

## Transcript

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 Program: **BREAKFAST** Time: **06:19 AM**  
 Compere: **ADAM SPENCER** Summary ID: **C00022680980**

Item: **GRAHAM WHITE WAS PART OF THE AUSTRALIAN TEAM IN THE INTERNATIONAL MATHS OLYMPIAD. WHITE DISCUSSES THE SELECTION PROCESS FOR THE TEAM. WHITE SAYS HE HAS BEEN TO THE PREVIOUS TWO OLYMPIADS.**

**INTERVIEWEES: GRAHAM WHITE, JAMES RUSE  
 AGRICULTURAL HIGH**

Demographics:	Male 16+	Female 16+	All people	ABs	GBs
	38300	35400	73800	27200	38300

ADAM SPENCER: Let's cross now to Ljubljana in Slovenia, to say hello to Graham White. How are you this morning, Graham?

GRAHAM WHITE: Good thanks.

ADAM SPENCER: That is great to hear. Now you are part of the Australian team that just went quite well in the recent International Mathematics Olympiad. Well done.

GRAHAM WHITE: Thanks.

ADAM SPENCER: Talk us through, for the people - many people here would have watched the television show that



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showed how people got into the Biology Olympiad team, what was the process by which you were selected? How did you get into the Maths Olympiad team, Graham?

**GRAHAM WHITE:** It's kind of similar, in that we have camps, except we have them twice a year, and so those 25 students go each time, and there's two of those a year, and in the April one, we have a series of selection exams, two at the camp and two before the camp, and from those they select the team of six to go to the Olympiad in July.

**ADAM SPENCER:** Now have you been before?

**GRAHAM WHITE:** I've been for the previous two years, in Athens in 2004, and in Merida in Mexico last year.

**ADAM SPENCER:** And did you feel more prepared third time round? Have you got used to the whole process, is there an advantage in having been before, to these sort of things?

**GRAHAM WHITE:** Yes, a lot of the training you do for this is just doing lots and lots of problems, and the more you do, the more types of techniques you've seen before and so the better you go.

**ADAM SPENCER:** And so did some of the younger guys and girls in the team look up to you as a bit of a legend, the old gun slinger, coming back for one last campaign?



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GRAHAM WHITE: Well, how am I supposed to answer that without sounding really egotistical?

ADAM SPENCER: Go crazy, Graham, why not, it's your chance?

GRAHAM WHITE: *[Laughs]* No, I don't think so, really. I mean we're all good friends that have been to all these camps together for several years now.

ADAM SPENCER: What was great also is once you've been selected, and you get overseas, you go into a special sort of maths boot camp, to just pore over examples when you can't even be with a lot of your instructors and coaches, because they might have been involved in the setting of the problems, is that correct?

GRAHAM WHITE: Yes, we go overseas, I think it was 3 July this year, the six of us, and the leader and the deputy leader of the team, so we went to Rome to train this year, and we were there for about five or six days, and each day there we did a practice four-and-a-half hour exam, and that was basically overseen by the deputy leader, because the day after we got there, the leader left for the - to actually set the exam in Slovenia.

ADAM SPENCER: So do you have a situation where not only do you need to be good at some of those mathematical skills, but you actually need to be able to concentrate at that highest of levels for four-and-a-half hours? Is part of it just the sheer mental toughness of being able to make good, clear decisions after four hours, 15 minutes?



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- GRAHAM WHITE: Yes, it's pretty important to be able just to keep cool, and to concentrate throughout the exam, yes.
- ADAM SPENCER: Now there were two exams, one a day, and there were three questions on each exam, and it was a four-and-a-half-hour exam. Now to the novice, four-and-a-half-hours to knock over three questions, that's quite reasonable, but I presume you're just working furiously for every second of that four-and-a-half-hours?
- GRAHAM WHITE: Yes, they're pretty hard questions *[laughs]*.
- ADAM SPENCER: That's probably to be expected in an International Mathematics Olympiad, Graham.
- GRAHAM WHITE: Yes, the way they differ from say, questions you might do at school or something, would be that in say a school exam, a question is just - you get the question, you try and remember what the appropriate formula is to use, and you plug the numbers in and it works, they may get a bit harder than that, but the questions you get at school, you're expected to be able to solve, fundamentally, whereas here you get something really hard, hopefully you haven't seen anything like it before, and you have to try and use some ingenuity and try and work out the sort of techniques that might be applicable trying to solve the thing.
- ADAM SPENCER: Because it's not coming off a set syllabus, is it? It's not coming off a set list of examples and chapters



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like people might remember their Year 11 mathematics have been. But you've been armed with all these basic techniques, and you're trying to work out which one of those would be applicable to these questions?

GRAHAM WHITE: Yes, there are a lot of techniques, but the problems themselves have to be completely new. The jury is comprised - the IMO jury is comprised of the leaders from each of the 90 countries that were in it this year, and they - when they're actually setting the paper, they go through it, and they go through the problems, and if anyone's seen any of the problems anywhere before, or even something similar, is expelled from the short list, they don't put on the paper.

ADAM SPENCER: Now I'm guessing Graham we've actually caught you at a railway station or something, there's some very curious noises going on in the background, but we'll plough ahead.

GRAHAM WHITE: I'm actually walking back from the closing ceremony, back to the hotel.

ADAM SPENCER: OK, fantastic. So yes, for example for people at home, one of the questions in this year's one was, "Consider a shape that's got 2006 sides, 2006 gone. Now I presume not many people there had answered questions about 2006-sided shapes before?"



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- GRAHAM WHITE: No, that's basically - consider a shape with some number of sides, and we don't really care what it is. I mean just using the current year is something neat that they like to do.
- ADAM SPENCER: Yes, a nice little dipping of their hat to this being the 2006 Olympiad. How did you go personally, Graham?
- GRAHAM WHITE: I got a silver medal, with 22 points.
- ADAM SPENCER: Congratulations.
- GRAHAM WHITE: Each question's marked out of seven, so the top score is 42.
- ADAM SPENCER: Are there any questions you look back on now and go - is there any you've woken up at three in the morning in a cold sweat going, if I'd only done this?
- GRAHAM WHITE: Yes, I should have got question four, which was the second easiest one on the paper, but I stuffed that and got three out of seven for it.
- ADAM SPENCER: What were you thinking, Graham?
- GRAHAM WHITE: *[Laughs]*
- ADAM SPENCER: You choked. Where to now for you? Are you in Year 12 at the moment?



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- GRAHAM WHITE: I'm in Year 12, yes.
- ADAM SPENCER: And so the plan is the HSC this year, and then what?
- GRAHAM WHITE: Yes, doing the HSC this year, then uni next year, definitely maths and something, I'm not really sure exactly what yet.
- ADAM SPENCER: Great to hear. And was there a big party afterwards? Was there much socialising between the teams?
- GRAHAM WHITE: Yes, there's quite a bit of socialising, it's really good to get together with all the other people from other countries, who, you know, enjoy the same sort of things that you do, like for example, we've been playing an awful lot of cards recently, lots of different card games.
- ADAM SPENCER: Any international mathematics genius loving going on, if you know what I mean, Graham? Anyone stare at each other's eyes across an exam room and think, you're the geek for me?
- GRAHAM WHITE: No, you definitely have to look at the exam paper, you can't be looking around the exam room.
- ADAM SPENCER: That is correct, Graham, that is what I wanted to hear. Look, congratulations, you've done us proud, it's fantastic to hear that you've done so well at the International Mathematics Olympiad. What would



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you say to anyone out there listening now, who's got a child, say in the primary school years, who's pretty handy at mathematics, what can they do to really tap into any talent that might be there?

**GRAHAM WHITE:** Encourage them, work with them if they're finding the stuff they're doing at school too easy, get your hands on some extension material, and work with that, and then when you get to the sort of early high school years, like seven, eight, start entering in competitions, like the Australian Maths Competition, that's every July, the Australian Intermediate Maths Olympiad- -

**ADAM SPENCER:** And the people out there who are looking for the really talented people spot that you're out there?

**GRAHAM WHITE:** Yes, they very carefully look over the results from these competitions, and snap up people to go to the 25-people camps each year. And even if you don't get into that, there's quite a few extension programs which take more people.

**ADAM SPENCER:** Well, congratulations, Graham, well done, enjoy Year 12, best of luck with everything from now.

**GRAHAM WHITE:** Thanks.

**ADAM SPENCER:** Graham White, from James Ruse Ag High, 17-years-old, in Ljubljana, he's just been in the International Mathematics Olympiad, didn't look at



other competitors, he was concentrating on his paper, couldn't be prouder of him.



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