



update

# Athletics Australia

2006 has proven to be a very successful year for Australia's distance athletes, with a check of the world best track times for 2006 (as of September) seeing seven Australians ranked in the top 20.

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**W**HILST these results are encouraging and show what can be achieved, they should be tempered by the facts that there is only one male in the list, and that three of the seven are from the same event (3000m steeple). However, the results are hopeful as we continue to build towards Osaka and Beijing.

Results such as these do not come easily; they are the return from careful planning and persistence. Closer inspection of Sarah Jamieson's and Craig Mottram's achievements in Europe attests to this.

Sarah's excellent performances came after some injury concerns over the summer, including a grade-two hamstring tear with 300m to go at Zatopek and a strained calf prior to the Commonwealth Games.

These concerns were overcome as Sarah produced an amazing series of 1500m races from May 6th in Osaka to the World Cup in Athens. Sarah won three of the races, broke 4.05 in nine and was a competitive force in all of them. She set her Australian record in the D.N. Galan meet in Stockholm, where she took nearly 3 seconds off her personal best to break Margaret Crowley's Australian record with a time of 4.00.93. This was achieved by careful planning.

Firstly, it was decided only to run 1500m (or a



Sarah Jamieson on her way to victory in the 1500m at the Seiko Super Meet Yokohama, Japan on 24th Sept 2006. Getty Images.

# Distance Runners on a Roll

## INSIGHTS INTO THE SPECTACULAR

RANKINGS

- BENITA JOHNSON:**  
10th over 10km (31.14.80)
- SARAH JAMIESON:**  
9th over 1500m (4.00.93)  
1st over mile (4.29.15)
- CRAIG MOTTRAM:**  
7th over 3000m (7.32.19)  
9th over mile (3.53.14)  
14th over 5000m (12.58.19)
- MELISSA ROLLINSON:**  
7th over 3000m steeple (9.24.29)
- DONNA MACFARLANE:**  
8th over 3000m steeple (9.25.05)
- VICTORIA MITCHELL:**  
11th over 3000m steeple (9.30.84)
- ELOISE WELLINGS:**  
17th over 3000m (8.41.78)  
17th over 5000m (14.54.11)

mile) and not risk attempting an 800m or 5000m. Training became simple and specific. Also, racing blocks (about 3-4 in a series) were interspersed with training blocks of 2-3 weeks topping up endurance. For example, the European championships break provided a perfect opportunity for this.

A good training base was selected at Loughborough, where Sarah's coach Bruce Scriven, partner Jai Thomas, training partner Brenton Rowe and medical support were present. Andrew Lambert (VIS physio) worked closely with Craig Ranson, England Institute of Sport Cricket physio, to manage Sarah's program. The plan was to have regular physio (twice a week), massages, ice baths, low-level calf conditioning work and a no-risk training program.

This meant backing off sessions of any soreness or tightness, keeping the endurance up with paced runs and not getting greedy with training and racing. Besides the Australian record, Sarah also – as of 1 September – had the world's fastest mile time.

By anyone's measure, Craig had an amazing 2006. He set an Australian 2000m record in March, smashing Simon Doyle's record by 10s, had an unforgettable Commonwealth Games and set another Australian record at 3000m in July and then again in September.

But after a 15th in a 3km at Monaco and a 17th at 1500m in Brussels in late August, it seemed the long year had taken its toll. The media reported that Craig had decided to finish his European season and withdraw from the World Cup. But this isn't the way his group operates: you don't walk away from the World Cup. It didn't take Nic Bideau long to decide that Craig should run it.

Physically the plan was to focus on his endurance with threshold runs and long easy running. Mentally there was a relaxed period, which included going to the Arsenal- Middlesborough Premier League game (Sunderland must not have been playing) and the All Ireland hurling final. At the same time, his training group (including Sonia O'Sullivan, Garry Henry and Benita Johnson) went to work on him.

Sonia (Olympic Silver medallist) had been in these situations before and knew what was needed. Sonia takes up the story: "That night I consulted the IAAF website, wrote down the list of entries for the



Craig Mottram starts the long run for home ahead of Kenenisa Bekele in the World Cup 3000m. Getty Images.

On the day, Buster was confident – his haircut showed that.

3000m and could clearly see that, without doubt, Buster would be in the top three. I met Buster the following morning for a 90 minute run, and mentioned my research to him, but he wasn't happy with top 3.

"I won the thing in 2002; anything less than a win will be a disappointment," was his reaction.

"I knew what he meant, as I would have felt the same way myself. So we were running along at a nice pace, nothing too difficult. When we were about halfway around Richmond Park, I remembered something I had read on the internet that

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morning: "Mottram Pulls out of World Cup". This was less than 12 hours after I had spoken with Buster, and all agreed he would focus for three more weeks and get himself to Athens ready to win. So of course I blurted this out to Buster: 'Did you read the Age this morning? You are still running this World Cup??' Silence... Oh no, what have I done; I was enjoying this run! The pace quickens a little bit. It's okay, just another piece of ammunition in Buster's armour. He is even more fired up to prove the doubters wrong – the bit between the teeth. We are going forward now; there will be no turning back."

Gradually the fitness and confidence returned. The training included only one track session on the Saturday before he left for Athens. It wasn't anything incredible: he just rolled a few laps starting out at 68s, and gradually winded up the pace to 60s for the 7th lap, after which he stopped, feeling his rhythm at that speed had returned.

In Athens a couple of days before the race, he cruised a few 200m in 29s and was sure he was ready to run a fast 3000m. Then it was off to Athens to become the first Oceania Athlete to defend a World Cup title.

The original plan was to make it a hard race from the start, similar to four years prior. However, when the news came through that Kenenisa Bekele

was running, a re-think was needed, and most people (even a few officials) thought he should run for second. This was where the mental toughness of Buster and his group came through.

Nothing had changed: winning was the only thing. However, tactics did need to change. I recall ringing Nic, and he was having lunch with Steve Ovett. He said ring me back later, we are just re-planning the race strategy.

On the day, Buster was confident – his haircut showed that. The plan was to wait for the last 2 laps, get the lead 950m to 850m out. It was a bonus when Bekele went out hard, ensuring after 3 laps that only he and Buster were still in the contest. The plan worked out perfectly. Eventually Bekele realised

he wasn't going to shake Buster and decided to coax him into leading three laps out by slowing to a jog. This resulted in a comical moment, as he and Buster discussed the issue down the back straight approaching 1km to go. With Buster determined to stick to his plan, despite the fast pace up till then, he decided there was no harm in cruising to the lead for 200m before he really pushed hard with 900m to go. After 500m of Buster attacking from the front, the look on Bekele's face 400m out said it all – he wasn't enjoying this one.

The team Captain and defending champion looked up at the big screen in the stadium and realised he was seriously in command. He said, "With 220m to go, I could see that I had 5m on him, and I thought, 'This is unbelievable.' Then I went again over the final bend and I knew it was over; I could enjoy the last 50m."

The excitement at the track was matched back in London, where Sonia was jumping up and down and Benita crying! Well done, all. A great team effort.

These are just two examples of the work going on behind the scenes and in athletes' minds to deliver truly world-class results. It is an exciting time in distance running and there is much hard work ahead, but Sarah and Buster have certainly shown what can be achieved with a professional approach.