Entry type: Person
Entry ID: AWE2282

Camplin, Alisa Peta

(1974 -)

Born	19741110, Melbourne Victoria Australia
Occupation	Olympian, Skier

Summary

Alisa Camplin is Australia's first female Winter Olympic gold medallist, dual Olympic medallist, World Champion, World Record Holder and two times WC Grand Prix Champion.

In 2017 Camplin was a director on four prominent Australian Boards – including the Australian Sports Commission, Royal Children's Hospital Foundation, Olympic Winter Institute of Australia and the Collingwood Football Club.

Details

The daughter of Geoffrey and Jennifer Camplin, Alisa Peta Camplin was born in Melbourne's Mercy Hospital in 1974. With her two younger sisters, Georgina and Alexandrea, she was raised in Viewbank in north-east Melbourne. The family was sport-mad. Camplin recalls, 'every week our whole family was at swimming lessons, ballet recitals, tennis lessons, hockey training and Little Athletics competitions all over the state. It was like being part of a full-time live-in sports camp'. A tomboy from the beginning, Alisa loved to play cricket and football, run through the paddocks, swim, ride bikes and play war games with the ten boys in her neighbourhood. None of them could beat her in a running race, even with a head start. At school she insisted on wearing the boys' uniform and tried out for the boys' cricket team. Aged five she was enchanted by the opening ceremony of the Moscow Olympics – here the dream was born. One day she would represent her country at the Olympic Games.

By the age of seven, Camplin was breaking all the Little Athletics club records and beating the other girls by over 20 metres. Asked if she wanted to run with the boys, she accepted the challenge but it was tough competition and her first taste of losing a race. Determined to win again, she began training in the back paddock and before long was winning against the boys and taking out the Open Female All Stars events: 'When I was younger, I rarely crossed a finish line without throwing up or dry-retching from giving so much – I always wanted to be the fastest, to finish first, to record my best time, to beat my opponent or break a record.' Camplin won several state titles in the 800m and 1500m track events.

Camplin began at Melbourne's Methodist Ladies College in 1987 at the age of twelve. There she took up gymnastics – 'I loved to tumble, jump, flip and twist, but I had neither flexibility nor grace' – and was competing in her first state titles by 1989, winning three silver medals. The following year she attended trials for the national titles, but had to pull out because of stress fractures in her lower back. Forced to abandon the sport, she 'followed a natural ex-gymnast's progression into diving' in 1991, attracted by the acrobatics. The move was short-lived as good coaches were hard to come by.

In the summer of 1992, having completed her secondary studies, Camplin began sailing Hobie Cat catamarans with her best friend Kynwynn Jones. The girls crewed together in 1993 at the Port Stephens National Championships and finished second. When Sydney was announced as Host City for the 2000 Olympic Games, Camplin received a call from her old athletics coach, asking if she would be prepared to train with a view to competing in the marathon. She duly began to train but remembers 'my heart was not one hundred per cent in it'.

In 1994 – a fateful year – she attended a ski show in Melbourne. A trampoline had been set up by Mt Buller's freestyle skiing program, Team Buller, and members of the audience were invited to try aerial manoeuvres in the trampoline harness. Camplin's acrobatic skills were well honed. Encouraged by her friends, she 'got in the rig and flipped around a bit'. She was soon approached by Geoff Lipshut (later CEO of the Olympic Winter Institute) and aerial skier Jacqui Cooper with an offer to begin training with the first Australian Aerial Skiing Development Squad. Camplin's dream was still very much alive, and after some consideration, she took up the offer with the sole aim of making it to the Olympic Games.

What followed was a long, hard slog. Camplin had been awarded an academic scholarship and entry into Swinburne University's

Bachelor of Information Technology degree, and she was determined to pursue her studies. It was in her second year at university that she began skiing and had to take on four jobs to help pay for ski lessons, mountain accommodation and petrol. She studied; coached gymnastics at MLC; worked for ANZ Bank; delivered pizzas; and cleaned houses. Every Friday night for three years she drove to Mt Buller at 10:00pm so as she could train over the weekend. It was not an easy ride:

I endured ridicule from nine year olds who were better than me, plus spite and bitterness from those who thought my motivation for joining their sport was wrong. I also tolerated contempt from the alpine elite, as many of them thought my terrible skills and fancy team jacket made a mockery of their sport… It took seven years of my eight-year campaign before people began to believe that I might actually be able to win an Olympic Gold medal.

Constantly fighting negative feedback on the ski fields, Camplin used the criticism as motivation: 'Every person who said I wouldn't make it stirred the fire in my belly and helped me train that much harder.' After a shaky start in competitions at Lake Placid and, in 1997, at Breckenridge, Colorado, where coaches told her she was 'the worst aerialist at training', Camplin's fight began to pay off. She finished seventh in her first Aerial World Championship event in 1999, and fourth in the World Cup finals in 2000/2001.

2002 was Camplin's year. At the Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, despite multiple fractures in both ankles, Camplin won gold in the aerial skiing event, scoring 193.47 for her triple twisting somersault or 'back full/double full'. She had asked her family not to come to the event as she felt it would be too expensive for them, and would place added pressure on her – but her mother and sister Georgina had hidden themselves in the crowd, and Camplin's joy was doubled when they surprised her after her win. Back home, Australia Post designed a stamp in her honour. Camplin and Steven Bradbury became Australia's first Winter Olympic gold medallists that year.

Camplin had achieved greatness but the battle was not yet over. She suffered from depression – or 'post-success burnout' – after the Olympic Games and had to fight (ill-informed) accusations that she was something of a one hit wonder. In the 2002/2003 season, Camplin won the World Championship and the World Cup title, breaking a world record in the process. She was named the 2002 Female Athlete of the Year, and received the 2002 Donald Bradman Award for the athlete who has most inspired the nation. In 2002 she also received the Kitty McEwan Award for Victorian Sportswoman of the Year and the Governor's Award for Victorian Sportsperson of the Year (she received both awards again in 2004). In 2003, she was selected as an Australian Institute of Sport all-time top twenty-one athlete. Rino Grollo and Mt Buller named a new building at the World Cup jump site the 'Alisa Camplin Winter Sports Centre'. Camplin had proven her point spectacularly.

The stress of competing and meeting expectations meant that Camplin developed stomach ulcers and had a gastrectomy in 2003. She took some time out from skiing to pursue other interests. She worked with the Seven Network; represented Australia at the IOC Convention in Greece; gave much of her time to work with charities; spoke to school students and corporate professionals across Australia; joined the Board of Directors at MLC; continued employment with IBM and began consulting with PricewaterhouseCoopers while the company supplied professional services to the Melbourne 2006 Commonwealth Games Committee.

Camplin recommenced training for the 2004/2005 season, but snapped the anterior cruciate ligament in her right knee and underwent surgery for a knee reconstruction, including a hamstring graft. Injury is inevitable in such a dangerous sport, and Camplin later recalled: 'I have broken my collarbone, dislocated my shoulder, broken my hand, broken multiple ribs, ripped my Achilles tendon, dislocated my sternum from my collarbone, fractured both ankles, torn my knee ligaments twice, suffered nine concussions and also had a full knee reconstruction.' After six months of rehabilitation, training began again and Camplin competed in the 2006 Torino Winter Olympics, winning bronze with a score of 191.39.

Camplin has retired from aerial skiing. She loves reading the classics and biographies of political figures, she is an amateur painter, and she has designed a range of thermal underwear. She continues her involvement with charities (including the Melbourne Citymission) and her television work has included commentary for the Athens Olympics and judging for *Dancing on Ice* . In 2006 Camplin began conducting ski tours to Colorado, including nine-day tours to Aspen and Steamboat Springs.

Events

2003 - 2003
For service to sport as a Gold Medallist at the Salt Lake City 2002 Winter Olympic Games

2002 - 2002
Freestyle Skiing

2006 - 2006
Freestyle Skiing

2019 - 2019
Member of the Order of Australia (AM): For significant service to the community through support for paediatric health care.

Published resources

Book
High Flyer, Camplin, Alisa, 2005

Newspaper Article
Camplin pins hopes on donor tendon surgery, Magnay, Jacquelin, 2005

Snow Queen Alisa Camplin, Hawkins, Joanne, 2006

Sound recording
Alisa Camplin's Bronze Jump, El-Chami, Margaret, 2006

Resource
Australia at the Games, Australian Olympic Committee, 2006,
http://corporate.olympics.com.au/index.cfm?p=25

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition
She's Game: Women Making Australian Sporting History, Australian Women's Archives Project, 2007,
http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/sg/sport-home.html

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