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# The Courier-Mail Sport



## League

Benji will ban himself from his late nights out on the town

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## Cricket

Kasper primed for new-ball challenge in Cape Town

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MELBOURNE 2006 COMMONWEALTH GAMES

## Tears on the track as Games pressure builds

ANYONE who doubted the importance of the Commonwealth Games to Australia's elite athletes only needed to visit the cycling team's training session in Melbourne yesterday to be convinced.

There was high drama at the velodrome when Australia's Commonwealth Games 500m time trial champion - Queenslander Kerrie Meares - broke down in tears as the pressure of defending her title proved overwhelming.

Story P84 »



# TALBOT BLAST

### Peter Badel and Amy Harris

FORMER national swim coach Don Talbot has slammed Australia's men's team, warning the squad could become the worst performed Commonwealth Games outfit in 56 years.

Talbot also lashed out at his successor Alan Thompson, accusing him of "running and hiding" from the tough-talking South African squad gunning for pool supremacy in Melbourne.

In a blistering appraisal, Talbot says the Aussie men face an uphill battle winning any of their 19 events, as they reel from the loss of kingpins Ian Thorpe and Grant Hackett and

former Olympic medallist Geoff Huegill.

The last Australian men's swim team to win fewer than five gold in a Commonwealth Games meet was in 1950, when the males claimed just two first-placings at Auckland.

Even our worst performed male squad — the 1938 Sydney team — managed one gold.

"I would be very disappointed to see it happen but if there is even the slightest lack of motivation there is every chance we won't win a gold medal," Talbot said.

"In the past, there was always some events where you knew we were a

shoo-in for the gold.

"But this time, as much as I hate to say it, I have a feeling we will be racing for the (minor) places.

"We'll certainly be in there competing for medals, but I don't have the conviction to believe it's going to be gold."

These comments should only serve to galvanise the depleted men's squad, which came under fire after a relatively disappointing outing at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

At the Commonwealth Games in Manchester in 2002, the men held their own, claiming 22 of the 50 medals won in the pool, including 15 gold.

The indomitable Hackett and Thorpe starred, contributing eight gold medals, while Huegill and Justin Norris also claimed first placings.

But in their absence, Talbot believes the men have only two genuine gold medal chances.

"Matt Welsh should be the hot favourite for the 50m backstroke and Jim Piper is the one to beat in the 200m backstroke, but whether they win is another matter," he said.

With the men short on depth, Talbot took aim at Thompson, who has backed away from a verbal stoush with the cocksure South Africans.

"We should be talking with more

confidence. Standing tall. Standing up for ourselves, responding to some of the things the South Africans are saying and beating our chests a bit," Talbot said.

"The first person that should be doing this is Alan Thompson but he's saying nothing. He keeps going on about the men's team and the women's team performing as one.

"What baloney. Come the Olympics, it doesn't matter how good your women's team is. If your men aren't stepping up then we will never beat the Americans."

Steven ready P85»

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