

Running is the best

In Focus: Mark Dawson



I was born in 1961, in Katherine NT, the second of five children. I started primary school in PNG, where my Civil engineer father had been transferred. School sports there provided enjoyment and freedom. My first memory of running on a proper track was just prior to the 1969 South Pacific Games in Port Moresby; my father had some technical role in the track engineering.

I remember bolting around the track and being totally out of breath after 200m. This grown-up's track was much bigger than the primary school oval!

In 1969 when I was in Grade 4, the family moved from PNG to Brisbane. In Grade 7 I was running the 800m; THE long-distance event at school. So when I started high school, with youthful naïveté, I told the Sports-master that this was my distance. The die was cast! Throughout high school, middle distance running — 800m and 1500m — became my forte. In 1977, in my final school year, I represented Queensland Schools in the National titles in the 3000m. On looking back, this was the acme of my running talent. I also enjoyed swimming, soccer and rowing. I ran my first marathon as a schoolboy,

doing a time of 2hrs 58min. Three more Marathons followed. After struggling to finish the last of these I have not had a hankering to run another! I have a lot of respect for my Masters' colleagues who conquer this distance.

Following high school, I went straight to Medical School at the University of Queensland. I kept up running, my mantra being *Mens Sana in Corpore Sano* (A sound mind in a sound body). I was running

with a small talented group, two of whom - Mike Hillardt and Brett Crew - went on to represent Australia in the Commonwealth or Olympic Games. Long hours as a Hospital Intern overtook running in 1984. In 1987 I was a country doctor in rural Queensland when I married my sweetheart Yvette (a Physiotherapist). Together, we moved around Australia — Alice Springs, Rockhampton and Broome. Our three children were born during this time. In 2002 we moved to Perth for the children's high school education.

How I got back into running in Perth is quite an odd-sounding story. At the start of 2004, I was sick of the usual New Year's resolutions to get fit and healthy — I was jaded and had swung away from the 'sound mind/sound body' principle. So I formulated a resolution from 'out of left field' — it was to 'get unfit, fat, and slobby'. Wow, was this an easy resolution to keep! Whenever I felt the slightest urge to exercise, I'd go to the fridge, grab a snack, and sit on the couch. I enjoyed this for one and a half years, with my weight blossoming to 95kgs. I cracked in mid-2005, six weeks before the City-to-Surf — I decided to run the 12km event, at a steady 6minute/km pace.

CONTINUED – next page

medicine

FROM – previous page

The pet dog dragged me around the block when I started training! I intended to run the course, and then revert back to my “Homer Simpson” lifestyle. As it turns out, I was so chuffed at attaining my goal of finishing in 72mins that I decided to push on and return to the sport of my schooldays. The rest is history.

I first joined the Marathon Club, but in 2007 after hearing about MAWA, I started track running on Tuesday evenings at McGillivray Oval. I will always have a soft spot for the Mosman Park Sunday run, as it was my first Sunday Club run, in November 2007. Over the ensuing years, I still enjoy the track (8’s, 15’s, 3k, 5k’s) and Sunday runs, up to the Half-Marathon distance.

Without a coach since about 1982, I was happy to run and train on intuition; if it felt fast and exhaustive, then it was a worthwhile training session! About a year out from the Perth World Championships and wanting to do well, I put some plans into place. I attended the 2015 Oceania Masters Athletics Championships in Rarotonga, Cook Islands to get a taste of international competition (in a tropical island setting to boot).

This was indeed well worth it. I then heard about one of our MAWA colleagues, Suzi Graves, who coaches talented junior athletes. Suzi was also gearing up for Perth 2016 so I joined her training group. It was a revelation to be exposed to modern training principles – just the warm-up and plyometric drills were about as much effort as I was doing beforehand, let alone the proper repetitions! I also entered Athletics WA Strive track events for extra competition and race experience.

The final piece to complete the training puzzle was via my second coach and MAWA colleague, the worldly, irrepressible and racy John Dennehy – his Saturday morning middle-distance training sessions focused on the needed speed and strength to run the last 200m of the 800m with grit and intent to win. I still train with both Suzi and John each week – two superb coaches.

How do you run the ideal 800m or 1500m? My start line mantra comes from Shakespeare – *to thine own*

self be true, meaning, *run my own race, run as only you know how*. For me, these races are long controlled sprints – there’s no time to take-it-easy; just find your nice speed rhythm as soon as possible, maintain the feeling and cadence of being *poetry in motion*, – find your poetic metre and prepare to run a bit faster over the final 200m. The aim is to get to 801m at full speed, and then collapse in lactic acidosis – it’s no good seizing up at the 600m mark, nor is it good to have so much in reserve that you feel you could have raced on for another 100m.

The Perth World Championships were a buzz! Besides the actual racing, for me there were three highlights: Firstly as a competitor; the overall organisation and running of the event was second-to-none, hence deep thanks to Richard Blurton and the entire team of organisers, helpers and volunteers. Secondly, there were the bright colours worn by the teams from around the world and the equally colourful personalities of the athletes. Thirdly, Yvette and I enjoyed a unique experience of having an athlete, German Josef Conrad, M65, live with us for the duration of the championships. We both enjoyed his stories of Europe and of previous World Masters Championships. I also enjoyed the fact that Yvette came to realise that there are runners out there who are more fanatical and obsessed than me! — I’d do a daily half hour run; Josef would do a daily two-hour run. Consequently, he was faster than me in the Half-Marathon.

To finish up, I reflect on my profession as a GP, and the advice I give people to maintain wellness and avoid illness – find that healthy lifestyle; find that sport or exercise that keeps you active, that you want to do daily

no matter what, and find a like-minded group of friends. Having experienced both lifestyles – fit and healthy or unfit and slobby, I know which I choose. The ancient Greeks were right — *Mens Sana in Corpore Sano*.

