



**2004 ATHENS PARALYMPICS GAMES
25 November 2004**

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): I move: That this house congratulates the South Australian cyclist Kieran Modra and all Australian athletes who competed in the 2004 Athens Paralympics.

It is a great pleasure to move that this house congratulates Kieran Modra and all the Australian athletes who competed in the 2004 Athens Paralympics. The Paralympics Games, perhaps even more than the Olympic Games, testifies to the courage and endurance of human beings who strive to achieve their highest potential and of the families and friends who support them. Today I tell the story of someone striving against the odds of devastating disappointment and liberating triumph to honour the sight-impaired cyclist Kieran Modra. This honour encompasses all members of the Australian team with particular congratulations to those who won medals in the 2004 Athens Paralympic Games.

Kieran's sporting prowess began during his time at Townsend House school at Hove where all students were encouraged to participate in sport. It was noted that he was well coordinated. Moving on to Mawson High School, he took up javelin and pole vault. He competed in pole vault in the Australian Schoolboys Championships where there was no thought given to physical impairment. The only consideration from the organisers was to paint the box white where he placed the pole when taking off for the vault. He came third one year, second another year, and then won gold in the Australian under 19 competition. Kieran first competed in the Paralympics in Seoul, Korea in 1988 in running and javelin. In 1992 in Barcelona, Spain he competed in javelin and swimming, winning two bronze medals in backstroke. For the Atlanta Paralympics in 1996 he switched to cycling with Kerry Golding as his pilot.

Sight-impaired cyclists use a sighted pilot who must also undergo the gruelling training regime of early mornings and hours on the track week after week. In an early race the couple fell and were both taken to hospital where it was feared that Kerry had a broken thigh. Fortunately, this diagnosis was incorrect; however, the strong painkillers that Kerry was given meant that she would test positive for drugs and, therefore, be disqualified. Then it was worked out that the drugs would be out of her system by the time of the race. Even though getting about in a wheelchair and having to be lifted on and off the bike, she was determined to ride. She and Kieran went out and won gold. Kieran and Kerry married by the time of the Sydney 2000 Olympics. Despite being pregnant, Kerry continued as pilot, usually fainting from low blood pressure at the end of each race. Kieran's sister, Tania, was pilot for the road race. Unfortunately, the chain kept breaking so they lost their winning lead. Tania also rode as pilot for the Adelaide visually-impaired Paralympian Sonya Parker who won two gold medals.

Then came Athens in 2004. Kieran is unusual in that he competes both as a sprinter and an endurance cyclist; therefore, he needed two different pilots—David Short and Robert Crowe. This dropped his points allocation for selection, allowing another cyclist to be put into the Australian team. Three months of appeal and counter appeal followed. Four days before the games started he moved out of the athletes' village and all but resigned himself to missing the Athens Paralympics. However, the Australian Paralympic Committee battled hard on Kieran's behalf, taking his case to the International Olympic Committee, asking for a 144th place for Australia. The APC said that Modra had done everything necessary to qualify to compete. In an unprecedented move the IOC granted Australia's request on the eve of the opening ceremony. He sent a jubilant text message to his wife, Kerry, in Adelaide which stated, 'We are in baby. We are in, we are in.' His parents, Theo and Sylvia Modra, who were at the Athens games, did not know that he would compete until he came out on the track on the first day of competition

following the opening ceremony the previous night.

Kieran fulfilled the faith that the APC placed in him, winning two gold medals and one bronze medal. He and his pilot Robert Crowe won the first gold in the 4000-metre individual pursuit. He won the second gold with pilot David Short in the men's sprint. The couple crashed due to a tyre blowout while travelling at 50 km/h during the semi-finals, sustaining abrasions, cuts and bruises. They were able to restart and win through to the three-race final, overcoming severe pain to win gold for Australia. Modra, who was the more injured of the two, could barely stand up after the event.

The 100-kilometre road race was combined with a time trial. While Kieran and his pilot won the time trial, they dropped to seventh or eighth in the road race due to a broken wheel that had to be replaced. This still allowed them to take out the bronze. Tyson Lawrence also acted as pilot in training sessions. This is the background of just one of our Paralympians and the highs and lows of his journey. I am sure that each one, medal winners or not, could tell a story of endurance and striving to achieve the utmost, of setting aside what are usually seen as handicaps to live life to the fullest. I congratulate Kieran and all the Australian athletes who competed in the Athens 2004 Paralympics