



# Great minds think big

The great nations of the future will be those that export the products of their creativity. Here lies a potential problem for Australia. To export the products of our creativity, we must first be perceived by others as innovators. It is not enough merely to be creative.

This is our potential vulnerability. So we must break the mindset of those countries that wrongly perceive Australia as a place only of kangaroos, beaches, minerals and sports.

The 2000 Olympics Games is an opportune moment to break that mindset and to do so under the spotlight of world attention. This Sunday and Monday, Australia will showcase our intellectual prowess during the *What Makes a Champion?* conference, staged by the Centre for the Mind, a joint venture of the Australian National University and the University of Sydney.

A cast of leaders and researchers, including that champion of the human spirit, Nelson Mandela, will unravel the ingredients of success.

The Centre for the Mind is passionate about what it means to be human. We see championship, and I mean championship in the broadest sense, as a fundamental aspect of the mind, the element responsible for advancing civilisation. Further, the Centre believes everyone is a potential champion, so we are compelled to understand the factors that nurture and amplify great achievement. Just imagine the competitive advantage for those who possess such knowledge.

Apart from Mandela, the contributing champions include adventurers, Nobel Prize winners, entrepreneurs, corporate leaders, sporting legends, writers and politicians. Together we will explore all aspects of championship, from the subtle – is it modulated by sex, culture and society, the role of the non-conscious? – to the extreme, such as how far will we go to win, how do we educate or select for it, the role of luck and how important is applause?

The ultimate question is whether anyone can be a champion and, if so, how? Intriguing aspects about champions have



I couldn't pretend to enumerate the categories or evaluate them in some hierarchal order. But why should I! Ultimately the process of conferring championship is a highly personal evaluation and one woven into our dreams and aspirations.

For example, I have enormous respect for anyone who builds something significant from nothing. That feat requires orchestrating a symphony of diverse talents.

But my favourite champions are those who show us how to see the world differently, especially when it shatters our preconceptions – for example, Gandhi, by demonstrating the awesome power of peaceful confrontation; Copernicus, with his proof that the earth revolves around the sun despite the appearance to the contrary; and Roger Bannister in breaking the four-minute mile,

presumed by some to have been a physiological barrier.

In my opinion, what makes a champion is a champion mindset. The world is viewed in its totality through this mindset. Great achievers often have a vision that they will succeed and sometimes even the steps leading to their success.

It is our mindsets that ultimately limit our expectations of ourselves and circumscribe our boundaries. It is our mindsets that determine whether we have the courage to challenge others and to expand our horizons.

The celebrated Sigmund Freud aptly captured this sentiment when he said: "I am not really a man of science, not an observer, not an experimenter and not a thinker. I am nothing but...an adventurer...a conquistador with the boldness and the tenacity of that type of being."

In other words, Freud didn't think he was especially skilled or talented. Rather, he had the courage to put himself into the race to begin with. He had a champion mindset.

**Professor Allan Snyder is the Director of the Centre for the Mind and Chairman of the What Makes a Champion Organising Committee.**

## Opinion

If you believe you can do it, you probably can



**Allan Snyder**

already been revealed from our research. Immediately before making breakthroughs, some individuals reported that something big was about to happen. Is this associated with the familiar incubation period where problems are resolved non-consciously?

Equally fascinating is the report of heightened sexual sensation during intense periods of concentration. Is there a link between creativity and sexuality?

Inevitably, I am asked my views on championship. To me, champions are ubiquitous.