

# LEE TROOP – “PLEASURE AND PAIN”

October 2007

To say that Lee Troop's athletic career has been a roller-coaster ride would be a huge understatement. Since bursting onto the international scene in the late 1990's, he has represented Australia at two Olympic Games, two World Championships, five World Cross-Country Championships, won numerous National titles and given the Australian public a glimpse of the talent and determination he is famous for. However, countering the highs have been some crushing lows, where injury setbacks, and a body that seemed unable to cope with the demands of an elite level distance runner, made retirement from the sport he loves the likely outcome. However, Troop is made of stern stuff, and there was unfinished business to deal with. A few days after contesting the Berlin Marathon, where he qualified for his third Olympics, I spoke to a weary, but extremely satisfied Lee Troop about the past and what lies ahead for 'Geelong's Marathon Man'.

**N.M. Lee, welcome home and congratulations on your 6<sup>th</sup> place finish in the Berlin Marathon. But more importantly, your sub 2.12 time qualifies you for next year's Beijing Olympics. You must be very happy.**

1.	Haile Gebrselassie	Ethiopia	2:04.26
2.	Abel Kirui	Kenya	2:06.51
3.	Salim Kipsang	Kenya	2:07.29
4.	Philip Manyim	Kenya	2:08.01
5.	Mesfin Adimasu	Ethiopia	2:09.42
6.	Lee Troop	Australia	2:10.31
7.	Arkadiusz Sowa	Poland	2:12.00
8.	Joseph Kahugu	Kenya	2:12.08
9.	Tomohiro Seto	Japan	2:12.21
10.	Ignacio Caceres	Spain	2:12.46

L.T. Thanks Neil. While I am happy, I am also very relieved that I have got the job done and have posted a time that qualifies me for my third Olympics. Now I can just concentrate on doing everything right over the next ten months in the lead up to the Beijing Olympics so I can run well there.

**N.M. The pressure going in must have been quite substantial.**

L.T. I have always said that the pressure that's there is the pressure you put on yourself. But I'm a pretty relaxed individual and not too many things phase me. However, after having the horror race I had in the Paris Marathon, where everything went wrong, and then realising I only had two more opportunities to run well and qualify, the Berlin Marathon was very important. So, if Berlin turned pear shape, there was only one chance left, so I'm really happy that things turned out well and that all the hard work, commitment and support from the people close to me, especially over the last 18 months, has been rewarded.

**N.M. How did the race unfold? Obviously with Haile Gebrselassie talking about a World Record pre-race, the pace up the front was going to be pretty swift.**

L.T. Yes, there were three packs – there was Haile's pack that wanted to hit half-way in 62.30, and that was him with six pace-makers. The second pack was to run 63.45 - 64.00, and even though we went through in 63.40, the pace was too quick – they were running 2.57's for many of the early K's and it was only when someone pulled up next to us in a bus and called out to 'slow down', that the pace dropped to 3.04. So, it was like doing 7 or 8 kilometres really hard, then backing off and trying to recover for only a couple of kilometres. Over the first ten kilometres I found that I had to surge a few times to get back on and at the 14 kilometre mark a significant gap appeared. But I kept hanging in there and at half-way, the field really broke up. Also, at 8 kilometres I developed pretty severe blisters on my left foot, so I had to relax and run my own race; otherwise I was going to pay the price during the second half of the race. But it worked out well and even though I was running by myself for most of the second half, I was able to work my way through the field and up to sixth place.

**N.M. The Berlin course is pancake flat, and without strong winds, you'd think it would not be too difficult for the pace-makers to get it right?**

L.T. In the Paris Marathon the pace-makers were terrible – they were supposed to run 3.00 - 3.02 and they ran 2.55's. In Paris, I went through the first 5kms in 14.50, which was 10-15 seconds faster than requested and I didn't see any of the pace-makers. In Berlin, because Haile was running so fast, it just pulled the other pace groups through faster than they needed to go. We had two pace-makers, but in the group there were also five Kenyans and five Ethiopians who would not relax – they were continually running past the pace-makers, which caused the pace rise. As it turned out, I used a bit of common-sense and backed-off and many of the others blew up and I was able to run through from being in the twenties to sixth place.

**N.M. The Kenyan that eventually ran second, Abel Kirui, obviously ran on strongly too.**

L.T. Yes, second to sixth all came from my pack. Initially there were twenty of us, and two of them ran on and held it together, while another couple were falling apart and coming back to me. And even though I got tired, I didn't drop the pace too much, which was really pleasing.

**N.M. After the race you said that you thought you might have lost the mental strength and determination to really push yourself and hurt yourself that you once had, but you were really happy that you were able to draw on these qualities in Berlin.**

L.T. I haven't been able to run a qualifying time since 2004, and I missed the World Championships in 2005 and the Commonwealth Games in 2006 and the World Championships this year and then in Paris I had a shocker and pulled out – my first D.N.F., so doubts were starting to creep into my mind: "Why did I pull out in Paris?, Why didn't I keep going?" - Thoughts like that. And in the marathon, you need to be incredibly strong mentally. It's a race that you spend six months preparing for one race and you can't just wake up and say, "I'm not feeling too good today; I don't think I'll race – I'll do it next week!" And during the marathon, there are times when you are not going to feel great but you've just got to grit your teeth and battle through, and in past races, I have been able to use my mental strength to get me over the line. In Paris I pulled out and doubts started to creep in because, as the cliché goes, you're only as good as your last race, and my last race was a shocker and my chances of running in my third Olympics were running out, and if I didn't make it, I had pretty well wasted the last four years and probably should have retired. But in Berlin, I ended up running with the old mental strength and metal toughness back, so that was really pleasing.

**N.M. Your blistered left foot was a mess at the finish, but apart from that, how did you feel over the last five to ten kilometres?**

L.T. I felt great. I ran 6.55 for the last 2.2km and I have never run under 7.20 for that section of a marathon before. Obviously I got tired, but I didn't fall apart. I dropped about 30 seconds per 5 kilometres from 25 kilometres onwards but I was able to keep it together and not 'hit the wall'. My early 5km. splits were 15.00 - 15.05, then from 20 - 25 km's it was 15.25. From then on I was clocking 15.56 - 15.58, so even though I dropped 30 seconds, I was still running pretty strongly. In fact, I feel that if I hadn't suffered from blisters, I could have run a minute faster in Berlin. And with another good block of training under my belt, I feel I am capable of running in the low 2.08s.

**N.M. You were in Berlin for your own goals, but was it a thrill to be in a race where Haile Gebrselassie broke the World Record, running 2:04.26. (For those of you, who find the time hard to comprehend, run around a 400 metre athletic track in just under 71 seconds ..... Then run another 104 and a half lap's at the same pace! Lee's time equates to a not too shabby 74.2 seconds per 400 metres!)**

L.T. Yes, definitely. I still can't get my head around it. I find it hard to believe that a guy, who has been around for as long as he has, and has had all the injuries and achilles operations, is still improving. There's no jealousy involved but, with all the injuries I've had, I sort of know what he's been through trying to get back. He's been an elite athlete since he was 16 and to be still amazing the world now is simply unbelievable. He reckons he can run 2.03, but I don't think that time is legally possible for our time. Great athletes like Paul Tergat (2:04.55) and Gebrselassie have been able to run 2.04, but if the time dips down into the 2.03's or faster, I would be highly suspicious, especially knowing how good the world's other top athletes are. At the moment, it is not humanely possible for someone to be many minutes faster than great athletes who are capable of running 2.06.

**N.M. Did you get to talk to Gebrselassie?**

L.T. Just to say 'G'day'. I'm very good friends with one of his minders, Richard Nerurkar, so I had a chat to him. But, it's a circus over there with media commitments and sponsors and many other things leading up to the race, so if anyone, apart from his support crew, says they had a good chat to him, they are talking crap. Basically, I was up on stage with him at the after part and said, 'congratulations', but that was about it.

**N.M. I hear that Gebrselassie earned about 350 000 Euros for his Berlin win, plus what ever Adidas pays him for wins and records. Are the Big City Marathons still the big pay day races?**

L.T. I can tell you, he got a hell of a lot more than that, but he's going to lose 21% in tax, then there's his manager's cut and other expenses, so he might walk away with half of that. But he deserves it.

**N.M. Will he run the marathon in Beijing?**

L.T. Yes. But Geb's only got a 50 / 50 record in the marathon and I've never seen a favourite win an Olympic Marathon. In the championship races, there are no pace-makers, the pace is up and down, the weather is usually hot and you only have to be a little off your game and you can drop a few minutes and be out the back. But at the end of the day, he's just another athlete I have to focus on and try to beat.

**N.M. What sort of money does a pace-maker receive for a Big City Marathon?**

L.T. Probably between \$10 000 and \$20 000.

**N.M. Is it performance based?**

L.T. Yes. But the pace-makers in Berlin got the time right in the end, but the pace varied so much that it was not what we wanted. I have chatted to Deek (Rob de Castella) and Mona and the fast Big City races that are set up to run fast times are a different world. You go out fast in a 2.04 or 2.05 marathon and

everything is really just strung along. Deek ran high 2.07 and Mona low 2.08 and going through half-way in 64 minutes is a hell of a lot easier than 63! I went through London in 63.10 and other races in 63.30 and 63.40 and that obviously has a negative effect on how you're going to cope with the second half. So, for Berlin, I was pretty conscious of trying to make it a 64 minute half-way split, but with the blisters on my feet, the uneven pacing and the pack breaking up like it did, it was a much harder job than I wanted. If I do run another marathon before Beijing, I will probably keep it simple and have the time I want to run roughly what should win the race so that I have every opportunity to run well rather than sitting back in twentieth place, being blown apart early, then picking up T shirts as the guys in front die. My Big City Marathon record is pretty good: I've finished 6<sup>th</sup> in London and 5<sup>th</sup> in Rotterdam, and obviously I was 6<sup>th</sup> in Berlin and Japan I was 7<sup>th</sup> so I can run well, but when everyone blows the field apart trying to run so fast and you're left to battle it out with twenty other Africans, it can be tough. So, if I can find a race that is not so intense, I reckon I can be there in the later stages. And, if you're in a race that you can potentially win, it's amazing how much less tired you feel over those last few kilometres.

**N.M. Do you know what caused the blisters?**

L.T. No. It's probably just the shoes I wore. They were extremely light weight – more suited to running 5 and 10 k rather than a marathon. I went to Ballarat today to see a specialist and had the blisters patched-up.

**N.M. Apparently, after a few not so good marathons, relatively speaking, Gebrselassie has gone over his training and decided he needed to change a few things. Supposedly he upped his mileage to 250 kilometres in a big week and ran some of his longer runs at a faster pace at the finish, so that he would be stronger over the final stages of the marathon. You have experimented with different training over the last few years, but I was looking at your P.B.'s:**

3000 metres	7:41.78	1999
5000 metres	13:14.82	1999
10000 metres	27:51.27	2003
Half Marathon	1:01.00	1999
Marathon	2:09.49	2003

**And one of the common factors was how well you were running in 1999. Obviously you were injury free back then, but have you had a rethink and gone back to the training that worked so well for you back then?**

L.T. I have just gone back to basics. I have done the 240 kilometre weeks but the simple training of Mona Fartlek, Quarters and Hills for the quality sessions works. Mona training might not be the best training in the world but it's the safest because you can't improve if you break down. In the end, you might not reach your absolute potential on Mona training but reducing the risks means that you can run well. It's about being fit and healthy enough to do Championship after Championship and Big City Marathon after Big City Marathon, along with the consistent training – that's how you get better, rather than putting in big blocks of training, breaking down and having to start all over again. When I was doing the big mileage, I was always treading a fine-line but now there's a little more lee-way. Also, I'm older, so I have to be more respectful of my body. However, I've looked at other areas to keep the body sound – things like Pilates, getting orthotics and getting regular treatment from Shane Hamill, which has all made a huge difference. People ask, "What have you done to run 2.10 when we thought you were finished?" And I say, "My comeback started 18 months ago, and I have been able to build on the huge base I put in over many years." So, between now and Beijing, not much will change – just more hard work and the sessions, treatment and support that has worked so well over the last few years.

**N.M. Are you enjoying getting back to sessions like 'Quarters' on a Thursday night, which you haven't done for a few years?**

L.T. Basically, I could not do them, as I kept breaking down because of all the biomechanical issues. Every time I trained on the track, I'd be stiff and sore for the next three weeks. And every time I raced on the track, I'd be stiff and sore for the next three to six weeks. Getting back on the track has given me a new lease on life but doing them on my own is tough. It's the hardest session of the week to do and solo is even harder because so much of the session is finding the right rhythm, and when you're out there by yourself and it's blowing a gale or it's hot, it's very hard to stay focused, whereas, when I was in Ballarat, there would be 15 other guys running and we could all work together. At the moment, I haven't got back to where I'd like to be but, I can run 14 minutes for the session 'day in - day out' and that's OK considering.

**N.M. What is your best time for the 'Quarters' session?**

L.T. I've run 13.17 for 'Quarters' and 13.14 for 5000 metres, both in 1999.

**N.M. So it's a pretty good predictive session for you.**

L.T. Yes,

**N.M. Looking at your P.B.'s, your times for 3000 metres, 5000 metres and the half marathon are all very impressive, but the 10000 metre time of 27:51.27, while very good, looks a little slow on what you may have run. Any plans to run a fast 10k?**

L.T. I have to be realistic, and at 34, I'm not a young guy anymore and it's pointless to think about what I can run on the track if it's going to cause an injury. I know I could run 27.30, because the 3k, 5k and half

marathon times all indicate that. But, the bottom line is, it's pointless worrying about what might be when I need to focus on what will help me run well in ten months time. I have been injured off and on for seven years, and I could sit here and say, I could have run faster for this distance or that distance, but why put chips on your shoulder, when it's a pointless exercise. Much better to look forward at what I need to do to get better. At the moment I'm going really well and my focus is to be able to train everyday, remain injury free and run the best possible race in Beijing next year. If that means that I can get back on the track and race and get close to some of my P.B.'s, then that would be a bonus.

**N.M. Do you find the new Landy Field track, with its less severe bends, a little easier on the hips and legs?**

L.T. It's only been open for six weeks so it's hard to make a proper judgement, but so far it's been great. But after running on similar tracks in Ballarat and Melbourne over many years, and not having any problems, I think it will be really good on the body.

**N.M. Obviously all the hard work paid off in Berlin, but in the lead-up to the Commonwealth Games, and even a few months ago at the Launceston 10km Road Race, setbacks would have had you thinking of retirement. How close were you to 'pulling the pin'?**

L.T. It was really tough in the lead-up to the Commonwealth Games, in that, after the Athens Olympics, I had worked out what I needed to do to get right, then six weeks later I was injured, which lasted all of 2005. I did a marathon pacing job in 2005, but had to pull out because of a problem with my back, then missed the London Marathon and the World Championships. Eventually, we worked out what was wrong – I had a massive problem with leg length discrepancy, causing my hips and pelvis to be out of alignment. A lot of it was due to what happened at the Sydney Olympics when I tore my stomach muscle. Anyway, I asked Athletics Australia for some dispensation to be given to me in order to prepare for the Commonwealth Games. I said it would take six months, then I would be ready to run a 10km. trial in February, and if I could run close to my best, then I deserved to be in the team. Athletics Australia said they would think about it, then three guys came out and ran fairly well in Berlin – still way off my P.B. but two of the guys went just under 2.12 and another guy was 30 seconds off it. Athletics Australia was too scared to make a decision because of its possible ramifications so I decided to cut short my six months preparation to two or three months, causing me to break down again. I was really angry with Athletics Australia, because I felt that I deserved the opportunity to have a chance to get through to February and then do a trial. Anyway, I ran the Fukuoka Marathon with a stress fracture in my back and broke down only two kilometres into the race and had to struggle home in the cold and snow and in pain over the last 40 kilometres. At the time, I thought, what is the point? – I've had enough! It's not fair on the people who support me and have to ride the waves of emotion. (Note: Andrew Letherby, Scott Westcott and Shane Nankervis represented Australia in the marathon at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games). But, I came home and I spoke to Mona and my wife, Freyja, who didn't want me to retire as we'd made the commitment in Athens to make it through to Beijing. So, at the start of January, we started again, with the Pilates and the orthotics and all the hard work. And I had a great year in 2006 with wins in the Australian 10k title, the Australian Cross-Country Championship and the Australian Marathon title – a feat no-one has done before in the same year. These were important wins, because if you can't run well nationally, how can you expect to run well internationally? I was in great shape. Then I went to Tasmania for the Launceston 10 km. Road Race and was leading at 5 km. in 14.10. I was feeling great and was starting to pick it up. But then at 6 km. I felt a massive rip through my groin and had to pull out. Straight away, I thought that I had done something really serious and that was my career over, because if it was as severe as I thought, I would probably need an operation, then six months of rehab, meaning that I would have to put all my eggs into one basket with one last chance to run a marathon qualifier in February, March or April next year, I didn't want to go through all that, then potentially miss out on another major championship. In the heat of the moment, I said, 'that's it! I'm done!' But when I came home I discovered it was only scar tissue from the Sydney injury tearing away. And a week later, I was out running again. So the Launceston groin problem was a blessing in disguise and I feel that the tearing away of the scar tissue has enabled my body to function like it was in the late 1990's. Now that I am feeling a little freer, I can do a little more quality in some of my sessions and improve on some of my previous times from when I was younger – probably not 13.14 for 5km., more likely closer to 13.30, but definitely faster over 10km. and the half, which will ultimately lead to a faster marathon.

**N.M. Unbelievably, the groin problem was the injury you needed to have.**

L.T. Yes, that's the way everyone has looked at it. Shane Hamill and Andrew, who I do Pilates with, have said it has given me a chance to get back in alignment and not have to compensate for other problems, which has put stress on other areas.

**N.M. In many ways, staying home in Australia, building up slowly, getting fit and racing the winter cross-country season has been a blessing in disguise.**

L.T. Yes, You know that I have been critical of a few of the guys in our Geelong Cross-Country Team who have put the cart before the horse and tried to prove themselves overseas before they have proved themselves here. If you can't win a state title, it's no good thinking that you're an international athlete. For me, I have tried to keep it simple and when I did become a good athlete and was selected for the

Commonwealth Games in 1998 and then was able to break Clarke's 5km. record in 1999, it was all the hard work I did at home in Australia in 1996, 1997 and 1998 that set the pieces in place for me to take the next step: things like winning National Cross titles and National Half Marathon titles and City to Surf. And so, I knew that if I wanted to get back to being a good international athlete again, I had to go back to basics and do all the things I did when I was coming up through the ranks. So I ate some humble pie, took a few steps back and started crawling before walking, then walking before running, then eventually running well again. I know a few people have been a bit critical of this approach, but I think it has been justified and now I can sit back and focus on running my best race in Beijing.

**N.M. Over the last few years, quite a lot has happened in your life outside of your own running: you've become married to Freyja and have a beautiful daughter Macy; you have become a race promoter and are coaching other athletes. Would you like to elaborate on these changes to your life?**

L.T. Because I was a single guy living out of a suitcase as I travelled the world, when I came back home I had a lot of spare time on my hands. Now, I have to be very time efficient. Getting married is a big step in anyone's life – you meet someone, you fall in love, you marry them and you have a child. I can honestly say that having Macy is one of the greatest things that has ever happened to me. It's amazing how it can change your focus because athletics can be such a selfish sport. There are some days that I can't go out and run as far as I'd like because I have to be home to look after Macy, or Macy is sick or she has to go to hospital. And if I have a bad session and come home, Macy doesn't care, so it changes you for the better. Having Freyja and Macy have been wonderful for me over the last few years when the running was not going well. The fact that I missed out on the Commonwealth Games in 2006 was completely overshadowed by the fact that my wife gave birth to a beautiful baby daughter a month earlier. When I was single, I tended to over analyse my running, and this can have a negative effect. Whereas now, most of my time is taken up with Freyja and Macy and my company and there is more balance in my life. And, it's actually great because now, when I go out for a run, I can use it as thinking time and go over all the other things happening in my life. When you are basically a full-time athlete, you spend too much time thinking about running: how the last session went, how the next session will go, this race and that race and this can wear you down, especially when you are not running well. With the company, it's been great because it gives me a fantastic opportunity to put in place many of the things I have learnt over the last 15 years. The events we have put on have had some great successes so far – Mona broke a World Record in the first Ron Clarke Classic and Nathan Deakes broke a World Record last year, so things are going really well in what is probably the second or third biggest track meet in Australia after we've only been going a few years.

**N.M. With your coaching, what is the message you pass onto your athletes?**

L.T. It's pretty simple and it doesn't matter whether they want to be a super-elite athlete or someone who wants to break 3 hours for the marathon – you have to be committed and dedicated and a lot of athletes have to take a step back before they can move forward. So a lot of the initial training over the first twelve months is just getting into a routine and learning how to train. Then, the second year it's building the miles up and improving in your races and the third year is about maximizing the work completed over the first two years. I tell all my athletes that it's like an apprenticeship. An apprenticeship to be a roof-tiler or a brick-layer takes three to four years, and running is no different – it takes three to four years of hard work and commitment before you start to see the real benefits. Too many people look for the quick fix, they want to get from point A to point B as quickly as possible and it just doesn't work that way. My message is pretty simple: you put one foot in front of the other, you run as long as you can as hard as you can and you try to get to the finish as fast as you can. My athletes know that. They have to do the same boring stuff, week in, week out, and that's what is going to make them a good athlete.

**N.M. The Geelong Region Team had a fantastic winter season, especially in the Division One Men's' Competition with a Team Premiership. Could you outline how the team came to be and it's development?**

L.T. It's quite simple. In 1998 I got sick of running for a Ballarat club, as I'd been doing for the previous 8 or 9 years. There were also a number of other talented Geelong athletes in the same boat, running for either Ballarat or Melbourne clubs. I was interested in getting a Geelong Team up and running, so I went to Geelong Athletics with the idea, but they said, "No, they weren't really interested". I then went to Athletics Victoria, and they weren't interested because we'd had a couple of previous attempts that had fallen by the wayside. A few of the Melbourne teams opposed us too because we had athletes like Darren Lynch, a young Craig Mottram and myself and they were worried that we would be too strong. But the bottom line was that our elite athletes would rarely compete because they'd be elsewhere. While it would be great for the top runners to be representing Geelong, our aim was to develop some of our best young athletes and to help them use the competition as a stepping-stone to go onto bigger things. Anyway, I fought the system and the knockers and initially, paid out of my own pocket to get it going and ..... Fast forward nine years and we have won our first Division One Men's' Premiership. People might find it hard to believe when I have been to two Olympics and moving onto a third, but winning the winter premiership is one of most satisfying moments I have had in my athletics career. And for the next generation of Geelong athletes coming through,

they will know that it's a wonderful stepping-stone to go onto state teams, then national teams and hopefully major championship teams. To have athletes like Craig Mottram and Georgie Clarke, who have gone onto the Olympics and have set the benchmark, and then Louis Rowan, who has gained Commonwealth Games selection, then guys like Richard Jeremiah and Mark Tucker, who have gained selection for World Cross-Country, Geelong has been a wonderful breeding ground for talented athletes. I believe that the Athletics Victoria Winter Season is a critical part in an athlete's build-up to higher competitions and to win this year, in such a dominating fashion, is a wonderful achievement and a credit to all the people who put in endless hours: people like Chris Sly and Lyn Taylor and Sue Buckley and countless others who make the club what it is. As I tell everyone, the club is not about me, it's to help the athletes and the up and coming kids.

**N.M. I think a few of the other centres are now using Geelong as a blue print, so that's a bit of a pat on the back for all the hard work that has gone on.**

L.T. Yes. And I think that Glenhuntly, who originally opposed us, are complementary now as the extra competition has raised the bar. Glenhuntly has won the title for the previous ten years and I'm sure they are really looking forward to challenging us next year. In fact, Glenhuntly is a club that I have tried to model Geelong on because they have so much commitment and a proud history. Everyone wants to run for Glenhuntly because of this. Winning one premiership is great for us, but to be regarded as a good club, we need to be competitive every year. Our last three or four years has been really good, with us consistently in the top three. But this year, much like the footy club, we have been dominant, mainly because of our extra depth. It's not about having guys like myself - it's having guys like David Wynn, Wes Benson, Brett Coleman, Nick Wightman, Colin Thornton that are there every week, running their hearts out. Then we're really lucky to have Scottie Rantall and Mark Tucker and Richard Jeremiah who compliment the other guys, a bit like the icing on the cake. For me, the most pleasing thing this year is how the guys have wanted to run and support each other. The joy on the faces of the guys after winning races like Sandown or Coliban has been priceless.

**N.M. What plans have you in the lead-up to Beijing?**

L.T. None at the moment - I'm taking a break. Apart from when I've been injured, I haven't had the luxury of a break in the last ten years. And when you're injured, it's not a break because you're cross-training on the bike or in the pool or in the gym or you're walking. This is the first time that I've actually voluntarily had a break. Initially I said I would have two weeks, but thought I would find it hard to stick to that and cut it back to a week. But I'm going to force myself into having two weeks completely off. What I need to do now is enjoy the moment with the people close to me. Freyja has sacrificed so much to enable me to do what I have done. I have just been away from home for 15 days, so I need to remind Macy that I'm still her father. Then there's guys like Mona, who has supported my whole heartedly. Then, I have Rowan Walker and Kevin McMahon running the Melbourne Marathon Sunday, so, as a coach, I need to be there to support them. Scott Rantall, who I don't coach, is also running, but I'll be there supporting him too. Previously, when I just had to think about me, I'd be going to every club and pub in town, but I'll be doing all the right things and enjoying the moment. Then, at the end of this month, Mona and I will sit down and map out what I need to do in the build-up to Beijing. I don't know if I'll run another marathon? - I don't need to, but I can't see any reason why I wouldn't. Possibly there could be a marathon in Japan or maybe London? I might also look at doing the second half of the domestic track season, because injuries have ruled that out for such a long time - who knows?

**N.M. With Beijing almost certainly being a hot weather marathon, and Mona doing so well in the later part of his career by using heat chambers and the smart use of hot weather training camps, are you looking to do similar things?**

L.T. At the moment, we haven't really decided. Mona obviously got the heat acclimatisation right in the later part of his career so, I don't think it will be that hard. I'll probably do a training stint in Townsville, plus a bit of heat chamber work. Recently, I have been doing a bit of altitude tent training, so there are many things I have got right in the last year that I will again use. If it's going to be hot, it will be hot for everyone but it's a difficult balance to get right. Too much training in the heat before the race flattens you and not enough and you're not prepared.

**N.M. You mentioned the altitude tent. How does that work?**

L.T. It's just a tent that you zip up and sleep in. It uses the training principal of 'live high and train low'. It can be programmed up to 4600 metres, but I kept it pretty simple at 3000 metres. I used it for 21 day blocks, and then had 21 days off. I did a lot of research and a lot of it talked about the general benefits but it did not talk too much about the benefits for elite athletes. The Gold Coast Half Marathon and City to Surf were two big races I wanted to do well in this year. Normally I come off altitude training at Falls Creek (1600 metres) really well for the first three or four days. I then normally have a lull for the next 6 or 7 days, and then come good again, so I thought I could do the same thing with the altitude tent. But Gold Coast and City to Surf were 3 days off the altitude tent and I ran OK in both but not great. The fact that I was at 3000 metres in the tent, took a lot more out of my body than mile high Falls Creek, meaning that I felt really flat for 7 - 10 days after getting out of the tent, even with freshening-up. So, a change I would make next year would be to race between 10 and 21 days after using the altitude tent. Another benefit of the altitude tent is that being away

from home training at altitude is expensive, so the tent is cheaper and in the comfort of my own home. Even so, you need to be aware that when you're training hard and using the tent, you're going to be really tired, so you need extra recovery and are basically living like a hermit. I try to be in bed by 10:00pm, then up at 7:00am, and fitting in an afternoon nap. I've treated the altitude tent just the same as if I was on a training camp at altitude and when I'm in it for 21 days, there are no late nights, no functions, no sporting events, no community work, and I completely hibernate for the three week blocks. That works really well, and with the change in when I race out of the tent, I'm pretty confident that it will work well again.

**N.M. I would imagine that everyone would respond a little differently to the tent.**

L.T. Yes. I know they were doing an altitude tent study in Canberra when I was using mine and they were staying at 3300 metres for 14 hours a day. All of those guys got sick and developed low iron and really struggled, so I decided that 3000 metres for 9 hours a night would be beneficial. Sometimes, more is not better.

**N.M. Do you find that your sleep is disrupted in the tent?**

L.T. Yes. Initially, for the first three or four days you struggle because there is so much less oxygen. But once I get over that, I adapted pretty well. There is also a loud generator that powers it, but I put in some earplugs and I was fine. I also have a very understanding wife, who slept at the top of the house with Macy, so I was able to get a good nine hours sleep.

**N.M. Lee, all the very best for your two weeks off – enjoy it, because the following ten months, as you prepare for the Beijing Olympics, will be pretty hectic.**

L.T. Cheers Neil.