

They're not just Olympians. They're our future leaders

More than 11,000 athletes from more than 200 countries in one vibrant South American city. The Rio Olympics is one I won't forget. And after years of assisting our wonderful Aussie athletes, nothing was going to stop me from cheering our teams on in Rio.

Gina Rinehart ! August 18, 2016 9:00pm



Gina Rinehart, with Australia's beach volleyball players in Rio, says our Olympians are outstanding role models. (Pic: Supplied)

The great effort and sacrifices these young athletes make to compete at the world's top level is truly inspiring. The qualities and characteristics that these athletes possess — the determination, tenacity, perseverance and drive — make them outstanding role models for Australians, and it is these qualities which make it clear why they are great ambassadors for our country and indeed could become future leaders of Australia.

They have got to being among the world's best through their own hard work and efforts. It is no part of their ethos to think they are entitled to win — they know they should only earn medals and respect from their own hard work and efforts. They are champions competing against the entitlement culture so sadly affecting our country, and its future.

The improvement in culture from the London 2012 Olympics to now is clear and, at the time of writing for instance, swimming contributed 50 per cent of all gold medals to Australia's Olympic team. And we came from the No.7 nation in swimming with one gold in London to the No.2 nation behind the US.

One only needs to look at how Cameron McEvoy, the favourite for the 100m freestyle, who said of fellow Australian Kyle Chalmers: "I had Kyle in this race and his success and his happiness. I can feel that and right now I'm kind of riding the wave that he's on." Team unity is paramount. This reminds me of the time-proven saying "united we stand, divided we fall". Good on you, team.



The unity and bond between Australia's Cameron McEvoy and Kyle Chalmers after Chalmers won the men's 100m freestyle final was truly inspiring. (Pic: AFP/Odd Andersen)

There were also some very heart-touching moments for me. Getting a wave from Kim Brennan (gold medallist in the women's single sculls) and many of the swimmers and synchronised swimmers either on their way to the competition or after their race, or even at times from the podium. Also to be made an honorary member of the synchronised swimming team, and to see them so happy to be at the Olympics when they greeted me in the stadium, was deeply touching.

Moments like these are magic. And the special moments continued outside the stadiums. I was at a function celebrating the rowing team and the father of a rowing silver medallist handed me a folded napkin with the words "Aussie rowers are ore powered". Unfolding the napkin, I found he'd written a big 'THANK YOU' on the inside. Seeing at first-hand the pride, the happiness and the enthusiasm of the parents of these great Olympians are among the best memories I treasure.

It is more than a great pleasure to support our teams. I have only been able to undertake this through decades of very hard work in Australia's mining industry. It's given me great pride to see Australia punch so high above its weight, for instance, seeing our comparatively small country have multiple representatives per race qualify among the best athletes the world produces, in both semi-finals and finals. What an achievement. And then there's medals!

And it's wonderful hearing so many people comment how proud our Olympians' efforts make them to be Australian. I'm hearing this from all over Australia, including our Outback.



Gina Rinehart cheers on Australia at a beach volleyball match at the Rio Olympics. (Pic: Supplied)

Despite the challenges of the Olympics this year, our Aussie Olympians have shone brightly.

I hope their inspiration as role models continues long past the Olympics. Although Michael Phelps is not an Aussie, his story as one of the Olympics' best-ever athletes should not be missed. At school and university, I was told by an American, Michael was not in the popular group that most wanted to be in. He didn't go to parties, he didn't live it up. Sure, he made some mistakes but he pushed himself past them. And now, as he steps onto the podium to receive each medal, he has the world's attention and respect, and enthusiastic applause from the many countries' representatives present, not just the USA. The emotion on his face says it all. As for those partygoers and liver-uppers, who knows them these days?

And, Australia may have at least one athlete walking in Michael Phelps' steps. I sure hope so. How incredibly exciting.

Warmest congratulations to each Australian Olympic athlete.

What a country we could be if we became — on a far-reaching level — inspired by the role models our Olympians are.

Gina Rinehart is the Executive Chairman of the Hancock Prospecting Group and patron of Swimming Australia, Rowing Australia, Volleyball Australia and Synchronised Swimming Australia