

“Rowdy” Rod De Highden

One of our quiet achievers

Full name: Roderic De Highden.
Date of Birth: 15th January 1969.
Place of Birth: Melbourne.

Sponsors: Asics and my wife Celeste.

Currently Living: Kew East, Melbourne.

Marital Status: Celeste and two dogs
bos and barn.

Occupation: Lecturer Holmesglen and
Swinburne TAFE

Height: 178cm
Weight: 62 Kilos

Shoe Size: 9.5

Hair colour: Blonde

Favourite shoe colour: Japanese racing
colour - made to suit my feet

Most loved pair of runners: Asics
Racing Shoes

Favourite Race: Gold Coast Marathon -
well organised and supportive in the
development of Australian distance
runners

Your 3 best running experiences: 1996
Olympics Atlanta, 2000 Olympics Sydney,
1993 World Cross Country
Championships Amborebiata
Spain

Personal Bests for your favourite distances:
12km Cross Country is my
favourite distance, thus no pb's. (editors
note: Rod has run the marathon in
2.13.53, Half marathon in 62.30 and
10000m in 28.38).

In a stellar career, you've competed in two Olympic Games, won the Host City Marathon in Sydney and competed for Australia on numerous occasions. What would you consider your career highlight? The marathon at Atlanta Olympics is my career highlight. My preparation was perfect. I had sixteen weeks of 216km and then did heat chamber workouts and eased down for the race. I had dreams and aspirations of winning, though realistically knew also that my best could be anywhere from 1st to 50th place. For 32km, I believed that I was going to win and when I finished I knew that I had given it my all in the most important race of my running life. I was in 16th place at 40km and then finished 23rd which was disappointing, though I knew two steps over the line that I had given it my all. It is very satisfying knowing that my best race was in the biggest race - the Olympic Marathon.

Given your brilliant results in the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Marathon, can you talk us through a bit more of your plan in Atlanta? My number one goal was to win the race, and I wanted to do everything possible to achieve my goal. The plan was to sit and relax in the pack and “race the race”. My coach Chris Wardlaw was a team coach and he was a great help and support. I also remember Peter Brett faxing me at the games and telling me to make the most of the opportunity, and try and win it. I was confident that I could run my best and wanted to give myself every chance to win.

You placed 23rd in Atlanta and 28th in Sydney. Were you equally satisfied with these results and how did the races compare?

No, my run at Atlanta was superior to Sydney. In Sydney, I felt that I ran a very good race, though in Atlanta I felt I ran a great race. In Sydney, I was off the pack at 16km with Steve Moneghetti and then Steve charged away from me. I felt that I ran as well as I could in Sydney, though I ran myself out more at Atlanta. Although it was fantastic to run with Moneghetti and Lee Troop at a home Olympics.

To your credit, your focus has seemed to be competing in major championship marathons rather than big city marathons. How do you compare the feeling of pulling

on an Australian singlet to competing in a big city marathon?

I place more pressure on myself when I am running for Australia. You know that one has run others out of the team and it's important to prove the selectors correct and run one's best for Australia. I have always felt the need for running fast times is just to make teams. Though I do regret that I did not run faster than my 2.13.

You compete for Doncaster Athletic Club in Melbourne. In your “era” Doncaster produced 3 Olympic marathon runners in you, Sean Quilty and Brad Camp, plus numerous other outstanding athletes including Paul Patrick, Dean Paulin, Dave Evans and many others. Fast forward to 2005 and Doncaster isn't even in “A” grade for Athletics Victoria competition. What do you see as factors for the success of Doncaster Athletic Club 15 years ago and why hasn't this success been sustained and replicated?

We had a great era at Doncaster and the backbone of the club was coaches Tom Kelly and John Hirst. They demonstrated that through great coaching you can produce great athletes and results. One



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“Regardless of training and racing form, one cannot race the marathon sore or injured”

thing that I have learnt is the importance of the coach. Doncaster was a young area and now we do not seem to have the number of athletes coming through. John Hirst has also retired as a coach, which could potentially explain the decline in athlete numbers.

You attempted to qualify for the Athens Olympic Games and Melbourne Commonwealth Games and have shown glimpses of form to indicate you may have made these teams. Was there any one thing which prevented you from qualifying for these Teams?

A lesson that I have learnt is that regardless of training and racing form one cannot run the marathon sore or injured. I have had a sore hip which has affected my marathon running. Thus, I am now going to lessen my commitment to running and also focus on track as well as cross country.

With the 2008 Olympics on the horizon, will you be trying to make that elusive 3rd Olympic marathon team?

No, that dream is over.

What advice would you give aspiring distance runners aiming to replicate what you've achieved?

The nature of long distance running is that you must be dedicated and prepared to make the choices that will allow you to achieve your best. The foundation for my running career has been great coaches and training partners. I owe a lot to John Hirst, Tom Kelly, Norm Osborne, Chris Wardlaw and Steve Moneghetti. I also had a great massuer in Des Fitzgerald and physiotherapy with Anne Lord and Robbie O'Donnell. I also had fantastic support from my family and wife Celeste. A good support team is critical.



2005 Berlin Marathon.

Photo: Viktah Sailer.

Letherby and Rod.

