

NICK BIDEAU.

MANAGER TO THE STARS

Nick Bideau manages many of Australia's best track and field athletes. He also has an encyclopaedic knowledge of the sport and is forthright in his opinions so it was great to have a relaxing chat over a drink with Nick at The Milch coffee shop.

N.M. Nick, you're up at Falls Creek again this year. Are you on holiday or are you working?

N.B. A bit of both. It's work in that I've got to spend a lot of time with the athletes to work out where they're going from here

but at the same time it's also a holiday because it's relaxing and not many people can get hold of me. You tell people you're coming up here and they think you're going to the moon.

N.M. Maybe you need to bury that mobile phone too?

N.B. I don't use it that much up here. However, I wouldn't come here if I couldn't do some work. I'm not really a holiday type of person, I like to be busy.

N.M. Athletic management, what does this involve?

N.B. There's probably two types of management. There's the agent type who just really books people into races and then leaves it up to everybody else involved with the athlete to make sure they turn up to races in good shape and are ready to go, whereas I see myself as more of a manager in that my job is also to make sure that everything else is going right in their lives. I organise their races, their financial deals and contracts and that sort of stuff as well but I also try to position myself as though I'm in a helicopter looking down, making sure that all the other pieces are fitting together because you can't do so well for the athletes if they're not putting all the other bits and pieces together correctly.

N.M. Are you almost a psychologist sometimes?

N.B. Yeah I suppose so If you had to ask me what it is that makes people run well, the mental ingredients, it's hard to define. However, if you are around athletes you can sense when certain things are not together, that they're uptight or they're not relaxed. Everyone performs at their best when they're happy, relaxed, focused and enjoying what they are doing. That's the main target so that they can train well, they enjoy training, they're fit and healthy and confident and ultimately they perform well because they know that everything is in order.

N.M. Do you have a talent identification role?

N.B. Yes if I thought I could do one thing well it's that I can assess whether people are going to be able to reach a high level. It's easy to look at people and say that they can run but there's a lot revealed when you have a conversation with them so I don't like to judge whether someone can be a great athlete until I speak to them. I've seen lots of people who can run and who have the physical gifts but their attitude, their ambition and their personality type might not be suited to reaching a high level. Sometimes you can change those things, sometimes you can direct them. Believe me, it's a lot easier to get someone who can run to be good than it is someone who can't run but who has the right personality.

N.M. You can't put in what God left out.

N.B. Yeah.

N.M. When you travel overseas with your athletes do you take on a coaching role as well as a management role?

N.B. Yes. Because I have been around a lot of athletes, seen them train, seen things that work and things that don't work, my role is more to help them steer clear of mistakes and making sure that they're doing the little things that are important for good performance. I'm always learning but I've seen a lot of the tricks of the trade and know what athletes should be doing - that's one aspect of coaching. The other aspect is just talking to the athlete, making sure they're in the right frame of mind and at times telling them the hard things to make sure that they really accept the challenge that's in front of them so they really give it their best shot. People might find it hard to believe but it's quite easy for some very good, very fit athletes to shy away from putting themselves on the line to achieve as high as they can. At the last moment some of them can have self doubts. I see the task of coaching / managing as inter-related. I certainly need to work with the coaches and I would find it extremely hard to work with an athlete who was coached by someone I disagreed with or didn't respect their coaching methods.

So it's very important to have a sound relationship with whoever is coaching the athletes.

N.M. Which athletes do you manage?

N.B. There's about twenty athletes all up. There's a big squad from Geelong made up of Lee Troop, Craig Mottram, Georgie Clarke, Richard Jeremiah, Mark Fountain I have also managed Lynchy but he's not running at a high level at the moment. There's also Kerryn McCann, Michael Power, Tim Forsyth, Peter Burge, Clinton Mackevicius, Mark Thompson, Benita Willis, Melissa Rollison, Alastair Stevenson, Eloise Poppett, Ruth McDonnell, Grant Cremer, Simon Field, Tim Ewen - 110 metre hurdler, Paul Pearce - Australian 400 metre Champion. I've been lucky enough to have a lot of people who have won Australian

titles. If you're going to manage athletes you have to think that first of all they can become State Champions, then National Champions, then represent Australia. I would say that everyone I am working with has the capability of doing that.

N.M. Many of your athletes have become more confident in dealing with the media. Do you make a conscience decision to help them in this area?

N.B. Yes. There are lots of tools that we use to help athletes raise their performance and the media is definitely a tool that is helpful because it gives people confidence. It can convince an athlete that they're going down the right track when they see themselves in the paper. You don't want them in the paper all the time but every now and then it's great so their colleagues, peers and the public say, "Gee, you're going well!" It's funny, but if it's in the paper it seems much more important.

There's one thing in particular that I have done every year for about the last ten years to help in this area. I send away a group of athletes to a small meet in Tasmania which is of no real significance but it's sure to have great local media coverage and exposure. Here they can learn how to be interviewed and talk to the media. I also try to spend a lot of time showing the athletes that you don't want to put a lot of pressure on yourself, that you should be humble and that you should talk in the right way because you can very easily do a lot of damage if you say the wrong thing. There have been some athletes that I look after who have caused themselves a bit of trouble by saying the wrong thing to the media, I've done it myself, so it's easy to do and it can be a burden that you might have to carry around with you. So yes, the media is very important.

N.M. Also, their sponsors would feel as though they're getting value for money?

N.B. Yes. It's all inter-woven. I am very performance orientated in the way that I manage people. If you perform well, these other things come, like sponsors and money. However, I get more enjoyment out of people performing great than winning a lot of money, it's the way I am. But if they want to make money out of athletics, and everybody does, they need to be able to deliver what the sponsors want. Sponsors want to see athletes in the papers, on television, they want to see them popular, they want the public to know them and like them. And all this can affect their performance. Once they know that they have a sponsor who is paying their way they feel obligated to do everything possible to perform at their best. However, you don't want to put someone in that position if they're not ready for it. For example, you wouldn't want someone to sign a contract where they were expected to perform at a level they were not capable of. Sometimes athletes don't understand this. They think that they should be paid a lot of money but with the extra money comes the extra pressure and responsibilities. So I try to get the best deal that's most appropriate for the athlete at that stage of their career. Every athlete probably gets one time when they're at their maximum value and you just try to make sure that you're ready to negotiate a contract when that day arrives and not before.

N.M. A few years ago you were involved in journalism with the Herald-Sun. How did you make the step into athletics management?

N.B. Even while I was working as a journalist for the Herald-Sun I was accused by my colleagues that I was trying to promote the sport rather than writing about it. In many ways, I guess they were right because my heart was really in what was best for the sport instead of covering the hard stories. There were many big stories that I knew about that never made the papers. I think the key to me starting athletic management was my friendship with Steve Moneghetti and having an involvement with him and being a sounding board for him on a lot of the things that he decided to do. And of course, directing Cathy Freeman's career and managing her. Once I had proved myself with her in the eyes of other athletes more people came to me to ask for help.

N.M. Your yearly schedule. Where are you at various times of the year?

N.B. It's becoming more defined every year. I'm in Australia from October until March, then I go to the World Cross-Country. I may come back to Australia for a week or so. Then it's off to London, where I'm based and have a house, until October. From there I fly off to meets although I'm not as big a fan as I used to be. I'd much rather go to the track where the athletes train. Occasionally it's very important to go to a meet, especially if you're sending out a young athlete such as Benita or Georgie or Craig to their very first big competition, but once they know how to do it, I think it's much better for them not to have their hand held. Funnily enough, and you might find this surprising, but after you've been to one Brussels or Zurich or Rome Grand Prix they are pretty much the same and you don't get the same buzz. There is a lot of down time spent sitting in hotels waiting for the two or three hours of excitement. So it can be pretty boring and I'm not as keen about going to the meets and travelling as I once was. I go probably three or four times a year but the rest of the time I stay in London and organize things or go to the track to organize training.

N.M. What would Craig Mottram's 2002 program look like at the moment.

N.B. Well, for a start he's had two stints training up here at Falls Creek. Then he's got a Cross-Country race in Japan over 12 km. on the 27th of January. That's a big over-distance race for him but I'm sure he's capable of competing well after his win at the Zatopek. Then he'll come back to Australia for some shorter track races over 1500 metres so that he's racing under his main focus distance for early in the year, which is the World Cross-Country Short Course 4 km. He'll run the 5000 metres at the Melbourne Grand Prix which

is also the National Championship - he'll try to win that. Then it's off to the World Cross-Country in Dublin where he'll attempt to do what he did last year. After the World Cross-Country he'll come back for the National 1500 metre title, then have an easy week before getting back into solid training for the next few months. He might go to Japan in May for one race just to check his progress - I don't like athletes being more than six weeks away from a race because it stops them training too hard, getting into a hole and it continually gives them feedback and confidence and lets them know where they're at. He'll come to Europe in early June where he'll race to prepare for the Commonwealth Games. In other words, Craig, Scivo and I will choose some races to have him 'cherry ripe' to run his best possible race at the Commonwealth Games. After the Games he'll run in a few more races to run as fast as he can, then get ready for the World Cup in Madrid in September. Finally, he'll come home and have a bit of a holiday, then get ready to start all over again.

N.M. Sounds exhausting!!! So Bruce and Craig and yourself would sit down a couple of months ago and map out the plan for the following year? Do you look that far ahead?

N.B. Yes, we'd sit down and have a vague plan for the next year, especially now that Craig has done it once and he knows what is required. It won't be a whole lot different from last year because it worked! And usually if it has worked once, it will work again.

N.M. The plan to run the Zatopek. That was kept very quiet.

N.B. Yes, because I didn't want people to get too 'hyped' about it. He's obviously a quality athlete with 13.23 and 3.35 for 5000 metres and 1500 metres and I didn't want people putting too much pressure on him expecting him to run 27.40 or whatever. He also wanted it that way and once I talked to Scivo about him doing it, we just wanted him to get out there and win the race because it gave him a lot of confidence. The crowd appreciated his performance, the media appreciated his performance, and he knew he was very fit because he could run 25 laps in 28 minutes and a bit so it was an excellent result all-round. Whereas if there had been a lot of talk about it and everyone asking him about the race for two or three weeks, he might have been a bit uptight with everyone expecting too much. You're always better off if less is expected of you. People often don't understand, and I suppose I don't understand, because I've never been a top class athlete, but when there is a big expectation placed on an athlete I have seen how uptight they can get. I see it with a champion like Sonia where people expect her to churn out great performances.

N.M. Do you think Craig had a sense of history. Did he know the great names who had won the Zatopek?

N.B. Well, I told him all about it. He knew it was a great race and Craig is the sort of guy who wants to achieve milestones and create a bit of history. He said straight away after winning, "this is a great race and I'm glad I've won it and can tick it off!" He was proud that he had achieved that. That's a great quality to have.

N.M. And he was the first person to win in bike shorts.

N.B. Yeah.

N.M. Your own athletic career. What did you do?

N.B. Well, I ran a lot - I've been running since I was a kid. I went to college in America. At my best I ran under 4 minutes for 1500 metres and under 15 minutes for 5 k. It doesn't take a lot of ability to do that but I trained hard and wanted to be good Unfortunately, I lacked ability.

I also ran 69 minutes for the Half Marathon, finishing exactly 9 minutes behind Steve Moneghetti when he broke the World Record in the Great Northern Run.

I ran 2 hours 35 for the marathon and was fortunate enough to win it but I'll never toe the line in one again because it almost killed me. I could hardly run for about two months after that.

So that's about it. A fairly modest sort of athlete but the big thing that helps what I'm doing now is that I've trained hard and I know what it's like to do the training and be tired. If anything, when I was young I was far too aggressive and wanted to train much harder than my body was capable of handling. I couldn't accept that I didn't have enough ability. But that helps when I'm advising athletes, especially when they're making the same mistakes I made. If you haven't made the mistake it's probably difficult to see it.

N.M. And you still run regularly?

N.B. Yes. When I can, I have a run. I like to keep fit. I also like to be able to have a run with the athletes I manage. Quite often an easy run with an athlete is a great time to talk things over.

N.M. Was Chris Wardlaw a big influence when you were younger?

N.B. Yeah. He was great. I grew up training at Box Hill under Alan Barlow who coached Graham Crouch and a lot of other guys who were track orientated. I used to run really well at school early on in the athletic season, then struggle towards the end of the season. One day Tim O'Shaughnessy advised me, "you ought to go train with Wardlaw - you'd enjoy that!" Anyway, the first time I went into train with him I was really excited. We were running 90 minutes around Princes Park and I was keeping up. Rab had heard about me and said as we were running along, "hey listen you, six inches behind me for the next two years and just learn!" And a lot of the things that everyone has heard him say makes sense. So yes, he's been a big help.

N.M. He gets people fit.

N.B. Yes, and that's the key ingredient to all athletic events. Whether it's the 100 or the marathon you have got to be really, really specifically fit. And Rab's training is specifically aimed at getting you really fit to run 10 000 to the marathon. I probably disagree with him a lot on training for the 1500 metres. There's certainly no problem with doing his training for a while but eventually if you're doing the events shorter than 10 k. you need to do other things in your training.

N.M. Do you think that a lot of people misunderstand the "Wardlaw System"?

N.B. Yes. When it's written down it doesn't explain everything. It's just fartlek on Tuesday, long run on Wednesday, 'quarters' on Thursday, hour run Friday, hills on Saturday, two hour run on Sunday, easy run Monday. But having done it with him, I know that the long run on Sunday is sometimes quite fast for the last 20 - 25 minutes, more like a threshold run than a long easy run and the Monday night run would often be like that too. And on some of the longer, easier runs, his runners would surge up the hills. It's difficult to explain to people sessions like Como where there would be a hard lap of The Tan before doing the Como hills. His training program has all the bits and pieces but it doesn't actually specify that this session is developing your anaerobic capacity or your VO2 max. The only thing I would say his runners don't do enough of is running flat out in training. You don't have to do a lot of flat out running but it can help. However, Rab would say that his athletes can make up for it by racing.

N.M. Who were your heroes when you were growing up?

N.B. Definitely in athletics, John Walker. I used to think he was fantastic. I'd read about Herb Elliott and Percy Cerutti and Ron Clarke. In fact, I remember standing at school assembly and being told that Ron Clarke didn't win at the Mexico Olympics - I was devastated because I thought he was terrific. But Walker was around when I was 13 or 14 or 15. I remember how he ran at the Commonwealth Games in 1974 when I was 14 years old. I thought it was fantastic how he looked in the all-black and the long hair, the 'rock star runner'. And now, having got to know him really well later on, he's a fantastic fellow. It's often the case when you finally meet a big star that they don't live up to their reputation and image but Walker certainly did - he's a hell of a guy, he's a beauty!

N.M. And he's struggling a bit with his health over the last few years.

N.B. He has got Parkinson's Disease but he seems to be on top of it. It certainly doesn't weigh him down and he just accepts it. He says he has had a lot of great things happen to him and one bad thing that he is going to deal with.

N.B. We were talking about coaching before. Last year you coached Sandy Richards to a World Indoor Title. How did this come about?

N.B. In 1997 I took over coaching Cathy Freeman and I recruited Sandy to come and train with Cathy. I would be the first to say that in 1990 I hardly knew anything about 400 metre running but having worked with Cathy and Peter Fortune and always asking questions, I started to learn about the event. Back then I'd go to America and take Cathy to training camps and watch John Smith and Percec and Quincy Watts. Then I'd go to Atlanta and watch Gwen Torrence, I'd talk to Michael Johnson, gradually figuring out what things worked and what didn't work. After putting all the pieces together, Cathy and Sandy got first and second at the World Championships. Then in '98 they trained together again. Cathy was in great form at the time, running 50.04 at Eugene in her first race of the season. However, she injured a joint in her foot when her shoe came apart in a race. While Cathy recovered, Sandy continued on and ended up ranked third in the world, running 50.03 to win the Commonwealth Games, breaking Cathy's Commonwealth Games Record. However, she was now back in America and the distance was a problem and I wasn't prepared to travel to overseas training camps. So in 1999 she went her own way but didn't run so well so she came back half way through 2000. However, it was too late to make a big impact on what she did at the Olympics but she trained in Australia from November onwards and won the World Indoors and a Gold Medal in the 4 x 400 metres at the World Championships. However, I'm not going to work with Sandy this year because I've got two children now and I'm not prepared to travel to America for training. I also don't have the same emotion because she's from Jamaica. When she won the World Indoors I was really pleased for Sandy but when an Australian does well I get a much bigger buzz. I find it difficult to get excited with a non-Australian. I don't really want to work with athletes unless they're running for Australia.

N.M. You were talking before about Michael Johnson's program. Is he fairly secretive about what he does?

N.B. Often what you read about Michael Johnson is rubbish. But what he's told me I'm pretty sure is correct. Greg Haughton, a Jamaican guy who has trained with him, will tell you every session they did and Michael is not telling him not to. Johnson's probably not telling him everything but his sessions were not closed.

N.M. The Kenyans - there's lots of them and they're very, very good. What can we do to beat them?

N.B. We can certainly beat them, especially at 1500. I think that's probably their weakest event. Their depth at five and ten kilometres is much greater than 1500. But Dieter Baumann was able to beat them in the 5000 in '92 and he beat them again in the World Cup in '98 in South Africa. You've just got to prepare really well, get really fit, be in the right frame of mind and run the best race you possibly can. Then they can

be beaten, but it's difficult because there is so many of them. They can afford to train so hard because if dozens of them drop by the wayside through injury and over-training, there are still others ready to take their place. However, anytime we come across anyone with talent like the Kenyans, we can't afford to take risks with them. We have one Craig Mottram, they have ten.

N.M. However, they don't seem to last too long.

N.B. No, they train so hard and they're so focused on getting the most out of running as soon as they can. It's pretty rare for a Kenyan to have a ten year career. I can't name one Kenyan who has had a ten year career. Moses Kiptanui comes closest. He was good in 1990 when he won the World Juniors and then he was just hanging on in 2000 but his best years were '92 - '97.

N.M. Daniel Komen is a perfect example. He was brilliant for a couple of years but now is nowhere near as dominant.

N.B. The amazing thing about Daniel Komen is that he's been World Champion in '97, he's set the World Record at 3000 metres that will be very difficult to break, he's been the World Record Holder at 5000 metres, he's won so many fantastic races but he's never been to the Olympic Games. It's unbelievable!

N.M. Is it because he's one of the few Kenyans who finds it difficult to run at altitude where they have the Kenyan Trials?

N.B. I don't think so. I think it's more the fact that he doesn't prepare properly. For example, he was running in Moscow in 1996 a couple of weeks before the Kenyan Trials. We would never take a risk like that. There's no way known we'd have an athlete crossing all those time zones just before a very important race. We'd have him at altitude preparing specifically for the Olympic Trials. No wonder he didn't make the team. But the people looking after him had the attitude, "OK if he doesn't run at the Olympics we'll just come out and break all the World Records and win all the money races afterwards."

N.M. So bad management rather than bad luck.

N.B. They wouldn't say so because he's broken all the World Records and made all the money but I would say it's a tragedy that he hasn't been Olympic Champion. And the guy who won the Olympic 5000 metres that year was Niyongabo, a good solid athlete but not at the level of Daniel Komen.

N.M. In America a few years ago they talked about lessening the influence of the Kenyans by restricting their numbers in races. Do you think that's going too far?

N.B. I can understand why they'd do it. If you were trying to sell running shoes off the backs of athletes you're not going to sell too many in Kenya. However, if you want to have an International Sport, which it is, you can't really do that. Also, the Americans probably have the top ten guys in the world over 100 metres but they don't stop them running the 100 in Europe.

However, I don't like it when there are 15 Kenyans, 3 Moroccans and 1 European in a race. As well as being a sport it is entertainment and a business and to get the best for the sport, we probably need to invite less Kenyans to races.

N.M. The other day we were talking about El Guerrouj and you were saying that he was not the great champion he could be because of races being set up and paced for him.

N.B. That's just my view. I just find it sad that he has to go into a World Championship or an Olympic Games Final knowing what the tactics are before the race. I think that a real dominant champion should not need to do that. When Herb Elliott won he didn't need pacing, he backed himself and ran away with it. I think it shows a slight flaw or a weakness that he needs a predictable race. He is certainly physically capable of doing it and I think he would win but he has doubts and that takes him one level down in my book.

Gebrselassie doesn't have those doubts.

N.M. Which of the current athletes do you really admire?

N.B. Ahhhhhh Gebrselassie he's the king! He's the best! A lot of other athletes that I see are the absolute boss in their events, like Maurice Greene is the boss and Marion Jones is the boss but I don't get a big kick out of watching their races unless it's the Major Championships where the stakes are high.

Gebrselassie is different. Who else could win at the Olympics, have months off to recover from a major achilles operation, then come out in his first race and still get third at the World Championships. It was just great to see him out there.

I love it when I see the Aussies competing at the highest level.

And I love it when Sonia is going great and she gets that big sprint going. She's one athlete who can perform unbelievably. However, unlike Gebrselassie who always runs brilliantly, Sonia can run not so well or super.

N.M. Why has Sonia been so good for so long?

N.B. It's a rare quality. She's exceptionally talented, really talented. Also mentally tough, competitive, determined and organized. It's funny, but I see people who have so much less ability than Sonia who are so much less organized and dedicated and determined. I don't know how they think they're going to beat her if they're not prepared to apply themselves in the same way.

But then she was nearly down and out in '96 and '97. Most athlete's careers go up, up, up, then they plateau for a few years, then go down and never return up again. Sonia, Colin Jackson, Carl Lewis and

Sebastian Coe are the only athletes I can think of whose careers have gone up, down, then back up again. Only a great athlete can do that.

I also think that having Ciara and Sophie has been significant. What really wears athletes out is the drain on the central nervous system. You can just imagine the very first time you go to the Zurich Grand Prix, there's the top eight athletes in the world in each event, the stadium is jammed packed with 20 000 screaming people and there's a huge buzz. But after you've been there eight times there's not such a buzz and it gradually drains you. But what has helped Sonia so much is having '99 out with Ciara being born and then having last year out with Sophie being born. She's got the hunger back again. She's been able to train and keep fit. She was able to return to world class form 12 weeks after Ciara was born and she's going to try to do the same again after the birth of Sophie. That's because she's so organized and so dedicated. She's truly an amazing athlete.

N.M. Just looking at her training schedule you can see that she trains extremely hard.

N.B. Yes, in fact, she has probably had a tendency to train too hard. That's one of the reasons why she had those bad years. I would say that in '98 she would not have trained anywhere near as hard as '96 yet she won two European Titles and two World Titles in '98 and none in '96. In 1998 she trained more sensibly, was not as intense and she was better organized with her training. Overtraining cost her one Olympics but one thing is for sure is that she now knows how to train - she has made very few mistakes since 1998.

N.M. Is it no coincidence that Alan Storey has been Sonia's coach for the last few years?

N.B. Yes, Sonia's previous coach, Kim McDonald was fantastic in that he could convince her that she could beat anyone. Alan is not the same sort of guy but he gets her extremely fit. In my view he could add a string to his bow if he had a few more tricks to make her believe that she can do amazing things but most times she has it in her own mind to get her head around winning anyway.

N.M. You were saying that under Kim she actually ran a World Record session in training.

N.B. Well, it was worthy of a World Record. With great pacing on that day I reckon she could have run the 5000 metres in under 14.30. I think at that stage the record was 14.36. But it was a training session and I prefer to see athletes saving those super efforts for races. Brendan Foster used to say that if you keep digging up the potatoes all you will be left with is dirt!

(Ed. Sonia ran 3000 metres (8.38) 2000 metres (5.42) 1000 metres (2.44) and 400 metres (59 seconds) with a jog lap recovery between efforts!)

N.M. Georgie and Craig have spent a fair bit of time with you and Sonia. Do you think they're learning the tricks of the trade from Sonia and yourself about how to prepare and be the best they can be?

N.B. Well, I certainly think Georgie has spoken a lot to Sonia, finding it easier to relate to a woman. Also, Craig just by being around Sonia will have picked up the little things she does to prepare and train and race. The other thing is that she's available to them at any time. There's not many people who have been in the 'call room' thinking that they're going to be World Champion and then they are standing on the dais with the gold medal that we can speak to - she's one of them. There's not many people who have completed a victory lap with 'World Record' being called out over the loud speaker - she's done that. I have seen that but I don't know how it feels and the emotions that an athlete feels so having Sonia around is certainly valuable.

N.M. The days of the amateur athlete are well and truly gone. What sort of money can the likes of Maurice Greene, Marion Jones, Hicham El Guerrouj and Haile Gebrselassie make in 'appearance money' and for running 'World Records'?

N.B. The "Super-Stars" can attract up to US\$100 000 per race for Grand Prix events with similar bonuses for World Records.

N.M. Drugs in sport. Are we doing enough to stop the cheats?

N.B. I was really disappointed with how things went with Yegorova. There was not much doubt in anyone's mind that she actually had a positive test for EPO but they haven't got the testing procedures sorted out and she was able to get away with it. So that means that they're not doing all they can. I've always felt that it's nowhere near as bad as the media likes to make out. I know athletes who have been World Champions and have won gold medals, I've been involved with them. I've seen Freeman and O'Sullivan and Richards win World Titles and break World Records so I certainly think you can do it without drugs. It does concern me when you have to compete against athletes who are cheating but that's just a fact of life. My job is to prepare my athletes to run their best, the athletes job is to run their best and it's the sports job to stop the cheats. If you waste your energy worrying about drugs you'll never be the best you can be. Unfortunately, we are much more likely to see a front page story about someone failing a drug test than someone breaking a record. There's a lot more drug cheats in American Football and other sports but no one seems to talk about that. Athletics is supposed to be such a heroic, clean, pure type activity.

N.M. It was a bit disappointing that Yegorova was named "Russian Sports Woman of the Year".

N.B. They would say that she has done nothing wrong but that is the nature of the Russian system that they can accept that more than we can. There's not much doubt that they had a system in the 70's and 80's

where they were cheating and so they probably couldn't ignore all her successes just because there was controversy about a failed drug test.

N.M. For me the greatest tragedy of drugs in sport is that the cheats have made us question the Haile Gebrselassie's of the sport.

N.B. I have no doubts that Gebrselassie is clean. People will tell you that what Michael Johnson ran in Atlanta is impossible. Maybe it is but I can actually see a way that a great athlete like Johnson could get himself into an emotional state where he could rise above what we believe to be possible. That is one area in sport that has been little explored. You can very easily see an athlete's performance raise 10 - 15 % when they're in the right frame of mind and drop 10 - 15 % when they're not.

N.M. Is Michael Johnson's 19.32 the greatest single individual performance you have seen?

N.B. It's the most amazing performance I have seen. But I've seen some beauties. I saw Gebrselassie break the 5000 metre record the very first time he did it and I didn't think anyone could possibly run that fast. I've seen Wang win the 10 000 metres at the World Championships just playing with the field. I've seen Sonia run 8.21 for 3000 metres in London in 1994 when we knew that the only people who had run quicker had been on drugs. Then there's El Guerrouj setting the 1500 metres World Record of 3.26 with the field strung out behind him like a road race. It's almost like 'Sci - Fi' stuff when people run that fast.

N.M. Was Sonia's Sydney Silver Medal night one of the best nights of your life?

N.B. Oh, it was great, but I like winning. When she finished there was about thirty seconds when she was disappointed, that's the competitor in Sonia, but then she took the Irish flag and ran a lap. And when I could see that she was happy, I was happy. If she was shattered in not winning I would have loved her to have won but she was great and she was beaten by a great runner in Szabo, in a great race that gave people a lot of pleasure. I was sitting next to former Irish champions in John Treacy and Ron Delany and although I've only met Ron a couple of times, he wouldn't let go of me, he was hugging me and squeezing me. That's how much it meant to the Irish people. Sonia is such a big star in Ireland that it would have been really tough for her if she didn't get a medal.

(Ed. John Treacy won a silver medal in the 1984 Olympic Marathon and was twice World Cross-Country Champion. Ron Delany won the 1500 metres gold at the Melbourne Olympics.)

N.M. Nick, thank you very much for your time. Enjoy your last day at Falls Creek and all the best for the up-coming year.

N.B. OK. Thanks a lot.