

## CAN-DO ATTITUDE

# McCann's medal will inspire team

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JOHANNESBURG: Kirsten McCann's world championship gold medal came as a relief for Roger Barrow as he feared anything less would have forced his long-time protégé into retirement.

But Barrow had nothing to fear as McCann showed her 'winning mentality' to win South Africa's fourth senior medal at the global showpiece when she won the women's lightweight single sculls title in Sarasota.

"She needed it, if she hadn't won or come fourth or fifth she might have retired, and that is where a lot of the other athletes from Rio where we had a lot of fourths and fifths," Barrow said.

"It was a tough pill to swallow but to be a world champion gives her so much enthusiasm and confidence to say 'the next Olympics is on, and let me give it a full go'.

"The result was more important for Kirsten than for the team, myself or anybody else."

Barrow and McCann's relationship goes back to when the national coach started a rowing academy at the Tuks High Performance Centre in Pretoria in 2005.

Three of the athletes, including London and Rio Olympic medallists James Thompson and Shaun Keeling, who was part of his original academy, have gone on to win medals at the global showpiece.

Barrow has distinguished himself as the architect of South Africa's ultra-successful rowing programme which has produced medals at the last two Olympic Games and three consecutive world championships.

McCann's world title was another feather in his cap but Barrow believes any coach could have coached her to such heights because of her can-do attitude.

"She does what the programme says, she is always



FIST OF GOLD: The Lightweight Women's Single Sculls champion Kirsten McCann of South Africa.

Picture: EPA

looking for more speed, I've worked out she has only missed two sessions this whole season.

"I think that is why she is world champion...but it is awesome to work with someone so driven, I think anyone can coach her and get the same result."

Proving to be the epitome of perfectionism, McCann celebrated her victory the next day by going back onto the water to work on a few flaws from her race.

"After the winning most people just want to get into the pub and take it off, she asked me if she could go training and we went and I coached her," Barrow said of his charge.

"It was weird having won and to still work, so we started on a few things she hadn't got right in the pre-season before.

"She's got that winning mentality, so it is an awesome thing to work with but it just needs to be tempered."

McCann's victory came as

a relief as his other boats did not quite hit the mark, with the men's four crew performing well below their potential.

A loaded boat that included Rio and London Olympic medallists Lawrence Brittain and John Smith only managed to finish 13th overall after winning first in the C-final.

The men's pair crew of Leo Davis and Sandro Torrente finished second while the men's lightweight double sculls duo of Vaughn Botes

and Nic Oberholzer were sixth, and single sculler Kyle Schoonbee crossing third in their respective C-finals.

Barrow believed McCann's achievement would not only be an inspiration to other female athletes but to the rowing squad.

"I don't really separate coaching women and men, I believe they should be treated the same and I treat her just like I treat the guys," Barrow said.

"The guys look up to her, they can learn a lot from Kirsten and she learns a lot from them.

"She learned a lot from Brittain and learned from them performing at the Olympics where she wanted to make sure she performed this year.

"Our whole approach is that everyone feeds off each other, it is a team and a family environment, where now she is the face and she will carry the team."