

Grieving Donna records world-class time

AUSTRALIAN steeplechase champion Donna MacFarlane defended her title at the Qatar Super Grand Prix in Doha yesterday, clocking the second-fastest time in the world this year.

The win, her second successive World Athletics Tour victory, comes just two weeks after the death of long-time coach and mentor Max Cherry.

MacFarlane, 30, beat Kenyan duo Ruth Nyangau and Eunice Jepkorir in 9min 31.47sec in the 3km event — a time bettered this year only by her own 9:29.93 at the Australian titles in Melbourne in February.

"This was not an easy win. With two laps remaining there was a group of seven athletes still in contention," said the mother of two, who will arrive back home in Hobart today in time for Mother's Day.

"I kept my focus and was able to

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increase my speed over the last lap." Cherry, 81, died of a heart attack on April 28 and his passing was felt heavily by MacFarlane, who has enlisted the support of Tasmanian Institute of Sport coach Peter Fortune to oversee her Olympic preparations.

In victory, MacFarlane remembered one of the most important pieces of advice Cherry told her about running right through the line.

"I approached the final water jump at the same time as Nyangau and used everything I had left to sprint to the line," she said.

In other Australian results in Doha, Vicki Mitchell finished 11th in the steeplechase in 10:14.50, and Melissa Rollison did not finish.

Sarah Jamieson returned to the

track for her first race since September last year, finishing ninth in the 1500m in 4:10.82 behind Romania's Liliana Popescu, who won in 4:05.52.

In the men's 1500m, Queensland's Mitch Kealey recorded his second Olympic B-qualifying time in finishing 11th in 3:38.69.

Kealey, whose personal best is his 3:37.65 in the Sydney Grand Prix in February, was involved in a fast race, with the first five all recording times under 3:34. Moroccan Abdalaati Iguider won in 3:33.27.

Americans Allyson Felix and David Oliver sounded a warning to their Olympic rivals with fine performances.

Felix completed the 100m-400m double, while Oliver ran 12.95sec in the high hurdles, 0.07sec outside Liu Xiang's world record.



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Mother in a hurry: Donna MacFarlane celebrates victory in Doha.