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## Isaac's Games-search

Koori Mail, Lismore



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FOR Isaac Maynard, it was graduation-meets-perfect-career-opportunity.

The 24-year-old Bond University Bachelor of Exercise and Sport Science alumnus is out to make sure as many Indigenous Queensland sporting talents as possible take and make their mark at the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Timing was everything.

"As I was preparing to graduate last year, I heard the Queensland Academy of Sport (QAS) was ramping up a statewide athlete talent search and I wanted to work with them on that," the proud Wiradjuri Worimi man from Mudgee said.

"The program takes aspiring athletes aged between 13-23 through a series of physical fitness tests and other challenges and those selected go through a 12-month

development phase to become a QAS supported athlete.

"For the past year it's been running in partnership with Deadly Choices, and that for me is a huge attraction.

"I get to see how the Academy is working to unearth sporting talent wherever it is."

Over 4,800 young athletes have taken part in state-wide trials with over 250 athletes currently taking part in the year-long QAS-supported sports programs.

Of these, nine have been fast-tracked into a new QAS talent support program, designed to develop athletes considered genuine medal prospects in LA 2028 and Brisbane 2032.

Maynard says the main priority is improving cultural

accessibility of these opportunities for the Indigenous cohort.

"Retention is a problem partly because once the young people go back to community, many are uncontactable and that's

something that needs more attention," he said.

"What I want to do is look at those sorts of barriers and how we can bring about change.

"I'd really like to get into communities in the more remote areas that are struggling with the greatest barriers, whether they be technological or otherwise, and see where we can do things better."

Maynard says it's a delicate balance between improving sport opportunity for kids in the most distant areas and what can realistically be provided as sporting pathways.

For him it's about the face-to-face and asking Indigenous youth what they need and want to see happen with their sporting futures.

"In the past a lot of research has been done *on* them and not *with* them and that's an important distinction that we're looking to flip to have things work a lot more collaboratively and much more their way," he said.

"That might include everything from providing access to equipment and facilities to coaching and other forms of mentoring.

"When remote communities are visited a lot of yarning techniques, reciprocal storytelling, are used where we listen closely to what they say and encourage them to tell us about the change they want," Maynard said.

"Storytelling is something our Mobs have done for thousands of years, and it is how we

communicate, understand and respect each other.

"And having that collaborative process from start to finish gives the athletes ownership and control over their own knowledges and destinies, and that's vitally important.

"Sport for us is about having a modern-day corroboree where people can get together, share their love of sport, maintain their cultural ties and give their culture the opportunity to thrive."



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Isaac Maynard from Bond University is on the look-out for potential Olympic athletes.