



*Cricketer and footballer Tom Sharp keeps fit despite a broken arm with physiotherapist Kusul Goonewardena.*

# Behind all great athletes ...

Behind every elite athlete is a team of people helping them achieve their best. **David Scott and Laura Soderlind** talk to a physio helping to make student athletes, well, better!

## SPORT

Every industry, from health to politics or education, has people working quietly behind the scenes to make any venture successful. Behind every successful doctor is a team of nurses and researchers making operations successful and behind every politician is an office of staff and strategists.

The world of elite sports is no different. Sports physio Kusul Goonewardena is one such diligent unseen worker, not only contributing quietly to the performance and successes of elite athletes, but also doing it voluntarily at the University of Melbourne.

"I wanted to give something back to the University that provided me with a great grounding in my career," says Mr Goonewardena, who graduated from the

University of Melbourne in 1999. "It's my way of saying thank you to the University of Melbourne.

"I have always loved medicine and the ability to help people. And I love sports. I combined my two loves and after finishing school I only ever wanted to be a sports physiotherapist."

Mr Goonewardena gives his time to the athletes at the University of Melbourne to support students as they encounter injuries and train for upcoming events. He has gained quite the reputation among the athletes for being able to assist with stubborn and ongoing injuries.

"The easiest sports to cover are the non-contact sports. There might not be too much work during the competition but once the games are over my workload increases – sports like badminton, tennis, squash, swimming and athletics."

Mr Goonewardena has covered the Australian University Games as a physio for Melbourne University Sport since 2002, and has been the head of sports medicine from 2008.

His commitment to the athletes in the University community extends internationally, as he plans to support the high performing athletes chosen for the Olympic team. "I will work with these athletes and travel to London next year to help them achieve their goals and win gold for

Australia.

"I live, breathe and love sport," said Mr Goonewardena.

Not only does he work with athletes to improve their game, but he also spends considerable time on the sporting arena himself. While cricket is his sport of choice, he admits a love of tennis, basketball and badminton.

While he splits his time between the University and his sports physio business, Mr Goonewardena says one of the great parts of his job is that it takes him all over the world, from Malaysia to Brunei.

"The best thing about being a sports physio, however, is the sheer enjoyment of seeing one of my athletes win gold after I have treated them for their injury. That's what drives me and I keep perfecting my skills to achieve the best outcomes for my athletes. I also love the travel, the teams, the countries I get to visit and the people I meet."

Despite his work receiving accolades from athletes and important figures, the role of a physio is not widely known by the public. He points out that only five per cent of people know what a physio does and how to access their services, while 98 per cent know what a dentist does.

For the athletes in the know, however, Mr Goonewardena's work has not, and will not, go unnoticed on the road to London 2012.

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