

Matt's dream award

Swimmer's chance to join disabled elite

By **ANTHONY BRAND**

KYMBERLEY and Michael Stark don't strike you as worried parents of a disabled child.

In fact, they're continually blown away by the dedication and devotion shown by their 12-year-old son Matthew.

After he picked up eight gold medals at the Queensland State Swimming School Championships, it would be an understatement to say Matthew is gifted.

Kymerley said the family could not be prouder of their son's achievements.

"It's all about Matt and the astounding effort and determination he has for sport," she said.

"He's the one up at 4am every day swimming countless laps, not us, and to see him be recognised is wonderful."

Matthew was one of eight disabled athletes to receive a Sporting Dreams Grant yesterday.

Sporting Dreams was initiated in 2007 by Paralympic medallist and Coast resident Marayke Jonkers, as a



WONDERFUL ATHLETES: Sporting Dreams grant winners (from left) Rachael Dodes, Eithan Leard, Rachael Watson, Brad Marks with Ace and Matthew Stark, and Marayke Jonkers.

PHOTO: CADE MOONEY

way of helping disabled athletes beginning their sporting careers.

"I know how tough it is for disabled athletes, so this is just a nice way to help," she said. "Several of our past recipients have gone on to become Paralympians and I'm sure we'll have many more."

"The more I can do to help

in the advancement of disabled sports, the better."

Ms Jonkers cited the first-class coverage of the London Paralympics as an example of a shift in attitude towards disabled athletes in the mainstream community.

"It was great to see how much recognition London gave to the disabled athletes

and that has definitely helped us," she said.

"That allows kids to be exposed to some great disabled sporting heroes and gives them something to aspire to."

Disability Council of Queensland representative Kay Maclean applauded Marayke's efforts in cham-

pioning disabled athletes.

"We all have our heroes and she's been a great hero to these kids and has achieved so much despite her setbacks," she said.

"It's so easy for people to give up, but it's very rare to find a person with a disability that gives up and Marayke is an example of that."