

McCann's mentality earns her the gold

OCKERT DE VILLIERS

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 she once again 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 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."

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

Three of the athletes, including London and Rio Olympic medallists James Thompson and Shaun Keeling, that 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 a medal 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.

"I find her such a diligent athlete and she is a perfectionist herself, she is one of those I never have to motivate," Barrow said. "She does what the programme says, she is always looking for more speed, I've worked out this year she has only missed two sessions this whole season.

"That is why she is world champion... but it is awesome to work with someone so driven, 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.

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

