

# A Quiet Little Kid from Ballarat YCW

by Steve Moneghetti

After finishing 5th at the Olympics in Seoul in 1988, the next year saw my first chance to run a Big City Marathon. For any Australian, London was always a popular choice.

**S**TART at zero time in Greenwich. Run past Cutty Sark. Across Tower Bridge at half way. Back over the cobblestones at the Tower of London. Along side the Thames River on the Embankment. Past Big Ben, Westminster Abbey, up Birdcage walk and finally the last turn at Buckingham Palace to finish down the Mall! A walk (or run) through history really – and a traffic free journey around one of the world's greatest cities.

As was accepted practice, I ran the World Cross Country as my lead up race. Little did the organizers of London, or myself for that matter, think I would run 4th. I finished only a couple of seconds behind Kenyan Wilfred Kirochi and until later that year when he ran 3.34 for 1500m, I was disappointed I did not run him down at the finish. It was extremely muddy and the tough going suited a light framed person like me. I don't think they played much golf on that course for many months! Anyway, I digress – back to London.

As I say, London was becoming one of the world's biggest marathons and to back this up they had the two best Aussies signed up – Deek and Lisa Ondieki (8th and 2nd respectively from Seoul). So I was just there to make up the numbers.

Back in those days major marathons were covered by Australian television and I still bump into people today who fondly remember late nights and early mornings sitting up, watching the races and the Australians in action.

Anyway, that year London was being covered by Channel 10 with Bruce McAvaney anchoring it. It was

destined to be a ratings winner with Lisa and Rob both running and sure to be prominent. No risk.

But a couple of months prior to the start – Lisa Ondieki got injured and pulled out of the race. No worries, Deek was fine and still the big ticket item, so all was fine at Channel 10. After World Cross I flew over to London and stayed at Richmond Hill Hotel right adjacent to Richmond Park – a terrific place to run and also where the London marathon office was housed. Back then it operated from the old Park Rangers office at Richmond Hill Gate with a staff of five. In fact, to fill in a bit of my day I often wandered over to the office to hang out with the marathon team. Unbelievable to think how low key it was back then.



Photo: Getty Images

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As the event moved into race mode, in the last week I transferred into the "Race" accommodation – the Tower Hotel. A couple of days before race day the press conference was held. I clearly remember the photo call out in front of the Hotel with the Thames and Tower Bridge in the background. It was the "who's who" of world marathoning, with Olympic silver and bronze medalists, European, Commonwealth and World Champions, a number of emerging Africans and a quiet little kid from Ballarat poking out on the end!

At the press conference it was announced that Rob De Castella had a knee problem, patella tendonitis, and was unlikely to be running. It came as a complete surprise to me, but was greeted with absolute horror from the people at

Channel 10. Their expensive gamble was falling apart as first Lisa pulled out and now it was very likely that Deek would not be starting either. Suddenly Channel 10 became very interested in my health and wellbeing! Camera crews were covering my every move and they joined me for dinner as well.

Race day arrived and I was primed and ready to go in my red and white Ballarat YCW singlet. It was certainly a good day at the office for me, apart from a slight mishap at the 35km drink station (which they moved in future years). Just after the drink station, along the cobblestones, three of us broke away from the rest of the lead group. Ahmed Salah, Douglas Wakiihuri and myself – here I was racing towards the finish with silver and bronze medalists from the previous year's Olympics. I had to pinch myself to make sure it was really happening. In those days the race finished on Westminster Bridge, and at the base of it Salah surged, we both checked it, but then Wakiihuri went and I finished 2nd in 2.09.06 with Wakiihuri winning in 2.09.03 and Salah 3rd in 2.09.09. It still remains as one of the greatest marathon finishes.

How happy were Channel 10! I was whisked away to the recovery area and I remember being wrapped in silver foil for warmth and being interviewed by the Aussie reporter who asked the obligatory question "How did you feel" to which this naive Aussie guy replied "Oh, I dunno, how did I look?"

I had arrived on the International marathon scene. Dave Bedford the race director and champion athlete has become a good friend and Bruce McAvaney and his producer at the time, David Barham, have become mates for life. I had come through with the goods on race day and many people at home in Australia 'had tuned in to watch'.

One of my fond memories of that 1989 London Marathon was attending the post race party where they handed out the race results – it was a proud moment and had a quirky touch as it read:

#### RESULTS:

1. D. Wakiihuri, Kenya	2.09.03
2. S. Moneghetti, Ballarat YCW	2.09.06
3. A. Salah, Djibouti	2.09.09

So began the marathon journey that ran through until the Sydney 2000 Olympics with another three London Marathon runs, but none matching the 'wow' factor of the first. **RAYL**

Steve Moneghetti – Over and Out.