

# from the vault

## Marathons - A battle within a battle

By Shaun Creighton

As a young aspiring athlete I recall watching “Deek” run down the Tanzanian athletes en route to a memorable victory in the 1982 Commonwealth Games marathon. Although only 15 years old, the seed was planted – from that moment, I too wanted to be a marathon runner! As it turned out, I ultimately became a better track runner than I’d anticipated which delayed my “marathon debut”. After the Atlanta Olympic Games I decided to train seriously for my first marathon.

With a track background my speed had been well developed so I focused my training on marathon specific training of greater volume and an increased number of longer tempo runs. Interestingly, the extra volume and greater amount of training close to my anaerobic threshold did not adversely affect my “speed” and I found myself maintaining very good quality. After discussions with my coach Pat Clohessy, we’d decided my marathon debut would be the 1997 Houston Marathon. We had

hypothermia from spending over 2 hours in freezing conditions wearing only shorts and a tee-shirt. I managed to hold on for second place but when I reached the finish line I was immediately taken to the medical room to be treated for the hypothermia. The (female) doctor asked the standard questions “do you know your name, do you know where you are, do you know what you are doing here” etc. As they cut my clothes off to administer hot packs I added “yes, and I also know that men get ‘shrinkage’ when it’s cold, so it is surely at its worst with hypothermia”. The doctor laughed and said “I think you’ll be OK”. As a result of my 27.31 10,000m time I was selected in the Australian team over 10,000m for the 1997 World Track and Field Championships. As then holder of the Australian 3000m, 3000m steeplechase and 10,000m records, I was very keen to add the Australian 5000m record to my name prior to moving more full-time to the marathon. The European training base was set up in Switzerland with Robbie

training is you know the work has been done, but you just “over-cooked” it. The good thing is that usually form can return after sufficient rest. On this occasion I rested for a month and returned to Europe after a further 10 weeks of training and ran my fastest marathon – 2.10.22.

Each athlete responds differently to a training stimulus, but from my first two marathons I learnt that high volume training suited me and did not mean I could not also run well over 5000m and 10,000m (as other Australians such as Steve Moneghetti, Lee Troop and Pat Carroll have experienced). I also learnt what my personal limit is, where the line is crossed between training hard and improving and training too hard and going backwards.

I always enjoyed the challenge of preparing for and running a marathon. As the great Emil Zatopek is attributed as saying “if you want to run, run a mile. If you want to experience another life, run a marathon.”

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planned running the Zatopek 10,000m as an end in itself and as part of the marathon preparation. From training feedback, suddenly breaking Ron Clarke’s long standing Australian 10,000m record became a realistic goal. This goal was realised with a new Australian record time of 27 minutes 31 seconds. Apart from being a “career highlight”, this gave me a lot of confidence going into my marathon debut 5 weeks later.

I went into my marathon debut aiming to run 2.10 based on my lead in form. The morning of the Houston race, I awoke to an ice storm and all thoughts of a fast time vanished as I spent the first ten miles following the lead pack and avoiding ice patches others had slipped on. At the 23-mile mark we had a lead group of 6 and a break was made. I immediately covered the move and thought I was ready for a “win on debut” even if it wasn’t fast due to the weather. At the 25 mile mark I started seeing flashing white lights and figured it must be a side effect of the often talked about “hitting the wall”. It was actually

Johnstone from New Zealand as I’d done the previous year and I started training harder than ever. Had my coach Pat Clohessy been in Europe with me I know he’d have prevented the problem, but I maintained the very high mileage, added some very intense track sessions, plus lost a few extra kilos to what I usually raced at. The result was that for the first and only time in my career I over-trained and started running slower in each race to the point I decided to withdraw from the World Championships Team and return to Australia. I’d always felt it was a slight on athletes when it was suggested from time to time that some athletes on an Australian team are there as “tourists”. I’d vowed if I didn’t think I was ready to compete to the best of my ability in an Australian Team I would rather not compete. Fortunately this was the only time I had to withdraw from a team (and as an aside Darren Wilson ran a fantastic race for 10th in the final of the 10,000m). The difficult thing with over-



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