

## Priya Cooper OAM

***Paralympics Swimming Champion, Motivational Speaker, Chair of WA Institute of Sport and Deputy Chair of Disabilities Services Commission***

Born with cerebral palsy, Priya has spent most of her life in a wheelchair but has not let this stand in her way of achieving her goals in life.

Priya began swimming at a young age for therapy and later realised her potential as a competitor. It was not until 1991, whilst competing at a school carnival, she was approached to represent Western Australia. Priya competed for the first time in the National Wheelchair Games winning a staggering nine gold medals.

With the hours of long, hard training Priya went from success to success, winning 3 gold and 2 silver medals, and breaking two world records and three Paralympic records at the Barcelona Paralympics in 1992. This was her first international competition. Priya won the most medals of any Australian athlete at the Games, and as a result was given the honour of carrying the flag for Australia at the closing ceremony. On arriving back in Australia she was awarded an Order of Australia Medal for her services to sport, and became an Australia Day Ambassador.

Priya then set her sights on the World Swimming Championships in Malta in 1994. Priya competed in five events, won 5 gold medals and set 4 world records as well as captaining the Australian team. The lead up to the 1996 Paralympic Games in Atlanta saw Priya compete in 1995 in the Pre-Paralympic Swimming trials in Atlanta winning eight gold medals in eight events and setting one world record. These results focused much attention on her for the subsequent Paralympic Games in 1996.

At the 10th Paralympic Games in Atlanta, Priya led the charge for Australia winning 5 gold medals, 1 silver and 1 bronze medal, as well as setting three world records and five Paralympic records. Far exceeding her efforts in Barcelona four years earlier. She was also selected to captain the entire Australian Paralympic team, and once again won the highest number of medals of any Australian athlete.

In 1988 Priya competed in the British National Swimming Championships and won 4 gold medals, a bronze medal, and set a world record.



In 1999 Priya was named Young Australian of the Year for Sport, winning the award over other major sporting stars such as Pat Rafter and Ian Thorpe who were also finalists in the Sports category of this prestigious award.

Priya spent almost two years in Sydney prior to Sydney 2000 Paralympics to concentrate on her training and lifelong goal of winning gold for her country, in her country, at the Sydney 2000 Paralympics. Despite recovering from major shoulder surgery, Priya achieved her aim and in October 2000 won a gold medal in the 400m Freestyle and three bronze medals in other events.

## Client testimonials

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“ Excellent. Great down to earth presentation which linked well with our theme of achievement for the day. Great personality and rapport building ability.

- **Dept of Public Works & Services**

“ Priya’s presentation for our annual state conference was sincere, inspirational, fresh, enlightening, fun and set a great tone for the day.

- **Ray White Real Estate**

“ (Priya was received) really well, she was perfect for the style of the function. Very warm and engaging, my members enjoyed her presentation. My CEO and I are very pleased with the outcome.

- **Australian Funeral Directors Association**

“ Priya was very friendly and well received by the audience. Priya’s speech was very inspirational, funny and full of emotion. Her many personal stories were a highlight at our recent Women’s Health and Wellness Day. Many of our guests would like her to return next year.

- **Rando & Associates**

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