A SPORTING CHANCE

In a region renowned for its love of active outdoor lifestyles, the development of sports and exercise sciences at the University of the Sunshine Coast was quick off the blocks. This teaching and research focus has been matched by investment in partnerships, programs and shared facilities that have engaged all levels of the community and industry, from Little Athletics children to Olympians and Paralympians, with diverse benefits for students and staff.

AS A TEENAGER, Brendan Burkett pursued his twin passions of sport and science through playing rugby league and studying engineering. As an adult, he became a world champion athlete and a nationally accredited sport scientist. As a new tutor at USC in 1998, only a year after the University introduced science courses, the swimming gold medallist, professional engineer and soon-to-be PhD graduate started constructing a degree to suit students of the sporty, outdoorsy Sunshine Coast.

The Bachelor of Sport and Exercise Science took its first enrolments in 1999 and remains one of USC’s most popular and enduring disciplines, one of five in the thriving School of Health and Sport Sciences. Along with biomedical sciences, nutrition and dietetics, occupational therapy and public health, the school headed by Professor John Lowe focuses on preventing disease and disability to improve people’s quality of life. Brendan Burkett is now Professor of Sport Science (Biomechanics), a USC lecturer and researcher of 18 years who is respected by staff, students and the wider community for his determination to help the University punch above its weight and serve its region.

According to Professor Burkett, his career success was more about taking opportunities than striving for long-term goals. The date he became a professor, for example, did not spring quickly to mind. “I never started off (in academia) saying, ‘Oh, by the time I’m 50 I want to be a professor,” he said, sitting at his desk on the fifth and highest level of USC’s Health and Sports Centre, nicknamed the Tower.

Standing up to seek clues from the certificates and memorabilia on his office walls, he remembered the milestone was “after Beijing”. The reference was to China’s 2008 Paralympic Games, one of three that Professor Burkett attended as national sport science coordinator for the Australian swim team, after competing as a member of the team in four Paralympics between Seoul in 1988 and Sydney in 2000. (The year he debuted as professor was 2010.) One of the earliest opportunities taken by Professor Burkett was in Europe in 1990. After growing up in a beach town halfway along the Queensland coastline, moving to Brisbane to gain his university engineering degree, and travelling overseas for swimming competitions, he landed in The Netherlands for a world titles where he won silver. Reading a local newspaper with the help of the team’s translator, Brendan saw an ad for an engineer on the oil rigs in the North Sea. It was a notoriously dangerous environment, with workers airlifted on and off platforms in all weather, but he wanted to give it a go. His application was accepted. The last step was the medical in France.

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There was a pause.
Scott has been an innovator in the area of sports technology. He strives to be ahead of the game and where it’s going. Working at the highest levels in the game with the best teams for a long period of time is his great achievement in this industry.

Wayne Bennett

Mr Barker was offered the top job back at the Broncos in late 2014 by Wayne Bennett, Australia’s most successful NRL coach, after working for Mr Bennett in previous years at teams including the Broncos, the St George Illawarra Dragons in Wollongong and the Knights in Newcastle. It was another high in a long career which took off in 2001 when Mr Barker was recruited full-time at the Broncos while still studying his USC degree part-time. Ever since, he has been at the centre of the action in coaches’ boxes at all NRL matches, providing Mr Bennett with the latest analysis to boost both player and team performance.

“Again I’ve been lucky to travel all over the world with the teams I’ve worked with, wherever they’re playing,” he said. “From 2005 to 2008 I travelled to France at the end of every NRL season, working with the French National Rugby League team. In 2013, we won the World Cup final in England with the Kangaroos (Australian rugby league team).”

Mr Barker took a moment to reminisce during last year’s pre-season – a tough, six-days-a-week regime for those behind the scenes in preparation for what he called “the fun part” of his job, the winter football season. He recalled how USC fixed his desire for innovation in the field and taught him the theory to support his ambition.

“I used uni to do my job better and to learn why we did things,” he said. “I took seven years to finish a three-year degree but I have no regrets about that because I could see the benefits of working my way up in the industry while getting the theoretical knowledge to back it up. My outside work commitments were always accommodated by USC. I still remember the lecturers clapping as I got my certificate (at the 2006 graduation ceremony at Sippy Downs), probably thinking ‘He’s finally gone!’

Mr Barker’s imagination was captured by new applications of video and computer technologies coming into sport at that time. “The USC degree got my creative process going,” he said. “Some of the degree wasn’t relevant to my job but some of the techniques would really grab me and I’d think, ‘yeah, we could adapt these for the team.’

“I was lucky enough to have Brendan Burkett help me on a couple of projects and we were trying to push the boundaries in sport science. I’ve kept in touch with him. He’s respected because he’s been in the industry; he’s been an athlete and he’s very humble about his achievements, and you want to learn off people like that.”
One project Mr Barker put to good use at the Broncos was the biomechanical analysis of goal kicking with 3D motion capture. This involved using three-dimensional technology to examine the movement of players’ bodies as they kicked goals, in order to educate them on how to improve their technique.

“When digital video came into the market, first in cricket in the late 1990s, I helped develop some software for a league version that’s now used in all 16 clubs. Things like that had never been done in rugby league at the time. I just three ideas forward to Wayne and I was never afraid to fail because he knew I was trying to make the environment better for the team. Now rugby league is a leader in sport science and technology. We even have requests from overseas professional sporting teams to come and visit and see what we do. That’s the biggest thing I got out of USC – it opened this world of possibilities for how to make sport better.”

Mr Barker also enjoyed sharing his developing knowledge and industry experience with fellow students, tutoring at Sippy Downs in courses such as sports medicine and video analysis. “In one of my last subjects I had to do practical hours in an approved industry and I did mine at the Broncos, but I also took on another USC student to do his hours there at the same time.” Years later, Mr Barker has passed his top tips to many more interns.

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Professor Burkett remembered conversations with Mr Barker over the years. “It took Scott longer to get through the degree but he did it while going from volunteering at Broncos’ training to becoming their full-time performance analyst. Scott was analysing all their games, feeding the results back to Wayne Bennett and his coaching staff. He’d phone me and say, ‘Tym, I’m trying to do this...’ Next thing he’s sitting beside the head coach for Australia at test matches. He found an area he was passionate about and USC supported him.”

It’s this commitment to students and staff that has kept people like Mr Barker in. “USC has become nationally recognised in areas such as Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) accreditation, working with elite athletes and being home base for the national high performance Paralympic swimming program.” He said. “To have all of these features here, so that a young person on the Sunshine Coast, using USC’s facilities to train for the once-every-12-years British and Irish Lions Test Series.”

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demographics, our community, while gaining national and, in some cases, international respect.”

Elite athletes attracted to the Coast’s moderate weather, environmental diversity and lack of bigotry distractions soon developed links with the University. Its early sport science testing with the Australian women’s water polo team, for example, saw a spike in the popularity of water polo in local schools resulting in many state and national age champions. With the Coast’s landscape defined by ocean surf, tidal rivers, lakes and canals, it’s no surprise that water sports were discernable. The opening of the Olympic-standard USC Pool in 2011 was a catalyst for teaching, research and industry engagement, including the establishment of Swimming Australia’s High Performance Paralympics program to connect top swimmers with student researchers and expert staff. The peak pool recently contributed $1.5 million over five years to the program.

A photo taken during the pool’s opening in 2011 showed the breadth of talent supporting the University.

“We’re creating athletes and a coach education environment but most importantly we’re providing practical cases where USC students can learn from real-life experiences, whether they want to research or work in sport, exercise physiology, rehabilitation, nutrition, psychology, occupational therapy or other health areas,” said Professor Burkett, who is also on the board of the Queensland Academy of Sport.

Research at USC has been backed by its Centre for Healthy Activities, Sport and Exercise (CHASE), established in 2006 to specialise in preventative health and rehabilitation, as well as the enhancement of sports performance. By 2015, USC Sport facilities included a $10 million indoor stadium with courts for ball sports, badminton and futsal; playing fields for rugby union and league, AFL and soccer; and an athletics track approved by the International Association of Athletics Federations. The USC Athletic Track is used by the community.

When Swedish personal trainer Cecilia (Cicci) Severin arrived on campus in 2011, she had no idea that soccer – and in particular the groin pain commonly suffered by its kickers – would become her Honours degree forte. “I hadn’t played football (soccer) since I was eight,” she recalled. Ms Severin enrolled in USC’s sport and exercise science program without a strong sense of direction, but with her father’s expectation that she would get a university degree in Australia. “He’s pretty excited about it now,” she laughed in 2014, after she not only topped her grade in First Class Honours but also won a scholarship to study a PhD in rehabilitation at the University.

By November, she was in Qatar accepting an invitation to present her findings to the First World Conference on Groin Pain in Athletes. Last year, she was one of the speakers at USC’s Friday Night Sports Talks, a series of lively public information sessions hosted by the USC Basketball Club.

Ms Severin’s research identified differences in the kicking biomechanics of players with groin pain, compared to those without the injury. “The motion lab here was fantastic for recording the pelvic and hip joint kinematics of the players,” she said. Supplied by senior academics with industry expertise, sport scientist Dr Mark Sayers and physiotherapist Dan Mellifont, Ms Severin’s study was expected to inform further USC research, given its relevance to kicking across other football codes.

Dr Sayers now coordinates the sport and exercise science program, a decade after he joined the University while gaining international renown as biomechanist and special skills coach for the New Zealand All Blacks rugby union team. “Ultimately, this research is working towards developing a screening test to prevent groin pain, which could benefit many sports,” Dr Sayers said. Mr Mellifont and his wife, Dr Rebecca Mellifont, a Senior Lecturer in Anatomy and former sport scientist for the Australian Paralympic Swim Team, have also spent the past decade at USC helping students achieve their goals.

Ms Severin, who came to the Sunshine Coast not for the beaches but for a career, said USC had inspired her to work in injury prevention and rehabilitation. “This may sound weird but it’s not necessarily the location keeping me here, it’s just that I absolutely love what I’m doing,” she said. “I love the research side of things. I love tutoring at USC. I love working with football clubs. I love the people here.”

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Professor Burkett, whose research covers diverse facets of human health and performance, has long promoted the links between sport and health via multidisciplinary teaching and research at USC. “The two areas connect easily because they’re both about assessing humans, whether for health or sport outcomes,” he said. “If someone has a knee operation, we want to improve their function so they can walk and do the daily tasks of living. If that person is an athlete, we want to improve their function so they can compete in their sport.

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Many graduates have combined the two fields with great success. Local representative cricketer John Turnbull, for example, turned his love for exercise physiology - developed at USC – into a career dedicated to helping injured and ill people.

Mark Sayers, whose doctorate is investigating aquatic therapy, said she aspired to work in professional sports. “This university has provided me with the experience and exposure I need to get there, and its support for my PhD will make a huge difference to my career opportunities.”

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Global research shows links between children who can't move well and health issues such as obesity and diabetes.

"Global research shows links between children who can't move well and health issues such as obesity and diabetes," Dr McKeown said later. "With increasing technology, safety issues and environmental restrictions, many children no longer grow up with a movement-based approach to fun and daily activity. To provide children with these basic foundations we must first understand the competencies required to develop this physical literacy." Sunshine Coast Grammar School's Head of Primary Paul Oleg said the research was making a difference to the lives of students now and into the future. "Children who are physically skilled are more confident, participate more, and are more likely to continue with physical pursuits later in life," Mr Oleg said.

The quest to advance public health through exercise and activity has been championed on and off campus by USC Sport, coordinated by Gary Moore. Individual athletes and teams representing the University compete as the USC Spartans, with fast-growing success in Australian University Games events. Students and staff enjoy the facilities and regular social games like futsal, basketball and badminton.

USC Activate is a rapidly growing outdoor recreation club that organises weekend adventure activities such as kayaking and bush hikes. Hundreds of staff joined a new fitness membership drive in 2014, organised by the Human Resources division. The USC Sport Clinic provides performance and injury prevention assessments and programs for amateur and elite athletes from across the state, while dozens of regional organisations use the track, stadium, pool and gym.

In 2014, USC academics and the Sunshine Coast Sports Federation hosted a sport education conference to provide the latest information on practices and research to delegates from across the country. Topics included the role of sport scientists in the wake of a national controversy about supplement programs in the NRL, strategies for keeping females fit and involved in sporting groups, and the importance of developing physical literacy in children.

The latter was based on a successful project which had immediate application in schools as well as implications for future generations. USC Research Fellow Dr Mark McKeown, an exercise physiologist, strength coach and long-time USC staff member who also did his PhD at the University, led a team that screened and analysed the movement competencies of 1,000 local children. The team was later welcomed back into the schools to recommend changes to the physical education curriculum.

USC also runs the Sunshine Coast Sports Hall of Fame, which features Professor Burkett (1998) alongside Coast-based sports stars of the past 25 years, from motor sports Chris Vermeulen (2013) and tennis player Pat Rafter (2007) to surf lifesavers from the Holmes, Stokes and Kenny families (event patriarch Hayden Kenny, 1993 Hall of Famer and 2013 USC Honorary Senior Fellow, in ‘Graduating by degrees’). Marayke Jonkers is not only in the Hall of Fame for her swimming performances at three Paralympic Games including Sydney 2000, she was also USC’s inaugural Outstanding Alumnus of the Year. She received the accolade in 2005, the same year she was named Queensland Young Achiever of the Year. The graduate of degrees in Arts (Communication) and Social Science (Community Work) has since founded a charity to help athletes with disabilities pursue their sporting potential. She inspired another USC graduate cohort after she was invited to address the October 2015 graduation ceremony. Ms Jonkers smiled from her wheelchair on stage before the crowded stadium and declared, ‘You don’t need to stand up to stand out.’

Professor Burkett is among the visionaries who intend to keep USC at the forefront of advances in health and sport. His commitment is personal, his own body a testament to the power of technology. In October 2014, he told a national television audience on the SBS ‘Insight’ program how he had recently become the first Australian osseointegration patient of Iraqi-trained orthopaedic surgeon Dr Munjed Al Muderis. The surgery implanted a titanium device directly into Professor Burkett’s right femur to enable a safer, more comfortable and stable attachment for the prosthesis.

It was a pretty scary thought but I’m glad I did it.”

"It was a pretty scary thought but I’m glad I did it" Professor Burkett told interviewer Jenny Brockie on the show, titled Cyborgs. “It’s literally changed my life. It’s made a tremendous difference ... The beauty is you twist and your whole foot will follow and go where you are and you feel everything on the ground ... You feel it’s an extension of your body.” Humour intact, he added that the technology wasn’t exactly robotic: “It doesn’t move by itself so you can’t say, ‘Take me to the bar to get another drink’."

Professor Burkett remains in demand as a commentator on hot topics relating to the integration of technology in sport. A 2013 report by the International Paralympic Committee, of which he is a sub-committee member, described as “powerful” his opening speech to that year’s IPC’s conference in Germany in the wake of controversy after the man’s sprints at the London 2012 Games, involving South African ‘Blade Runner’ Oscar Pistorius. Professor Burkett’s talk addressed the battle of tradition versus technology and whether new equipment in Paralympic sport was performance-enhancing or simply necessary for performance. USC researchers will join others around the world to continue the debate this year in the countdown to the Rio Olympics."
Fundraisers help USC splash into sport science

Fifteen years after USC opened, it gained a pool – a $2.1 million, heated, 10-lane, 50-metre, Olympic-standard pool – for teaching and research as well as year-round training for athletes and recreational use by the public. The pool’s construction was watched via live web cam and when the official opening by then Queensland Sports Minister Phil Reeves was celebrated in the Sunshine Coast Daily newspaper in October 2011, the jubilant faces of elite swimmers and local children belied the painstaking effort that had gone into securing the facility.

“We had a two-week training camp to open the pool, which could offer a whole range of testing using Queensland’s first remote-controlled underwater/above water synchronised camera,” recalls Professor Brendan Burikett. “We had the French Olympic team including then world record holder Alain Bernard, Australian Olympic champions Libby Trickett and Jess Schipper, the Australian Paralympic swim team who moved from Canberra to base themselves here, and our youngsters of the future. We had made a decision to value-add to the community and this was the result.

“We’d been applying for funding and at meetings everyone was concerned about our odds of making it happen. We wanted to do it for the community, not as a cash cow. We wanted to create an environment that would benefit the community and take the Sunshine Coast to the next level. And look at it now,” Burikett says, peering down from the Tower at the hub of activity around the pool one summer’s morning. “It’s helped bring in more than $1.5 million in grants. We’ve had 60 peer-reviewed research papers that relate to swimming. We’ve had eight PhD graduates working in swimming.”

The campaign for pool funding is remembered with pride – and some angst – by USC’s former and current Vice-Chancellors, Professors Paul Thomas and Greg Hill, long-time facilities manager Mark Bradley and former USC Foundation executive officer Andrew Pentland, and by community donors and in-kind supporters including Hall Contracting and builder Trevor Harch.

In 2010, when USC started fundraising $300,000 to add to its own contribution matching the State Government’s $600,000 pledge, Professor Thomas expressed delight at seeing the project progress after many years. “A pool like this would have been seen as a luxury in the University’s early days, but today many of our academic and research programs will benefit enormously,” he said.

Even when the concrete was poured and the ceramic tiles were being installed in March 2011, another fundraiser called the USC Alumni Challenge was underway. Foundation board members offered to personally donate $50,000 if graduates could raise $10,000 in three months. 2004 business graduate, Coastlink BMW dealer principal Tristan Kurz, covered both angles as the first USC graduate member of the Foundation board. Tristan, who received an Outstanding Alumnus award in 2012 for his corporate philanthropic leadership, funded the pool blocks as icing on the cake. Local philanthropist David Kirk recalled how the campaign’s final fervour prompted him to donate to ensure USC met its target.

By 2015, after four years of pool operations and with new generation stars like world champion breaststroker Blake Cochrane embedded in training and studying at USC, Greg Hill was looking to green-light further master-planned stages of what will become an Aquatic Centre, including a second pool for hydrotherapy.

Mark Bradley recalls the pool as one of the toughest facilities to fund in the University’s first 20 years. “The money just wasn’t around and we had to put our energy into other priorities,” he said. USC had already won $5 million towards the sports stadium from the Australian Government in the wake of Prime Minister John Howard introducing voluntary student unionism in 2006, and the University’s biggest ever public fundraising campaign, Building Excellence, had reached its $5 million goal in 2008 for projects including the sports tower. “So the pool had many starts and many failures to launch. It got down to the pointy end of the date where we had to either accept the government grant and match it, plus extra, or we lost everything. I remember the meeting where we all finally said, ‘We just have to do it.’”

‘What’s a senior fellow? We’re both carpenters, aren’t we?’

Trevor Harch, whose co-owned company Evans Harch built much of the campus over two decades, was at that meeting. “This is a funny story because it started in 1999,” he says. “That’s when Pat Evans and I got made honorary senior fellows of the University. I said to Pat, What’s a senior fellow? We’re both carpenters, aren’t we? And Pat joked in his Irish way, ‘I’ll tell you one thing, it’s going to cost us a dollar.’” Their business name now appears on an honour roll of USC supporters displayed at the entrance to the whole sports complex.

Trevor said helping drive the construction of the stadium, tower and pool was one of his biggest highlights. “We worked closely with the University and the contractors on design and construction to really save on price. Then we put up our hand to make sure the pool happened, and lots of other local people and companies were donating money or in-kind, and all of a sudden we were away.”

And for Pat, that honorary award for services to the University, received at its first graduation ceremony in 1999, remains a treasured highlight.

David Kirk’s decade of contributing to USC through his Kirk Foundation was recognised last year when he became an honorary senior fellow. “I am passionate about education, so funding scholarships for USC was an excellent fit,” he recalled at the April 2015 graduation ceremony. The impact of his generosity was obvious when former scholarship recipient Jim Lee flew from Darwin to watch his mentor gain the USC award. Jim, who in 2009 completed his third USC degree – a PhD in science, is now an academic at Charles Darwin University. “I just wanted to show my appreciation because that support made all the difference to my confidence and my ability to focus on studies instead of outside paid work,” said Jim, whose USC research analysed the capability of micro-technologies to monitor running and walking gait, and who recently spent a year in Japan on a research fellowship from The Japan Society for the Promotion of Science.

The pool proved integral to an extraordinary year of achievements for clinical exercise science student and London Paralympic gold medallist Blake Cochrane in 2014. Blake had moved to the Sunshine Coast in the year the pool opened to train with the High Performance Paralympic Squad and by early 2014 he was gearing up for his second Commonwealth Games, to be held in Glasgow.

“That semester I was at the USC pool every day except Sunday and at USC five times a week for my degree,” he said. “It was tough but it worked quite well. I trained early, went to class, went home for a rest (to nearby Buderim) and headed back for training in the afternoon.”

“One of the best components of my degree was relating what I learnt in the classroom to my training as an athlete. Growing up, I had no idea why coaches were working us so hard or giving us so many k’s. Now I have the knowledge to apply the theory,” Blake also had the talent and commitment to earn a list of accolades that made him a media favourite. These included a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM), a bronze medal in Glasgow, Sunshine Coast Senior Sports Star of the Year, and a back-to-back win in the USC Sunshine Coast Sportsperson of the Year awards. This year, 2016, he is on target for the Rio Paralympics.

Olympic effort gets region on track

In 1997, as Australia was gearing up for the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, the Sunshine Coast’s sporting fraternity saw a golden opportunity to finally get a world-standard track and field facility to take the region to the next level in both competitive and recreational sport. As elite teams around the world eyed Australia, the region’s new university had just built a large distinctive clubhouse (known as the Uni Club) next to its playing field and was offering a slice of its sprawling grounds at Sippy Downs for a synthetic running track, to be shared with the community.

Coast residents and visitors of all ages and skill levels now run, jog, throw and jump on the resulting 15-lane track equipped for hurdles, sprints, pole vault, high jump, long jump, triple jump, discus, hammer-throw, javelin, shotput, and disabled throw events. It was completed in 1999, within months of the institution officially becoming an independent university through a special Act of Parliament.

“Our sports precinct memorandum of understanding with USC was quite innovative, focusing on sharing facilities,” recalls John Loshkairt, former principal of Chancellor State College next to the tertiary campus. “The MOU meant my students had their athletics carnivals on a track where Olympians trained.”
I changed from sport and exercise science to a Bachelor of Clinical Exercise Science so I could work in rehabilitation, using exercise as a tool. I’ve always had a desire to help people and decided to merge that with my heavy interest in sport and exercise. My parents encouraged our family to be very active and I’ve played cricket and soccer all my life.

I was interested in physiotherapy but, through my USC degree, I developed a real passion for exercise physiology. At first my friends and family mocked the idea, in terms of job availability. But the University exposed me to a plethora of opportunities and opened my eyes to working in chronic disease management. I grew to understand the importance of what an exercise physiologist does, in dealing with people who have long-standing or lifestyle diseases.

“People with disabilities often have more capacity for a better quality of life than what others may allow them. It just takes someone willing to put in the time and effort to get them there. Empathy is front and centre. My dad’s recovering from a recent heart attack, and he’s been in a wheelchair since he had an accident when I was 12. A lot of my satisfaction comes from making a genuine change in someone’s life. When I went overseas in 2010 to study at Grand Valley State University (Michigan, US) through USC’s Global Opportunities program, I volunteered in a cardiac rehab program one day. I took a patient through some stretches and had a conversation with him. The next day in a shopping centre, he came up to me, remembered my name, introduced me to his wife and thanked me over and over for helping him out. I said I didn’t do a lot, but he talked about the impact on his life after a heart attack. The GO program gave me cultural exposure to different rehab settings and practices, and I loved it. I made lifelong friends there, including some from Norway, Germany and France. (See the world through new eyes)

"It was also an avenue for me to visit Jessica’s home country. I’d met her the year before, during her six months of study at USC, through a roommate at UniCentral (share accommodation near the campus). Jess was into rehab and sports medicine too. She had a passion for sports physiotherapy and that’s what she pursued (at UQ). We really had an impact on each other’s lives. She had a massive influence on me applying myself and I stole her away from her country!"

I finished at USC mid-year 2012 and immediately landed this job at Eden Rehabilitation Centre (a private hospital at Cooroy, near Noosa) through a student placement I did as part of the accreditation requirements of my degree. I’m really enjoying facilitating change. One of my long-term goals was to coordinate a cardiac rehab program at Eden and I achieved it within a year. And I can still pursue my sports ambitions, as that’s what she pursued (at UQ). We really had an impact on each other’s lives. She had a massive influence on me applying myself and I stole her away from her country!

I went back to Albany to finish my Bachelor in Biological Sciences and when I returned I worked at community and club sports events, as well as with the Brisbane Lions (the city’s representative Australian Rules football team) while I was studying. I gained my Master’s degree in physiology in 2013 and accepted a full-time job as a physiotherapist on the Sunshine Coast, at Kawana Sportscare, before graduation. I’ve worked with the general population and sportspeople including the Sunshine Coast Falcons (Queensland Cup rugby league team) and Melbourne Storm under-20s.

I enjoy the problem-solving aspect of helping people feel better and move better through physiotherapy. As I was growing up, I had several musculoskeletal injuries from sport and this sparked my interest in rehabilitation. I love making a difference in someone’s condition but also giving them the tools to take control of their own recovery.

“I’m quite a motivated, independent person and I’m proud I’ve done all this. My family came here for the first time in 2013 to spend Christmas with us. Mum told me then that she doesn’t think I’ll ever live anywhere else because it’s all the things that I love in the one place. It’s right by the beach, 20 minutes’ drive to rural areas and a lot more sun than New York.”