissue Therapist, Athlete, loves a meat pie.

PETE GARBUTT

CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, PARALLELS

Having spent the past 25 + years looking after athletes at every level from the weekend warrior through to the elite, the COVID crisis of 2020 has presented some new challenges to not only keeping a practice open but providing the best care for athletes managing this challenge. Regardless of what aspect you are interacting with the athlete, whether it be through coaching, manual healthcare, psychological care, nutritional care or pharmacological healthcare, your approach always needs to be multifaceted. It needs to consider all aspects of the athlete's wellbeing so that you can draw on the expertise of others when needed, but most importantly, understand when that might be needed. COVID presented challenges from a few perspectives. (motivation, socialization, facilities)

MOTIVATION

Anytime that you are caring for patient, it is important to understand their motivations. A patient who is not motivated to get better, rarely gets better. These motivations may vary from needing to work, to be able to meet the needs of a young family, to simply moving to feel good and socially interact. For an athlete it is usually based around a very measurable outcome of performance, and generally event based. The shifting of goal lines, moving of events and uncertainty surrounding any level of competition, whether it be qualifying, income earning or ultimate goal oriented has provided a challenge with motivation to not only achieve, but recover from injury by a set time, and for a specific reason.

SOCIALIZATION

With many athletes, and particularly team-based athletes returning to sport has a large socialization component. The ability to interact with teammates which becomes an integral part of self-identity becomes lost in a world of social isolation. Not only is the motivation to return to this obscured by the inability to effectively do so, but the depressive mindset that creeps in during this isolation becomes a barrier to recovery from any injury.

FACILITIES

Facility requirements differ from athlete to athlete. For swimmers, this has been a tough period, for gym-based athletes, it has also been challenging. When rehabilitation is best served through specific facilities that have been closed or less available than usual, an athlete's recovery from injury might be hampered more than their basic ability to train and maintain fitness. Also included in facilities might be services such as soft tissue therapy which was sadly impacted by poor communication by government and governing bodies. This left many therapists with their doors closed unnecessarily and athletes without valuable therapists to facilitate their recovery. For my own clinics, each day posed the possibility of doors needing to close, and monitoring the governmental requirements, along with our own risk assessment to staff, family and those entering the clinic. We implemented measures early and progressively to maintain the safety of all those

those entering the clinic through heightened sanitation measures, gaps between appointments, alternate waiting room arrangements and electronic carpark check-in to minimize waiting room traffic. We implemented COVID screening questions checking people against the epidemiological criteria for high risk as determined by the Australian Government. Checking in regularly through the Australian Government and the World Health Organization and balancing our local situation regarding the use of personal protective equipment, social distancing all measures available to maintain a level of safety that was consistent with our ability to keep our doors open. This was an aspect wrestled with by many allied health practitioners. I saw clinics close due to a perception of risk being too high, and I respect the owners that made that very tough decision. My personal one was based on a belief that we could maintain a safe environment and continue to play a role in the health care sector that whilst not saving lives, kept a load off those that were.

GP's and emergency departments, inundated with potential COVID cases or concerns thereof did not need to be congested with headaches, muscle strains and back pain that could be managed through conservative care.

OPPORTUNITIES

I'm a firm believer that in every situation we find ourselves, there are unique opportunities, not necessarily afforded at any other time. This was one of the mainstays of finding motivation for athletes during this time. What weaknesses could they work on? What new skills could they develop? Or simply, how much better and well-rounded could their rehabilitation from injury be without the stress of impending competition and performance demands. These opportunities cannot be determined by the practitioner. The athlete needs to own these. They need to be not only sport specific and athlete specific, but situation specific. It needs to be meaningful at the time to drive that motivation to achieve. Athletes that are able embrace this opportunity become stronger and more versatile athletes. They develop resilience that helps to overcome other challenges.

The understanding that they can strengthen as a whole through these unique situations provides a mental agility to adapt and overcome in and out of competition. High level athletes often have these skills, but at times like these, it might be the role of a healthcare provider to frame them in the right way for the athlete to adapt these skills to this situation.

PARALLELS

Probably the easiest parallel to draw here that is meaningful to athletes is that of a longer term injury such as surgery, broken bones or the like that keep an athlete from training in a conventionally meaningful way for their sport. These times require a similar adaptation to goals and training. They see the successful athlete using a rehabilitation time to come out stronger in an area of weakness and not only return to competition but return better than they left it. This scenario is not one that is foreign to healthcare providers in the athletic population space, and it is one that translates easily. COVID has thrown up some challenges to athletes and to healthcare providers. Some will come out of this stronger than they went in, others will perhaps move on to something else because it was too hard. Regardless of the path taken here, we need to embrace the outcome and learn the lessons that it has taught us, and use them to be even better next time.

MEGAN HALL

HIGH PERFORMANCE PARA TRIATHLON COACH

I am a mother, wife, Olympian and coach. My passion for, and small successes in swimming and running during my youth set me up well to transition into triathlon during my late teens. My first junior World Championships was in Wellington, NZ, 1994. It was here that a ninth-place finish in my third standard-distance race ignited a life-long passion for the incredible sport of triathlon. A decade later at the Athens 2004 Olympics, the curtain fell on my competitive triathlon career. Another ten years later, I completed a Bachelor of Sport and Exercise Science, which allowed me to return to the triathlon fold, this time as a coach. The drive and vision which fueled me as an athlete is now directed towards forging a pathway in high performance sport, supporting my athletes in achieving their goals.

When asked about the challenges of coaching amidst COVID-19, three words sum up my world: disappointment, adaptability, and opportunity – set in an environment marked by isolation and uncertainty. As a leader, there lies an importance in sharing my vulnerability and emotional journey, from the feeling of let down and disappointment, to the strength in being adaptable and flexible with change and shifting the behavioral mindset to find the opportunities that emerge from COVID-19.

Disappointment is naturally a negative emotion I have felt during this time. The period without decision, as well as a final call to suspend competition for the Olympic and Paralympic athletes, was a challenging time for all athletes and their support staff. While some relief has been provided by the tentative 2021 competition date, the grief experienced by the athletes and staff was significant. The loss of that pinnacle sporting event was huge, but a point of focus has emerged, as training plans are reworked around the rescheduled competition period.

In high performance sports coaching, Eliud Kipchoge's philosophical outlook rings true for me: **"Preparation is critical and crucial; when you plan well, then success can come your way, then winning can come your way."** A strength of mine is planning, which I see as the backbone in providing guidance and vision for an athlete or team reaching success. Further to this, the ability to be flexible and adaptable, as well as strategizing ways to embrace change, are essential tools to complement any sound plan. A meaningful quote that I have found grounding in situations of change is this: **"When you can't control what's happening, challenge yourself to control the way you respond to what's happening. That's where your power is."** (Author unknown)

The adaptability in any plan must come with a level of calm and decisive direction allowing for acceptance, further developing the athlete-coach trust. This in turn builds the positive spiral of emotions needed to go beyond survival to thriving in uncertainty. COVID-19 is not the first time this year that we have faced the challenge of adapting to change within our Canberra-based program.

The smoke from the devastating bushfires impacted us, with pool closures and limited outdoor training. This meant a plan B was implemented to relocate the team for a period of time to continue training safely. As COVID-19 began to change the sporting landscape in Australia and social-distancing measures became strict protocol, planning was carried out to ensure equipment was sourced that would give the athletes the ability to continue to train in isolation. More importantly, having wellbeing support structures in place to help the transition to change from normality to the unknown in such a short space of time. Significant change will always be met with differing levels of emotions, and as a coach the importance of making this a supported process with a bigger-picture understanding – all through effective communication – will help give the athlete a sense of willingness to move forward.

For myself as a coach, Covid-19 has gifted an opportunity to slow down and to assess and re-evaluate my goals and practices as a coach. I have consciously given the athletes space to process the changes inflicted and presented this time as an opportunity to refocus and assess individual goals. We have been presented with a rare opportunity with more time to develop a solid physical and mental foundation from which to build volume/base work – a rarity for Australian athletes, who typically have to balance the demands of two seasons, Australian and International. Further, we are permitted more time to implement sessions focusing on technique. Rather than cause anxiety and overload for myself and the athletes by building programs and sessions that are difficult to execute in lockdown, I have tried to find balance to give the athletes emotional breathing space. Slowing the pace for the athletes has not only allowed sessions which target areas of weakness and extend aerobic tolerance but has also provided valuable time to reconnect with family and social networks which provide unconditional emotional support and motivation. It is important at this time that we are all checking in on one another in the triathlon and broader sporting community. Speaking openly about your feelings and emotions will allow you to grow as a person and give others around you the confidence to be open too. We are all in this together, working towards a common goal: getting back on the start line united!



EMILY TAPP

AUSTRALIAN ELITE ATHLETE

In 2011 I had a horse-riding accident resulting in paraplegia whilst competing in 'camp drafting'. In 2012 I was fortunate enough to attend a Spinal Rehab center in California, whilst there halfway around the world I met a fellow Aussie, Nathan who was a quadriplegic. Nathan was such an inspiration to me and others. I was in awe when he began training for a 70.3 (half ironman).

To see another person with a disability, take on such a rigorous training schedule with grit and determination gave me inspiration to complete a triathlon also. I found Triathlon and was fortunate to come under the guidance of Katherine Parica and Corey Bacon. I began competing in 2015 and since then have been honored to represent Australia on the world stage ever since. Due to classification restrictions at the 2016 Rio Paralympics I made the switch to athletics under the guidance of the great Fred Parica. Although I qualified, due to injury was unable to compete.

Returning to triathlon I am now under the indelible coach Megan Hall, Fred Parica, and Fabrizio Andreoni of the Shock team fame and together we have become two-time world champions and won silver at the Gold Coast 2018 Commonwealth Games.

Covid-19 has presented many challenges on many levels for everyone and every country. I recognize the huge sacrifices made by everyone in trying and keeping us all safe and healthy. I am currently in training for the rescheduled 2020 Tokyo Paralympics to be held hopefully in 2021. Qualification for the Tokyo Olympics it is now fraught with its own challenges. Being unable to race domestically and internationally presents its own difficulties.

We all must try and train at home and keep the momentum up and hope that soon we will be able to resume to our full training schedules to compete on a domestic race circuit. When we were first sent into self-isolation with the closure of all sporting and recreational training venues, I found it very difficult to stay motivated. It was mentally challenging to be by myself. Although with the help of my coach, she has helped me to view this challenging time and use it as a positive. Together we have redefined my short- and long-term goals to stay mentally engaged in each session. I am also very thankful for the exceptional support from the Australian Institute of Sport and the Athlete Well-being and Engagement team coupled with our National Sporting.

Organization, Triathlon Australia recognizing the difficult times we are facing as elite athletes and providing ongoing support especially regarding mental health. As a result, I have been able to continue working with a sports psychologist as our training landscape is rapidly changing. As high performing athletes, we are told to become in tune with our bodies and not rely heavily on technology. However, technology has allowed me to continue to train to high performance. The online training platform Swift allows me to train and stay connected with other athletes. As well as using Zoom where my coach can watch my sessions and provide live feedback on technique and help push me.

My housemate has also kindly built me a custom gym in our now transformed car garage alongside my track chair rollers and wind trainer I call it my own home “national training center” I have also taken the opportunity to observe other aspects that complement training which are sometimes over looked when we are time poor, such as nutrition, sleep/recovery and meditation. To ensure that they become strong habits and continue when we are able to return to normal training.

It's in this time I've been able to reflect and appreciate my personal support team including nutritionists, massage therapists, physiotherapists, sports doctors, strength& conditioning coaches and how extensively they work to ensure I have the best performance. I hope they are staying happy and healthy during this time.



MICHAEL ROEGER

AUSTRALIAN PARA OLYMPIAN, RIO 2016

I grew up in country South Australia, Langhorne Creek which is about an hour South East of Adelaide. I was born without the lower half of my right arm. I never saw this as a disadvantage but rather an opportunity. I have a twin brother Christopher who took me under his wing from day one, we were competitive with just about anything. I ran through school but really gravitated towards running when I finished year 12 in 2005.

I have been to three Paralympic Games, Beijing 2008 being the first. I have four World



Championship medals and one World Title in the marathon in 2019. I won a Bronze medal in Rio 2016 in the 1500m and currently hold four World Records (1500m, 5000m, 10,000m, Marathon) in my Paralympic class, T46. The most recent being the 2020 Houston marathon, where I ran 2:19.31. The dream is to win a Paralympic gold medal and stand on the top step and sing the national anthem. I wake up every day thinking about it and even know Tokyo 2020 has been postponed the desire and fire is still burning just as strong.

Covid-19 is the one thing that the whole world is going through together and everyone can now relate in some way. It has been no different for athletes, We are facing uncertain and challenging times and at the moment we are sitting in a kind of holding pattern. There have been many challenges over the last few months, a roller coaster of thoughts, feelings and emotions. I think one good thing athletes are good at is adapting and putting a positive outlook on a bad or negative situation. The biggest challenges for me as a high performing athlete dealing with the current rules and regulations around Coronavirus lockdowns and social distancing are;

- Not running with team mates
- No treatment (physio/massage No Gym strength
- Conditioning)
- Not being able to race (no competitions)
- Social connection (seeing friends face to face)

I guess growing up with missing the lower half of my right arm I have had to adapt to a lot of things, there is not much I haven't been able to figure out and work out a way; the Coronavirus situation is no different. I still want to be performing at a high level no matter the situation. High performing is about showing up every day trying to be better than the day before, doing the right things on and off the track and being consistent at these things.

The biggest challenge for me is not having regular treatment from my massage therapist and physio. I have been very lucky, and I am very grateful that for the last ten years I have been an athlete at the Australian Institute of Sport where I get two to three treatments a week. When that suddenly goes, and you are still running at high level and doing over 100 miles a week, you need to adapt. Through my coach Philo and physio Ben we have made conscious changes in training through minimizing risks that we don't need to take at the moment due to no competitions or races going ahead. I have backed the mileage off around 15% and the intensity of my workouts are reduced slightly. This will hopefully allow my body to get through the workload without treatment and recovery sessions. With this being said I have been committed to stretch and make sure I am cooling down properly after my runs, this is something that I haven't always done.

In times like these as an elite athlete it's important not to be too hard on yourself. Motivation can be up and down and that is okay. It's important to recognize how you are feeling mentally and physically and if required chat to someone in your corner like your coach or training partner. Keep showing up and get the workouts done, get the runs done, you don't have to blow them out of the water every week but as long as you stay consistent and healthy we will come out of this a better athlete and person.



WAYNE CORLIS

SOFT TISSUE THERAPIST, CAPITAL PEAK PERFORMANCE

It's hard to imagine that not long ago I was treating 30-40 clients a week over two locations my clinic Capital Peak Performance was seeing up to 100 clients a week, it was moving fast with events on every weekend, athletes in out, soft tissue injuries being looked after daily.... then in March we start hearing about this Virus called Covid-19. It had been a developing problem in China and other countries around the world but not for one minute did I realize that it would have such a significant impact on what I was doing , or for that matter on my business.

I remember my friend saying, "There looks like there's going to be a shutdown." I basically shrugged it off and did not think much of it as I thought there's no way this is possible! After a couple weeks however, we soon realized that this was very real and in fact the 'a shutdown' may actually happen. A week went by and business started slowing, gaps appeared, clients asking questions and before we knew it the Australian Government and our Association instructed us to close the doors until further notice. The risk of the pandemic were too high and for our own safety, and that of our clients. So, on the 24th March we closed the doors, it was a weird feeling, the uncertainty of what was happening.

I remember I didn't panic, I took a positive approach, knowing first of all I needed a break and this was after all an opportunity for that, and then second I needed to find a way to get my clinic though this, and also help my clients along the way, But then it hit me! there was no money coming in, no clients coming in and I still had rent to pay, bills and overheads to cover. This wasn't the time to panic, my brain was in overdrive, there were so many questions and decisions to be made, such as –"how do I keep in contact with my clients? how do in ensure their needs can still be meet?"

I knew post this everything is going to be back, events would be back on, and our clients are going to need our help, so I jumped online and we went digital! Our podcast called "The Peak Performance Show" was born, where we talk to likeminded athletes, Therapists and so. It was a great opportunity to show case some of our clients and share their experiences. It was also an opportunity to keep people informed about what it takes to be a performance personality in these tough times. We also decided that it would be great to provide online content that our clients can read so I created an E-Book called "The 2020 Athlete" the precursor to this.

This was all great, but I still was not treating, I wasn't using my hands, helping clients, and that's what I do and that's what I love, but it simply couldn't happen during the lockdown. Again, I looked at the crisis as an opportunity I decided to use the time in the best way I could, I used this time to learn about more ways help my clients into the future. I went online and researched, trained, trained and trained some more, looking into various skills such as dry needling, general wellness/wellbeing skills, and nutrition courses. I wanted to upskill not only my own treatment skills but also able to advise, talk and guide my clients in forwarding their own healthcare needs.

Looking back on that whole experience of being forced to close a hands on business down was really a process of making sure client's and staff were safe, and putting processes into place that would ensure the return of a clinic that serves to help the healthcare and performance needs of so many Canberrans. As we already begin to see the dust settle, I believe my clinic is now better placed to deal with unexpected changes and can more easily adapt to the requirements of our client's need as we look forward to great 2020/ 2021 season.

