

VICTORIA MITCHELL



RUNNING FLAIR

Following three years of racing the collegiate circuit at Butler University (Indianapolis, USA), Victorian runner Victoria Mitchell has returned home a different athlete. After an astounding track season she has begun to establish herself as an international athlete. Run For Your Life recently caught up with her.

Interviewed by Lenon Wicks

Photo: Getty Images

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R4YL: Vic, we have seen you racing around for a few years now. When and why did you start running?

VM: I used to do Little A's (all events) in Mansfield once a week after school. But it was when I got to High School and we competed at Interschool, Eastern Zone and State comps where I actually started running. My PE teacher Steve Ward was a massive influence and encouraged me to have a go at cross country and track. He was also a positive influence on my attitude to life as well. Running kept me out of trouble!

What motivated you to become involved in the sport?

Growing up my brothers, sister and I rode horses when we were little tackers. I was very involved in competitive riding and show jumping. It turned out that some of the shows we went to also had foot races. I used to do both and really enjoyed it. The High School comps were motivating as well. You have to run well at one race to make the next. Making the teams for Nationals and traveling was also something I looked forward to.

You're one of a few athletes now making a successful transition through the junior ranks to seniors. How did you make the jump?

I think my first time at the State All Schools I came in the 30s and then each year I got better. I was late to mature and I was never a stand-out in the junior level. In under 20s I did well, but that was the weakest age group ever!!! From there I headed to the States. I guess I just had the support and encouragement to stay in the sport.

Battling hard against Kate McLroy for 4th position at the Commonwealth Games



Name: Victoria Lorraine Mitchell
DOB: 25th April 1982
Martial Status: Single
Shoe Size: 7.5-8
Height: 164cm
Weight: 47kg
Coach: Nic Bideau
Previous Coaches: Joe Franklin, Rod Griffin
Occupation: Professional Athlete
Favourite Race of All Time: Commonwealth Games 3000m Steeplechase
Personal Bests:
1500m: 4.18.01 (06/01/06)
Mile: 4.38.05 (18/02/06)
3000m: 8.58.42 (09/03/06)
3000m Steeplechase: 9.34.24 (22/03/06)
5000m: 15.36.15 (19/01/06)

"I think my first time at the State All Schools I came in the 30s and then each year I got better. I was late to mature and I was never a stand-out in the junior level."

Photo: Getty Images

You spent three years racing collegiate circuit. What made you move to the US?

I wanted to continue running and didn't want to get a 'real job'. I thought a scholarship in the States would be sweet! I went there to pursue my running and it turned out okay because I've improved to another level. I also picked up a Masters degree.

You are now one of several Australian athletes who have run for Butler University. What was your reason for choosing this university?

I emailed Mark Tucker and he said it was good at Butler. Plus, there were a few other Aussies that had gone through the system there, such as Frazier

Thompson, Martin Fedmowski, Kelly Moring and you. I then emailed several other universities in the States after finishing my last year at Ballarat University. Joe Franklin from Butler seemed eager to recruit me and had a good rap as a coach and recruiter. He was able to get me over there ASAP, which I wanted.

Over here we read a lot about the races, but what is the competition really like?

GREAT! There are loads of people competing and there is so much depth. It really makes you see that running is bigger in other countries! There is also a team spirit and bonding amongst the college teams. It makes the racing experience much more personal. It's something I never experienced before.

You arrived at Butler as a fairly decent runner. You left as an NCAA Champion and international athlete. What do you attribute to the change?

Training at Butler opened my eyes. I did more mileage and longer sessions. I generally just got fitter. My first season at Butler wasn't great but once I got settled things just started to flow together. My last track and cross country seasons were a great success. I broke my second metatarsal which cut my second last cross season short. During my rehab I cross trained a lot, up to two hours at a time. I hated cross training but it made me appreciate being healthy and able to run. I think being injured helped me to think differently about training. I took my new mindset into the next season and ran really well.

Photo: www.sportbiz.com

Is preparing for a US Collegiate Cross Country season any different than preparing for a season in Australia?

Yeah! You know that from the start of the US Collegiate season that everyone is going to be fit. But not necessarily fast. The whole season is based around one event; the NCAA National Championships. If you don't race there you have basically wasted your season. However, to get there you need to run well at all the lead-in races. It's complicated. We prepared mainly aerobically, doing a lot of mile/km repeats and threshold or tempo runs. We never really did any quick stuff 'till the business end of the season.

While at Butler you set many records, won an NCAA title, was Horizon League Athlete of the Year and helped the Butler Women's Cross Country team to its first ever appearance at the NCCA National Cross Country Championships. What was your most satisfying performance from your collegiate eligibility?

The most satisfying performance would have been my 3km Steeple win at NCAAs in 2005. It is the biggest event in collegiate athletics and you

just can't beat winning. But so was helping the Butler Girls to National Cross Country. Collegiate cross country is more about the team aspect. I was so stoked to help Butler get a run, as all the girls worked hard and deserved to go.

You have improved so much in such a short time; six PBs this season. Not many girls would now be able to keep up. Do you do most of your training with guys?

I trained a lot with guys at Ballarat and Butler. I used to think the faster I trained the better, including my easy runs. Now I think differently and do not run with guys on my easy runs unless they are going at a pace that I am comfortable with.

As for my

Competing for her American University (Butler), Mitchell is always easy to spot in the crowd!



Games B qualifier. I can certainly see myself racing over that distance and other flat races in the future.

You were part of the women's World Short Course Cross Country team that finished 3rd at Fukuoka. What was it like standing up there on the podium?

It was awesome. We had such a great team and all the girls ran really well. I kind of felt like I shouldn't be there as my finish score didn't count, but I was glad to share the moment.

It's pretty hard not to notice, but you've got a bit of a flamboyant hair style. What's the reason for it?

The pink hair made its first appearance in the States as I wanted to stand out. I like being different! Then I decided I would

sessions, I have done a lot of training on my own but I don't mind it because I feel I push myself better.

What's an average training week like for you?

During track, I generally only do one session a week on the tartan. My week looks like: Sunday long run, Monday 2 easy runs, Tuesday session (e.g. 7x1k), Wednesday 75 minutes, Thursday 2 runs, Friday Threshold, Saturday 2 runs.

Given your recent success at the steeplechase, is this your preferred event or can you see yourself progressing to 5km or making a move onto the road running circuit?

I am sticking to Steeplechase at the moment. I like the challenge of the steeple and the way the barriers break up the race. There is always something coming up. The steeple hasn't got the same respect as other events. This is disappointing, but the sport is still growing. I finished second in the 5km at the Sydney Track Classic running a Commonwealth

do it for the Games. I tried to get the National Breast Cancer Foundation involved but that didn't pan out, doh! It is going to kinda be a trademark now. I guess now I am going to go pink for all major champs...that's the plan anyhow!

So where to from here? Will you have a break or have you got races planned?

I am racing a steeple in Qatar on May 12th and then basing myself in London. My coach has me doing some events around the UK and Europe. I am pumped and wouldn't be doing these things if it wasn't for Nic Bideau, who I might add is a genuine nice, generous guy! He is also a great coach and manager to boot!

Vic, Thanks for your time and all the best for the European Season.

THANKS! I feel really honoured to part of such a great magazine.

R4YL

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The Aussie girls were tightly bunched through the initial stages of the Women's Steeplechase at the Commonwealth Games

