

# Clive Barton relives the magic of the Sydney 2000 Olympics

- Samantha Newsam

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Unforgettable experience: Twenty years on, the Sydney Olympics remain a cherished memory for Tamworth shooter Clive Barton. Photo: Peter Hardin 140920PHD005

Twenty years ago today the eyes of the world were on Sydney as the biggest sporting extravaganza came to Australian shores for just the second time.

Among the thousands of athletes competing for Olympic glory was a quartet of local heroes - water polo duo Craig Miller and Nathan Thomas, hockey star Michael York, who would go on to lead the Kookaburras to the bronze medal, and shooter Clive Barton.

For York it was his fourth and final Olympics but for Miller, Thomas and Barton it was their first and something they will never forget.

"It was a magical time," Barton recalled.

Although at the time he admits he probably didn't realise what a once-in-a-lifetime experience it was.

"It was my first Olympics so I sort of didn't know what to expect anyway," he said.

But as the years have gone on, and he has competed in Olympics and Commonwealth Games abroad, he has "learnt how special that home Olympics really was".

It was a moment he had long been dreaming of - he recalled sitting next to Miller in science class at Tamworth High and the pair of them joking about one day going to the Olympics - and had got a sniff of four years earlier.

After storming into contention for the team for Atlanta by cleaning up at the nationals that year, he went on to just miss out.

But it had planted the seed.

"I thought well that's it, I'm going to have a real dig at this and finished in the number one spot for the Sydney team," he said.



Clive with wife Renee, right, and daughter Monique at the unveiling of the Tamworth Regional Olympian Honour Wall back in 2013.

He said the opening ceremony is something he will "never forget"; the excitement of everyone getting dressed at the village and then the "spine-tingling" moment of walking out to the deafening roar of 110,000 people.

"I remember us all lining up and you could hear the crowd roaring in the distance for other countries.

"And then we marched down to the tunnel to go underneath the stadium and pop out, and Laurie Lawrence started the Waltzing Matilda chant," he recalled.

"I don't know how many athletes there were at that Olympics but there was a lot. There was a big line and we're all in unison singing Waltzing Matilda and the echo of it going down in underneath the stadium and all the volunteers clapping and cheering us.

"I was towards the back and then you just hear it getting drowned out by the roar of the crowd spotting us coming out for the first time."

It was just incredible, he said, and made the hairs stand up on the back of his neck.

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But the flame had barely stopped burning in the night sky and he was back to work on the farm. With the skeet competition not starting for another seven days - it was the last shooting event of the games - Barton decided to head back to Tamworth for the days inbetween.

"We had the option of staying there in the village but I just thought that might have been a bit of a distraction," he said.

"When I shot well overseas I worked out that I was much better off delaying travel and turning up in enough time to get over jet lag but not enough time to get there and get bored and distracted."

"It was a bit surreal really, I went to the opening ceremony, which was unbelievable, and jumped on a plane and came home and went back to work and watched the Olympics on the tv, and then turned up a couple of days before my event."

No stranger to competing in big events, Barton admits he wasn't prepared for how different an Olympics is, especially a home Olympics.

"I remember walking out onto the ground an hour and a half before the first shot was fired," he said.

"Where usually you walk out there and there's birds chirping and nothing else, the stadiums were chock-a-block full and there were people I knew, local people, yelling out different stuff to me."

"And it blew me away."



Eye on the prize: Clive gets in some practice before the 2012 Olympics. Photo: Robert Chappel.

"I'm trying to work out what sort of lenses I'm going to put on my glasses and all of a sudden I just felt the weight of the world on my shoulders."

And while it was special to compete in front of his family and friends, there was a pressure associated with that that he hadn't really experienced before.

"The first day I tried to shut it all out, tried to do what I'd normally do at a shoot and I shot a 71 out of 75," Barton said.

Not the performance he was hoping for, it meant he had to "shoot the lot" (50 out of 50) the next day to have any chance of making the final.

"I remember getting back and I was talking to my room-mate about the pressure and I just sort of said well I'm going to approach this totally differently.

"I'd heard it somewhere .... you've got to embrace all of this, enjoy it rather than try and block it out," he said.

"So that's what I did. I just sort of went with everything the crowd was throwing at me and smiled all the way round and I shot 50 straight."

He went on to just miss the final, finishing equal 14th on countback.

Another standout memory is watching Cathy Freeman win gold in the 400m, "which was special", and just the general atmosphere.

"What made those games was the volunteers, the volunteers were just unreal, and everywhere you went everyone was happy," he said.