

# SHANE NANKERVIS

by KYM MORGAN



# NO PAIN NO GAIN

**Full Name:** Shane Michael Nankervis  
**Date of Birth:** 6th May, 1974  
**Place of Birth:** Ballarat, Victoria  
**Sponsors:** New Balance  
**Currently Living:** Ballarat  
**Marital Status:** Married to Paula, also my biggest sponsor and provider of support (I am very lucky).  
**Occupation:** Student - Can't run 200km a week and work, something would suffer, probably the job!  
**Height:** 185 cm  
**Weight:** about 63kg  
**Shoe Size:** 10  
**Hair colour:** Currently Brown  
**Favourite shoe colour:** Don't care as long as they feel good.  
**Most loved pair of runners:** New balance – RC 550 racing flats, great marathon shoe.  
**Favourite Race:** International - Berlin Marathon, Australia – City to Surf  
**Your top 3 running experiences/performances:** Hopefully have not experienced it yet, however so far:  
 1. Melbourne Commonwealth Games  
 2. Berlin Marathon – Ran P.B.  
 3. Just being involved in the sport and meeting some amazing people. Having the opportunity to train alongside some of the best athletes in the world.  
**Personal Bests for your favourite distances:** Marathon - 2.12.33, 10km – 28.56, 5km – 13.54.

Rotterdam 2004. Getty Images

Shane in the Melbourne Commonwealth Games marathon. Getty Images



IT'S 12:35 PM, MARCH 19TH 2006, SHANE NANKERVIS REMOVES HIS RIGHT SHOE AFTER finishing the Commonwealth Games marathon in Melbourne. From it, he empties a pool of blood. Not even his drenched sock, which had changed colour from white to red during the race, could soak up all the blood that had he'd lost from a blister which ran almost 10cm along the outside of his foot. The blister had begun to form only 10km into the punishing event, and it didn't take Nankervis long to realise he had a serious problem.

"It just got worse and worse and by the 36 kilometre mark I just didn't want to put my foot on the ground anymore, it was hurting so much."

As the thought of pulling off the road seeped into his weakening mind, Nankervis remembered the pact that he and all marathoners who pull on the Australian singlet swear by before they take to the start line. It is the eleventh commandment that they all must observe. "Thou must complete the race".

It was a rule introduced by Chris Wardlaw, who ran the 1980 Olympic Marathon in Moscow, and has been steadfastly observed by every Aussie marathoner ever since. Some of the more famous examples of how seriously the pact is taken include Steve Moneghetti's effort to battle through heat exhaustion and finish at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, and Lee Troop limping to the line in Sydney 2000, after pulling an intercostal muscle midway through the event.

At 36 kilometres, Nankervis found himself facing a similar personal struggle, and summoning all his mental and physical strength, he found the courage to continue to put his foot on the ground and ran on towards the MCG, finishing in seventh place.

As he looked down at the blister which had burnt through layer after layer of skin until it got down to the raw flesh, Nankervis knew it was better than the alternative.

"If you start a marathon in an Aussie singlet and fail to finish, you have to take the singlet off your back and walk back to the stadium with your top off."

**// There are no excuses. It's just part and parcel of the sport and those sorts of things happen. //**

It's a humiliation that Nankervis will push through any level of pain to avoid.

Like all elite marathoners, toughness is an intrinsic part of Shane Nankervis. In fact, it's a character trait which was obvious right from his very first long distance running experience. As a 21 year

old, Nankervis, who was at that stage a basketballer who'd represented Victoria at junior level, decided to go out on a Sunday long run with his now wife, Paula, and her training squad, through the hilly terrain of the Ballarat countryside. Pushing his untrained legs through 18 kilometres of solid running, Nankervis made an immediate impression on Paula's coach, Dave Bulloch, who offered to write him a program.

It would soon become clear that Nankervis was a gifted runner, and within two years of taking up Bulloch's offer he'd earned Australian selection, but not in Track and Field. In 1997 he represented Australia in the 20 to 25 year old category of the world duathlon championships, and led the field at the end of the run leg, only to finish seventeenth. In 1999 at the same event, he again dominated the run leg, but finished eighth.

"I'd lead everyone through the run, and then count the riders off as they went past me. 1, 2, 3...30, 31, 32 and then have to try and reel them all in again on the second run leg".

By his own admission, Nankervis's cycle leg was weak, compared to the elite competition he was





The boys doing battle.  
Image by Daniel Green

Melbourne half marathon behind experienced marathoners, Gemechu Woyecha and Magnus Michelsson, Nankervis then travelled to Chicago to run the Marathon. His 21<sup>st</sup> placing, in 2.17.16, opened a few eyes back home, and pushed him to eighth on the national rankings list that year. But possibly even more impressive was his effort at the Zatopek 10000 metres in December, where after going out hard, Nankervis showed the type of grit for which he would earn a reputation, grimly hanging on to finish fourth in 29.03.

Nankervis was now gaining the belief that he was capable of representing Australia at international marathon running and in March 2003, he flew to Lake Biwa in Japan with Moneghetti and Troop for another crack at the 42.2 kilometre race. The calming influence of having two of Australia's best ever marathon runners with him was a bonus for Nankervis who admits he can get edgy in the lead up to a big race.

“I'm a bit of a shocker. The week leading into a race I'm terrible. I don't sleep that well and always think I'm getting a cold, or I get hot or I get these headaches... I'm a worrier I suppose, because with a marathon you need everything to be perfect”

With five spots in the Australian team for the World Championship up for grabs that year instead of the usual three, because the event coincided with the world cup, Nankervis knew he had a massive opportunity to gain a spot in the team. And he didn't let it go to waste, clocking a personal best of 2:14:39 to book himself a ticket to Paris.

The World Championships proved to be a brutal introduction to the world of elite marathon running for Nankervis.

“I was travelling along ok until about 30km, and then I just hit the wall, and it was like I just couldn't

go anymore. I went from running about 3:15 per kilometre to running 4:15” he recalls.

“By the time I got to 40 kilometres, I remember feeling dizzy and like I was going to pass out... Fortunately I had an energy drink at the 40km mark and that got me through. I can't really remember finishing the race but apparently when I ran into the stadium I kicked over a few witches hats. I've got the video at home but I've never watched it. I don't want to relive that experience”

Nankervis's effort to find the finish line in Paris, in 55<sup>th</sup> place, with a time of 2:23:12, demonstrated his bravery to Australian distance running followers. But his own assessment of the performance is the type of cold hearted, harsh reaction needed to reach the top in such a vicious event.

“There are no excuses. Its just part and parcel of the sport and those sorts of things happen.”

The experience, however, was a valuable step in the steep learning curve that a marathon runner, must climb in order to understand the art and the science of preparing the body for an event it is not physically designed to undertake.

The effort of attempting to run at around three minutes a kilometre for over two hours will inevitably deplete the body's glycogen stores in the latter part of a marathon. It's when a runner's glycogen stores become completely exhausted that they hit the wall, like the way Nankervis did in Paris. A marathoner's training and diet must therefore be meticulously planned in the weeks prior to a race to help avoid hitting the wall.

But even with a seemingly perfect preparation, there are no guarantees in marathon running, which is part of the ultimate allure of the event.

Despite the cut throat nature of 100 metre sprinting, Linford Christie, Donovan Bailey and Maurice Green

have all started the Olympic final as favourites in recent times and won gold. The pre race favourite has never won the Olympic Marathon.

Professionalism, therefore, is vital in such an unpredictable event, and after missing selection for the Athens Olympics in 2004, Nankervis decided he needed to seek more professional management. Enter Nic Bideau. The mastermind behind the success of, amongst others, Cathy Freeman and Craig Mottram. Bideau demands a greater level of commitment and self sacrifice than any other coach in Australian athletics. In return, he promises to extend to his athletes every possible opportunity at success.

Bideau's heavy-handed style of coaching and management, which includes deliberately playing mind games with his athletes to help mentally prepare them for international competition, hasn't agreed with all of Australia's top athletes. Commonwealth Games medallists, Mark Fountain and Sarah Jamieson, are among those to part company with the former journalist on bad terms, but few could argue with his record. Other than Mottram, athletes currently under Bideau's guidance include Commonwealth Games stars Eloise Wellings and Melissa Rollison, former World Cross Country champion, Benita Johnson, and Kiwi, Adrian Blincoe, a world championship semi finalist at 1500 metres.

Bideau's iron-fisted style of coaching and management immediately suited the punctilious Nankervis and he quickly began to make progress in training. The time demands of his new program were such, however, that Nankervis realized his full time job as a manager at Safeway had to go.

“That was one of the hardest decisions in my life, to resign from my job and say ‘right I'm going

to completely focus on running.”

The decision would soon be vindicated, during a breakthrough 2005 on the big city marathon circuit. In April, Nankervis shaved over a minute off his best, on the famous Rotterdam course, memorable to Australians for Rob DeCastella's epic 1983 battle with Alberto Salazar and Carlos Lopez, which was beamed live into Australian living rooms.

Placing twelfth in 2.13.07, Nankervis, noticed a newfound strength in the last quarter of the race. His body was beginning to reap the rewards of a more extensive gym and maintenance program under Bideau.

But better was to come. Stepping out onto the Berlin course for his second Marathon of the year, Nankervis found an immediate affiliation with the event.

“We were really well looked after by the meet promoters. Once the race got underway it was a great atmosphere and huge crowd lined the streets”

Passing through the half way point in 65.38, he again called upon his new found strength in the second half of the race, hanging tough to clock 2.12.33 for another twelfth place finish in the hot field. The performance booked Nankervis a place in the Melbourne Commonwealth Games team, and moved him to third on the Australian rankings for that year.

At 32, the thought of retirement might begin to surface in some marathoners, bodies battered from years of smashing the pavement. But Nankervis still has unfinished business. An eventful eighteen months just gone has left him hungrier than ever to conquer more challenges. First on his checklist is another crack at Berlin in September and a chance to again lower his personal best for the marathon. Beyond that, his sights are firmly set on the major championships and ensuring that he is a regular member of the Australian team.

“Missing Athens was disappointing but I could kind of handle it because I felt that I was still developing as a marathon runner. But now I feel like I've done the work, and I expect to run in Beijing. I've never run at an Olympics, and that burns away at me”

When this article lands on the shelves of newsagents around Australia, the Beijing Olympic Marathon will still be 100 weeks away. In that time, barring injury, Shane Nankervis will run close to 20,000 lonely kilometers. He will complete around 300 painful repetition and threshold sessions, and he will push his body and mind deep into the depths of exhaustion in four more marathons. He will likely suffer more harrowing experiences like those he encountered in Paris and Melbourne. Surely when that's all over, Nankervis will consider easing into a more sedentary retirement.

“Actually I'd love to complete a Hawaiian Iron Man one day, I think that's kind of the ultimate challenge”.

The term ‘tough’ is often bandied about too easily in sport, but Shane Nankervis is an athlete who definitely fits the description. ☺



Nankervis, Letherby and Westcott (left to right) post race in Melbourne. Image by Daniel Green

thon runner was the town in which he lives. Ballarat has a tremendous tradition for producing top level distance runners. Preceding Moneghetti was former Olympic 5000 metre runner, Tony Benson, who many credit with trail blazing a path to elite level track and field for future Ballarat distance runners to follow. And in more recent times, Collis Birmingham has made his mark on the national scene.

Nankervis believes Ballarat's physical, and climatic environment are as much responsible for producing star runners as the town's distance running culture.

“The climate's pretty cold here which is a plus for distance running. We can go out on a long run and not come back absolutely dehydrated and smashed because of the heat. The town's surrounded by forest, and we can go out and run ten times and not run over the same terrain more than once, which helps to keep it interesting”

In addition to having access to magnificent running terrain, Ballarat runners have the advantage of living about 500 metres above sea level and training in slightly thinner air, forcing their bodies to learn to utilize oxygen more efficiently than those training at sea level.

It was in this environment that Nankervis began to earn a reputation for the reckless abandon with which he trained, pushing his body to the limit during sessions and steadily improving under the guidance of Paul Hayes as he lifted his mileage up towards 200 kilometres a week.

In 2002, the signs began to emerge that Ballarat could have another star distance runner coming through to follow in the footsteps of Benson and Moneghetti.

After clocking 1.05.45 to finish third at the

>> pitting himself against. But the seemingly obvious decision to become a specialist runner didn't occur to him until the year 2000 when he was one of several hundred thousand Australians who lined the streets of Sydney to watch the Olympic Marathon.

“Being from Ballarat, I followed Steve Moneghetti's career, and went up to Sydney to watch him run the Marathon,” Nankervis recalls.

“I was watching the event and thought, ‘Wow, I think I could do that, I think that's what I want to do’, and that's where the goal began to become a marathon runner”.

Not only did Moneghetti inspire Nankervis's decision to take up marathon running, but he has also played an important and ongoing role in Nankervis's development, in the form of a training partner, advisor and mentor. Soon after Nankervis made the decision to switch to marathon training, he sought out the three time Olympic top ten marathon finisher as a training partner. Moneghetti had retired from international running after Sydney, but continued on at domestic level, and initially he was helpful to Nankervis as a reality check if nothing else.

“I thought I could run, and then I went and did some sessions with him (Moneghetti) and he showed me how far I had to go and the type of level you had to run at”

Nankervis soon gained an appreciation for the intensity he needed to reach in training to force his way onto the international marathon running scene, and pretty soon he began flying around Ballarat's Lake Wendouree, slowly bridging the gap on Moneghetti.

Along with Moneghetti, Nankervis' other main ally in his quest to become an international mara-