

No Tomorrow



Stuart competing at the 2005 Australian Cross-Country Champs

Photo: Rowan Creig

As I sat in the cubical in the loos at the AIS track before my race, I pondered how many other people have sat here in my position, reading the writing on the toilet roll holder in a desperate attempt to take their mind off the race starting in 15 minutes. I've never really like racing at night, so I tried to imagine it was a warm afternoon, but I could hear the PA system echoing outside and unfortunately it still sounded like night time out there.

Pre Race

BACK into the cool night air and Vince Craig was waiting. He'd turned up to pace me for the 5k, a good training workout for him. We'd been on a nice warm-up and I felt good, the conditions were just right, cool, only a very slight breeze.

This was the big one for me. Everyone has their 'milestone' or 'benchmark' times that they want to beat some day. For some it's in the marathon, some it's the 100m, for me it's the 5k. I don't know why it's this distance, perhaps because when I was about 13-14 years old, some friends and I used to run around the footpath around Weetangera once a week. It was 5km around the perimeter and we used to pretend we were running in the Olympics and would see who could do the best time, so for me it's always been this sort of 'benchmark' distance. When I took up running as a sport in 1998, it was the 5k that I immediately went for and was delighted when after a little bit of solid training I went under 18 minutes. For the last 6 years I've had this monkey on my back, called "16 minutes". I went close a few years ago, 16:11, but apart from a 16:18, that's the closest I'd been. This PB I also rated as my 'hardest' to beat. I wanted to go under 16 minutes so much. In 1999 I bought this really great racing outfit up in Brisbane and told myself I wouldn't wear it until I broke 16 minutes. Back then I thought I'd have it on by the end of the year!

After the warm-up, I was feeling really good and focussed. I was also trying to stave off negative thoughts, which there were plenty of lurking. The ones saying "you're never going to go under 16". But this time felt a bit different from all the other attempts. This time I really felt I had a good chance of doing it after my recent good form.

I'd talked with Vince before the race and he was going to try and take me around in 3:12 pace, 76-77 second laps. We'd talked about how it would be better to err on the side of slowness in the first km as I'm a slow starter and tend to work into my races.

Away

So all the thinking and planning was over and we were on the start line. The gun went and so did Vince! He took off at what felt like a very hot pace but I have a habit of starting too slowly, so I made sure I stuck just behind him. The pace did feel fast and my thoughts were confirmed when we went through 200m in 37 secs (74 sec lap pace, or 3:05km pace).

Vince said "whoops" and immediately slowed down. The next two laps felt like a complete dawdle to me, and I thought we may have dropped off the pace a bit, but I felt really confident that Vince wouldn't be too far off pace, so I had a huge confidence boost that it felt so easy. Went through first km in 3:16, damn, a little bit slow, but Vince immediately sped up. Into the first two laps of the second km and the pace had definitely increased but I was still feeling like it was a training run. It wasn't until the last 200m of the second km that it started feeling distinctly like race pace. It was so nice to be able to concentrate on relaxing and not worrying about the pace, so valuable to have Vince doing that for me. We went through the second km in 3:13, I didn't actually know this at the time, in fact I didn't even look at my watch as I had faith that Vince had picked it up to around 3:12 pace.

The Hard Part Begins

As the third km started, Vince picked it up another notch and for the first time it started feeling a little uncomfortable for me, but I told myself not to panic and tried to imagine it was an out and back road course, in which case you usually start feeling the pressure near the 2.5km turnaround, this helped me mentally prepare for feeling like the pressure was on. Again, I just tried to concentrate on leaning forward (I have a bad habit of leaning back when I get tired) and relaxing my upper body and running loosely. I didn't get a split on the third km, I must have been so focussed I didn't even bother

worrying about what pace we were on, I just felt like Vince was definitely doing the right pace for a sub-16.

The fourth km is when the mind games really started. This is where I've lost the battle in every other sub-16 attempt (and there's been lots of them!) in the past. In footy terms, it was the championship quarter!! As we entered the fourth km, I knew my job was simple, just stick with Vince! It was here that his work as a pace-maker was worth his weight in gold!! I just knew all I had to do was keep that red singlet within touching distance and the sub-16 was mine. Each 400m, Vince would look at his watch and the pace would lift a fraction, I was really hurting big time now and my mind started playing tricks like "you can't keep this pace up", but I'd ignore it and just say "I'll stick with him for the next 200, and then take it from there". It felt so hard though, and my body was crying in pain, but I countered this by remembering a really incredibly hard session I did once around West Basin with Andrew Whitehead, where I felt like throwing

"The last 100m felt like six years, or maybe a lifetime, as everything seemed to go in slow motion except for the clock at the end of the straight. 15:52, 15:53, 15:54..."

up 13km into the session, but managed to pull through and run with him for the 16km, I thought to myself, I don't feel like throwing up quite yet, keep pushing! This is how I got through to the 4km mark.

Vince had given me some great advice prior to the race "just keep a positive mind". When we hit the 4km mark this positive attitude really paid off. We went through in 12:51, and the thought that I was completely stuffed and now would have to race the fastest km of the entire race to go under 16 minutes, just didn't enter my head at all. All I remember thinking was "12:51, I can do this!"



Handing off to John Winsbury at Parliament House Relays



Powering downhill in the Canberra Three Peaks

The Pain

So I was ready to take off now for the last km, and give it everything. I just knew I had to keep with Vince for the next 400m. He really helped me on this lap by pulling out a 75.8 (the fastest 400m split of the race). We went through with two laps to go, 13:28, in my mind, prior to the race; the absolute cut-off for a sub-16 had been 13:30 at the 2 laps to go mark, still on track! It almost killed me, but I stayed with him to the 4400m mark, 1.5 laps to go, and then thought, all I have to do is stick with

him until 1 lap to go and then sprint. Then Vince said "I've had it, go Stuey" (or something along those lines). Suddenly I felt like a little sailing boat heading into the Southern Ocean whose pilot boat has just turned off and headed back into harbour! But what a pilot!! A moment of panic hit me as I realised I was well and truly exhausted and didn't know if I could keep going at this pace. Then something strange kicked in, I had this amazing feeling of anger and I thought, damn it, I'm set up for this, it's 4400m, I'm on pace for a sub-16, this chance may never come along again, this is the moment now, not tomorrow, there is no tomorrow! The adrenaline kicked in! On my own now, it felt strange but the fear of slowing helped me focus. Went through one lap to go, 14:44, sprint!! I need a sub-76, sprint I thought. 300m to go and I could feel the lactic building up, went into the bend for 200m to go and Vince was there cheering madly, 150 to go, I could hear Vince yelling "sprint Stuey, sprint!" this scared me, because I thought I was sprinting already, I tried lifting up into Rohan Lowry gear, but I just couldn't shift gears, this was all I had, this pathetic lactic-induced pseudo-sprint!

The last 100m felt like six years, or maybe a lifetime, as everything seemed to go in slow motion except for the clock at the end of the straight. 15:52, 15:53, 15:54...but the line was just there, I knew, at long last, I was going to do

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Stuart Doyle:
it, one final last stretch to the line and a glance sideways, 15:58....

coming out and helping me achieve this dream. It means so much to me, thankyou!

The Ecstasy

This was my Olympic qualifier, this was my world cup qualifier! I had done it! A huge "YES" seemed to spontaneously burst out from deep within me. I fell down onto the track, frothy foam streaming out of my mouth onto the track. I couldn't move, literally, couldn't get up for about two minutes, but it didn't matter, I didn't have to move anymore!

Running is a great thing, and racing even better. It can teach you so many valuable lessons. One is, never be too proud to ask for help. I'm so lucky I know such a great guy and great friend in Vince. I can't say how grateful I am to Vince for

Never give up on a dream

Three years ago I was struggling with chronic hamstring injury and nothing was going right. It went on and on for two years. As the years went on, there have been times when I thought I'll never put that sub-16 outfit on in my life and was very close to snipping the tags off and just wearing the bloody thing or relegating it too a dark top cupboard, forever a reminder of what might have been. But something pig-headed in me made me keep going, not giving in to excuses such as "I'm getting old" or "my body just isn't built for this". **R4YL**

Hard at it in the triple triathlon



Vets 5000m: Thursday 27th October 2005

1st place - S. Doyle, 15:58.56

Splits: 1st km - 3:16, 2nd km - 3:13, 3rd km - 3:11,

4th - 3:11, 5th km - 3:07

Lesson: Never give up on a dream, if you want it, you can get it. There is no tomorrow.

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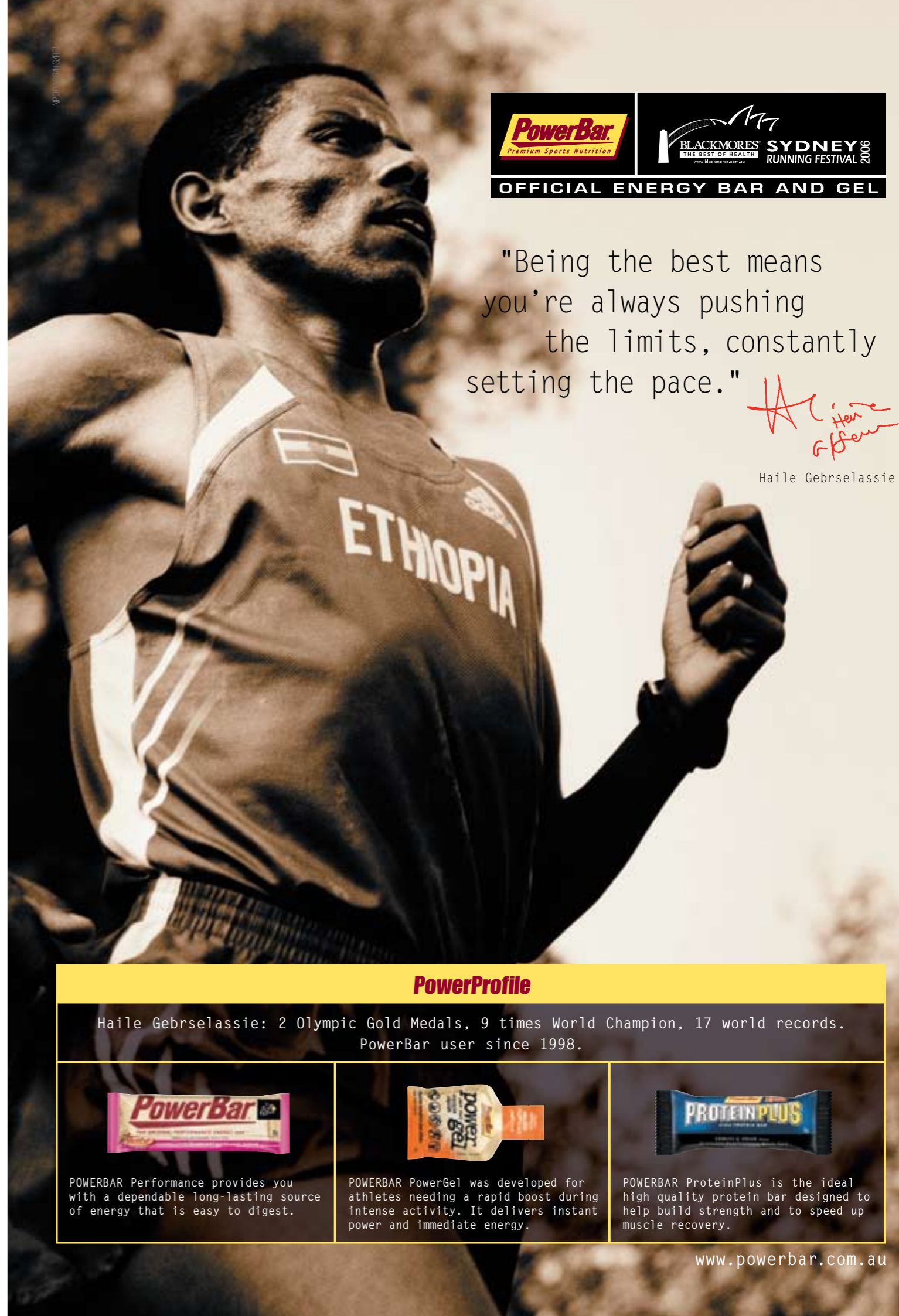


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