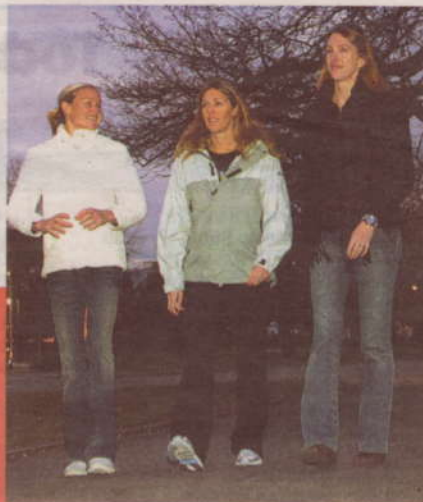


➤ MacFarlane ready to move on

Athletics: Page 45



The EXAMINER Sport

Refreshing attitude after world title disappointment

Donna looks ahead

By ROB SHAW

DISAPPOINTED Tasmanian runner Donna MacFarlane was already looking ahead last night as she watched the world championship steeplechase final that she could have been contesting.

Despite being denied her shot at a medal by a freak accident in her heat, the former Launceston athlete was in good spirits in Osaka and planning her return to the track.

"It's times like these when it's important to put things into perspective," she said.

"My chance to race in these world championships is gone, but I am still alive, I still have my family and I am loved.

"I am very lucky to know that my value as a person does not depend on how I perform on the track.

"It's disappointing for me and a lot of other people as well, but it was just an unfortunate accident that I could not have prevented. So I'll get over it."

The mother of two, whose passion for running began at Larmenier School, gave a detailed account of the spiking accident which prematurely ended her world championship dream, and revealed the valuable assistance she had received from her team,

Tasmanian support group and her family in Hobart.

MacFarlane was forced to pull out of her heat after just 600m having run two laps on the scorching track with a shoe missing.

"It's certainly the biggest disappointment of my career, but not something I want to end on," she said from Japan.

"I was feeling good on the start line and was confident of making the final, particularly as I was the third fastest of the 18 athletes."

Starting from the seventh lane, MacFarlane said as the athletes converged to prepare for the first steeple, one trod on her right foot causing the shoe to fly off.

"I found myself in the middle of the pack of athletes with only one shoe. It had been tightly laced, but I can see three spike holes in my shoe now, which anchored it to the ground as I tried to run.

"With literally less than a second to think, I considered going back to find my shoe, but I decided that it would take too long and I would not make the final if I took that option."

The 30-year-old carefully took the first water jump, making sure to lead with her left foot, but despite having escaped injury

from the spiking was beginning to feel the effects of running on the simmering surface.

"I completed 600m, but as much as I wanted to continue, the pain in my foot as it burned on the track was unbearable. When I looked down to see blood pouring from the sole of my bare foot on to the track, I had no option but to stop.

"The air temperature was around 35 deg. and the track surface was obviously hotter. I had even tried running on the white line of lane one for a bit of relief from the heat and friction of the track."

MacFarlane said her first instinct was to persuade the Japanese officials to allow her to compete in the third heat, even though she was not able to walk to the medical area.

"I did not realise the extent of the damage I caused by running barefoot, in terms of extreme blistering and broken skin on my feet," she said.

"The pain from the doctor trying to scrape pieces of the track from underneath broken blisters was incredible. I needed a local anaesthetic in my toes to finish the job."

Having had time to think about the incident, the Sandy Bay Har-

rier said: "If given the chance to decide what to do again, I would go back for my shoe. But I really wanted to make that final and I wasn't thinking about conserving my feet for the next race."

After making her way through some understandably tearful interviews, MacFarlane said she was grateful for the support of the Australian team management and medical staff.

Her husband, Marty, praised that support structure and said he and their two children had spoken to MacFarlane on the evening of the heat.

"I was really disappointed for her," he said.

"Having seen the times for the heats, there's no doubt in my mind that she would have made the final and could even have tried to win it."

He said MacFarlane will turn her attention to preparing for September's world athletic final in Germany, which she has already qualified for.

"She is keeping it all in perspective and will soon start to look forward to the next challenges that await her."

➤ READ MORE

WORLD ATHLETICS TITLES: PAGE 39

Hurdles only a minor obstacle



ROB Shaw

The Shaw Thing

AS a steeplechaser, Donna MacFarlane is adept at overcoming hurdles.

The former Launceston runner has responded with grace to the spiking injury that shattered her world championship dream on Saturday.

Despite the heartbreak of being forced to withdraw from a heat she could have won, MacFarlane has adopted the approach that it is the end of the worlds not the end of the world.

"It's times like these when it's important to put things into perspective," she said from Osaka.

"My chance to race in these world championships is gone, but I am still alive, I still have my family and I am loved."

The point about perspective is a poignant one. A trio of elite runners was pictured strolling through City Park last month ahead of the inaugural Launceston 10km. Since then two of them, MacFarlane and former cross-country world champion Benita Johnson, have suffered mishaps which ended their world title bids.



Donna MacFarlane, Kerryn McCann and Benita Johnson stroll through City Park on the eve of the inaugural Launceston 10 on July 21.

Picture: WILL SWAN

The third runner, dual Commonwealth marathon champion Kerryn McCann, has been diagnosed with breast cancer.

MacFarlane and Johnson's disappointment pales into insignificance.

Marty MacFarlane said things could have been a lot worse for his wife.

"The results on the Web site had her listed as a 'did not start' and I was more worried about that," he said.

"So when I found out what had happened it was actually better than what my imagination had come up with."

MacFarlane was fortunate to receive plenty of support from both her national team and her fellow Tasmanians.

Her wily coach Max Cherry pre-empted the value of such

support last week when it was suggested that it would be wonderful for MacFarlane to have him in Japan should she do well.

"I don't need to be there if she does well," he said.

"I need to be there in case she doesn't do well."

The Australian medical team also knew exactly how to help MacFarlane deal with the situation, administering all the required treatment before providing some equally welcome chocolate and icecream.

Inevitably, the strongest support in times of adversity comes from family, and MacFarlane's was equal to the task.

"The kids both spoke to her on Saturday night," reported Marty. "Marcella (aged 5) said: 'Why didn't you put your shoe back on and keep running?'" and Gabriel

(nearly 3) just said: 'Will you come home now?' So I think hearing their comments helped."

Marty was also able to assist, commenting about how much media attention the incident had attracted in Australia.

"I think she got almost as much coverage as if she'd won," he said.

"I told her she was the lead item on SBS news which must mean she's made it."

And that report included perhaps the best advice of the lot.

As the SBS experts discussed the incident and the effect it might have on MacFarlane, experienced reporter Dave Culbert listened patiently before offering the simple observation: "She'll be back."