

# Kirsten's can-do attitude

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**K**IRSTEN McCann's world championship gold medal came as a relief to Roger Barrow as he feared anything less would have forced his long-time protégé into retirement.

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

"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 (are) from (the 2016 Rio (Olympics) where we had a lot of fourths and fifths," SA coach Barrow said.

"It was a tough pill to swallow but I think 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."



Lightweight single sculls rower Kirsten McCann of South Africa wins the gold medal at the World Rowing Championships at Nathan Benderson Park in Sarasota, Florida, last month.

PICTURE: EPA

Barrow and McCann's relationship goes back to when he 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 were part of his original academy, have gone on to win med-

als at the global showpiece.

Barrow is the architect of South Africa's ultra-successful rowing programme which has produced a medal at the last two Olympics and three world championships.

McCann's title was another feather in his cap but Barrow believes any coach could have guided her to such heights.

"I find her such a diligent athlete and she is a perfectionist herself, she is one of those athletes I never have to motivate," he said.

"She does what the programme says; she is always looking for more speed. She has only missed two sessions this whole season.

"I think that is why she is world champion... it is awesome to work with someone that is so driven."

McCann celebrated her victory the next day by going back onto the water to work on a few flaws from her race.

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

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

"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 was a relief as Barrow's other boats

did not quite hit the mark – the men's four crew performed 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.

Barrow believes McCann's achievement will not only be an inspiration to other women athletes but also to the entire 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.

"I think 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 Lawrence Brittain and learned from them performing at the Olympics where she wanted to make sure she performed this year.

"Our whole approach within the team 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."