Days after Australia woke up to an Olympic honeymoon or hangover, we will soon forget one set of heroes and turn our attention to football finals and the almost inevitable, mandatory tales of men behaving badly after weekend football games. Is it time now for Australian children to look elsewhere for heroes and role models? Does a 'real man' have to be a hard man? Does it need to be a man at all?

Take our Olympians for example. Years of sacrifice and hard work, no fat pay cheques each week and yet, they represent Australia with dignity and grace on the world's stage. At the first indication of bringing the Olympic movement into disrepute, a clear message is delivered. Just ask Nick D'Arcy.

Take our female athletes for example. Once every four years, they get the chance to shine and they do us proud. You don't hear of Sally McLellan, Emma Snowsill or Libby Trickett getting caught up in an unseemly nightclub brawl at midnight. Unlike the pathetic excuses, usually centred around a celebration party after another footy game, these girls are celebrating Olympic victory, no less. Do girls just have an innate sense of what the word "celebrate" actually means? Perhaps their parties are not sponsored by alcohol companies.

Whatever the reasons, we should be using this post-Olympics afterglow to redefine the sort of heroes we put forward to the community. Let's make a big deal of these athletes who sacrifice everything but their dignity to represent the very best that Australia has to show the world. Let's make a big deal of our female athletes who have stolen the Beijing limelight and done it with a smile and good grace. Hell, why not go one step further and make heroes of mothers, nurses, childcare workers and teachers who might actually come into daily contact with our children?
Females aside, why not make our male Olympians more heroic, not just every four years and not just for their athletic skill. Let's focus on the other things in life that keeps them in balance. Things like their education, careers, families and discipline. Or is that not sexy enough for the beer and bourbon barons and the ridiculous advertising messages they peddle? Some ad agencies even defend their insidious themes by claiming that it's not really meant to reflect society's view of women. Oh really? So they get paid the big bucks to design campaigns that are not really meant to work?

As our Olympians return to the inevitable tickertape parades, will we cheer deliriously this week and forget them the next? Until we jump on that big red double-decker bus to London in 2012? What about our female athletes from Beijing? Let's hope we wake up to ourselves and celebrate the achievements of those 'birds', the ones who really deserve to be heroes. The other Bird is just a goose!

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