

## Media Release

### Global achievers win top NSW Catholic schools sports honours

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Paralympian swimmer Tim Hodge and world cross-country champion Ella Heeney have received the Vince Villa Award for most outstanding NSW Catholic school athletes in 2018.

Tim and Ella join past winners of the prestigious NSW Combined Catholic Colleges (CCC) honour which have included Olympian Jana Pittman and NRL stars Nathan Cleary and Campbell Graham.

CCC Chairman John Sparks said the awards are the pinnacle of the annual NSW Blue Awards, established in 1997 to recognise the outstanding achievements of NSW Catholic school athletes across all sports.

“Catholic schools have nurtured the careers of hundreds of professional Australian athletes, thanks largely to the dedication of volunteer teachers and well supported by parents,” Mr Sparks said.

Tim Hodge, of Patrician Brothers’ Blacktown, was recognised for his strong showings at 2018’s Gold Coast Commonwealth Games and the Para Pan Pacific Games in Cairns.

Last year, Tim won silver medals in the 100m breaststroke and 100m backstroke Commonwealth events, before picking up four gold medals and a silver at the Para Pan Pacific Games.

In 2016, he competed in five events at the Rio Paralympic Games, placing fifth in the 200m individual medley and sixth in the men’s 100m backstroke – outstanding achievements for a school-boy athlete.

Mr Sparks said Tim was born with a lower leg deficiency and had his right foot amputated when he was four. He is also missing two fingers on his right hand and his right arm is shorter than his left.

“But none of these conditions stopped him from developing into an outstanding swimmer and backstroke specialist. Tim would regularly compete against able bodied athletes, just to get involved.

“He currently holds one world record and 114 Australian records in his swimming category (S9).”

Ella Heeney, from Mackillop College in Port Macquarie, won the World Schools Under 18s Female Cross Country Championship in France last year.

She also finished first in the NSW CCC, New South Wales All Schools and School Sport Australia events in 2018.

“Ella has been a member of the NSW Combined Catholic Colleges’ Triathlon Team in 2013, 2014 and 2015 and in 2017/2018 represented Australia at the World Cross Country event,” Mr Sparks said.

“Last year, she became the best female schools’ cross country runner in the world – a fantastic achievement for a student who was also completing her Higher School Certificate that year.”

Mr Sparks said Ella and Tim are both inspiring role models for their peers and are well respected by their respective school communities.

“Their athletic achievements are outstanding, yet they both maintained excellent academic results. We acknowledge their exceptional contribution to school sport.”

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