

SONIA O'SULLIVAN.

THE PRIDE OF IRELAND, BUT A TOUCH OF AUSSIE TOO

World Athletic Champion, Olympic Silver Medallist, Dual World Cross-Country Champion, Dual European Champion, World

Record Holder - the accomplishments go on and on. However, to be one of the world's very best athletes for almost a decade is what makes Irish athlete, Sonia O'Sullivan a Super - Star.

I was fortunate to catch up with Sonia for a chat at Falls Creek where she was returning to running after the birth of her second child, Sophie.

N.M. Sonia, congratulations on the birth of Sophie - a Christmas baby and a little sister for Ciara.

S.O. Yes, she was born on the 23rd of December but that was great because I would have been too full to have Christmas dinner otherwise.

N.M. Sophie was born a couple of weeks ago. How is the return to running going?

S.O. So far everything has been going very well. I have been back running a week now which is one day earlier than when Ciara was born but I thought that January the first was the perfect day to start. I thought that even if I just go to ten minutes by jogging five hundred, walking five hundred I'd be happy with that. Then, when we got up on New Year's Day, it was absolutely pouring with rain. However, Sophie was fed and changed and happy and sleeping and Ciara was playing with her cousin. Anyway, I was dressed in my tights and jacket and Nick asked, "are you running now?" and I said that I had no choice because everyone was quiet and happy.

N.M. You've had a practice run with Ciara. How was the first run back?

S.O. Better this time than with Ciara, which was a surprise. We were going to walk over to The Tan and then run but because it was raining we ran straight out the door. Actually, it felt really good but I was running quite slowly. However, it was great to be back running.

N.M. Kerryn McCann mentioned that towards the end of her pregnancy she started to really miss running. Did you have the same experience?

S.O. Yes, towards the end I definitely got like that. I really stopped running in July, about 20 weeks in, but up until then I had a really good run of training and even racing. However, I got injured in July and was forced to stop running and start walking and doing other activities. But I really enjoyed training while pregnant because there was no pressure or intensity.

N.M. Why do you train through pregnancy? Is it for your own 'peace of mind'?

S.O. Yes, to some extent. It also gives me some structure to my day. Otherwise, I'm not doing too much else. I don't work and towards the end I was still training but taking Sunday off. Quite a few Sunday's I'd just stay in bed for as long as I wanted and sometimes I'd still be in my pyjamas at noon. I really enjoyed days like that, playing games and reading with Ciara, but I couldn't imagine doing that every day.

Also, when Nick was working, I would often drop Ciara off at the creche so that I could do some training.

N.M. I see you use a "Baby Jogger" quite a lot. They must be great for parents who want to train.

S.O. They are the best although Sophie isn't allowed to ride in it until she is three months old. Initially I was talking to the makers and said that I was going to the Great North Run to do the Fun Run and that I would like to go for a run with a "Baby Jogger". Anyway, there were pictures in magazines and newspapers and they have been my friends ever since.

N.M. What sort of training did you do during your pregnancy?

S.O. Lots of walking, some with Ciara in the pram but she is getting a bit old for that now. Up until 20 weeks I ran, including some track sessions. I even ran a few races in England. I ran a Ten Mile Road Race in Ireland, the Ballycotton Ten. I'd never run it before and I missed the course record by about 5 seconds. The race had a great atmosphere. I only got to run it because it was transferred from March to June because of the 'Foot and Mouth' problem so Nick and I had a chance to run. When I was about 19 weeks pregnant I won an All-Women's Race against some pretty decent runners in Newcastle. I ran about 27 minutes for 5 Miles. By this stage I had a sore foot but I had races planned. There was also a Nike Race on July 22 and that was my last race. While in England I had been doing some work on the exercise bike and in the gym but when I arrived in Melbourne I started doing 'Spinning Classes' which are great for getting your heart rate up so I did that most days. I also tried to run again in Melbourne but after about 20 minutes it didn't feel right, so I stopped. I did run the Age Footy Fun Run and felt quite good but the next day my foot was really sore again so there was no more running and I concentrated on just the gym and the bike.

N.M. What are your plans for the rest of the year?

S.O. The closest thing, of course is the World Cross-Country in Ireland. That's definitely a hope-to-do event.

N.M. The Short-Course Race over 4 kms.?

S.O. More than likely. I've written to the Irish Team and told them to let me know where I can be of most benefit. I think we have a chance of winning a medal with the great home support. I think the girls will probably run better at home than anywhere else in the world. But at this stage it's a bit hard to tell if I'll be ready because I've only been running a week. I'll certainly have to do the race off a lower running mileage base than usual but I'll work on the exercise bike and do running exercises in the pool and go for long walks to compensate.

N.M. And after the World Cross-Country?

S.O. The European Championships in the northern summer. I've always run well the year of the European Championships, '94 and '98 and hopefully 2002.

N.M. You have been coming to Falls Creek for a few years now. What benefits do you gain from training here?

S.O. There's a much more relaxed atmosphere up here. You're away from home so you're also away from all the running around. Up here you can lie down in the afternoon and relax or have a cup of coffee and a chat. There's no real pressure to do things other than rest, relax and run.

N.M. Do you find the 'group training' a help?

S.O. Definitely. Even this year, it will help me a lot. On Saturday it was my first run up here and I was struggling to keep up on the warm-up out to Fitz's Hut. Anyway, I made it out to the stream then turned around. I think if I was in Melbourne I would have run 30 minutes and stopped rather than the 39 minutes I ended up running because I was determined to make it to the stream.

N.M. Is the foot OK?

S.O. Yeah. The foot is perfect. This morning I ran and talked with Emma Carney. Just to be able to run and talk and keep up with people is a great help. I ended up running out for 25 minutes this morning. My plan is to go out maybe 5 minutes more each day and then if I feel like I need to stop on the way back in I will. Also the time goes much more quickly if you run with others.

N.M. You have been to altitude in Kenya. What differences did you notice between Falls Creek and Kenya?

S.O. There's not a lot to do in Kenya other than run. At least up here we have television. Also, I went to Kenya by myself for just ten days to have a look. In Kenya it's so remote. I think if you were injured or sick it would not be the greatest place to be. I think it would be best to go there in a big group. Richard Nerurkar has been there with a group and he found it really good. They also took some good back-up with them. (Ed. Richard Nerurkar - 5th in 1996 Olympic Marathon / Marathon P.B. 2:08.36)

N.M. A couple of years ago you came off Falls Creek training and won the World Cross-Country Short and Long Course Titles. Was Falls Creek a big part in that success?

S.O. Definitely. It was the first year I had ever been up here. It was also the first time I had been on a training camp for ages where all you did was eat and sleep and train. I really enjoyed my time here and I ended up being in great shape. I did a lot of training with Steve Moneghetti and Lee Troop. In fact, we shared a house with Steve and Lee and we all had a great time.

N.M. You were probably the world class athlete most affected by the emergence of Ma Junren's Chinese women in the early 90's. What was your reaction when they burst onto the scene?

S.O. It was 1993 and the World Championships were in Stuttgart. Leading up to the World Championships I was probably running faster than anyone else in the world and winning all my races. I remember that I ran a 3000 metres in Oslo and did 8.28 which was the fastest time in the world for five years. Next thing, the Chinese came out and ran 8.26 or 8.27. A lot of people were now talking about it, even my mother back in Ireland was hearing talk on the radio and television. My Mum said, "Oh, these Chinese, they're going to be tough." At the time I brushed it aside and thought, "I don't care, whoever is there is there."

Anyway, the World Championship 3000 metres was the first race where I got to see them and with about 700 metres to go they just took off and I was trapped behind Yvonne Murray. By the time I got out and was able to chase after them it was too late and I ended up fourth. When you are expected to win it can be a great shock to the system. But I quickly put the 3000 metres behind me because I had another chance in the 1500 and was determined to be in the right position this time. I didn't really concentrate on winning the race, I just think I wanted to beat some of the Chinese. Towards the end of the race it became really important that I came away with some sort of medal. For a while it looked like I might finish third but then there was a race to the finish with Hassiba Boulmerka from Algeria and I ended up second. It was almost as if I had won. Many people thought it was great that at least the Chinese didn't get a clean-sweep.

N.M. Were you suspicious at the time or did you just think that they were exceptional athletes?

S.O. I believed that they trained very hard running a marathon a day and doing all their tough sessions. I thought, well I haven't trained like that so how can I be as good as them? Anyway, after the World Championships the Chinese went home and I was able to resume winning on the European circuit. Then I

was at a mile road race in Edinburgh and somebody came up and said that Wang Junxia had run 8.06 for the 3 k. I didn't believe them so they said, 'go and have a look at the text.' So I did. I couldn't believe it until I saw it written down.

Then I thought that I had to train harder so I started training really hard. It was the first year that I started running 100 mile weeks. I was training three times a day. I was flying but then I got injured.

N.M. You forgot to take the turtle blood.

S.O. Yes. I must have needed that.

N.M. Despite all the controversy, I think that Wang Junxia was a pretty exceptional athlete.

S.O. Oh yeah. She definitely was really talented. She was a really good athlete without any help and she proved that in '96 by winning the Olympic 5000 metre gold and the 10 000 metre silver.

N.M. Her World Record for 10 000 metres is an unbelievable 29:31.78.

S.O. That time is amazing.

N.M. How did it all start for you. Were you a talented junior?

S.O. Under 17 I ran 9.01 for 3000 metres and 2.05 for 800 metres. They're the Irish records. I won the Senior Irish Cross-Country two weeks after winning the Junior Cross-Country. That was a pretty big deal for a 17 year old. That was the only time that I've run the Senior Irish Cross-Country and I won it as a 17 year old.

N.M. Who was your coach back then?

S.O. My coach then was Sean Kennedy. He was a club coach and I had heard that he was really tough. People told me that he would make people run up this steep hill and that he wouldn't take any messing from anybody.

When I was Under 16 I won the 1500 at the National Under Age Championships and got second in the 800. Then, when I got home I thought maybe I need a coach so I looked up Sean's name in the phone book and called him to ask if he could coach me. He said that we'd have to meet first to have a talk about what I've done and what I'd like to do.

Anyway, Sean coached me until after the '92 Olympics. A good five years where we had some success, a 4th at the '92 Olympics in the 3000 metres and many other good results despite not doing a lot of training. However, Sean gave me a good structure in my training.

N.M. Your current coach is Alan Storey. How do you find being coached by correspondence when you're overseas?

S.O. I think I started like that because Sean worked many long hours. He would often write out my training program and put it in my letter box on the way to work. Sometimes the program would be for two weeks, sometimes it would be for four weeks and it was up to me to do it. One of the first things Sean ever said to me was, "you only get out what you put in! If I tell you to do something and you don't do it then you're not going to get the results."

So, whatever Sean said to do, I would do. I used to love the training but sometimes I would change the days around to suit what I was doing not realising at the time that the order of the sessions was also very important.

N.M. Did you train by yourself back then?

S.O. Mostly by myself. There were a few boys that I did the long runs with. Lots of my runs were in a field at home. However, it wasn't very accurate. Sean would tell me to do 10 x 300 metres and I'd look in my diary and see that I'd done 10 x 36 seconds which is impossible for 300 metres. There was a fair bit of 'guessing' - where I'd say, OK, from here to here looks like 300 metres.

N.M. Alan Storey is a highly respected coach. What is his basic coaching philosophy?

S.O. His big thing is mileage. You've got to run a lot. You can't run the quality until you have done the quantity. You need to have a big base behind you before you're ready to run fast. That is what I am doing right now, gradually building up and even though I'm only running once a day at the moment I will still go for a walk while up here as a second session or when I'm back home I will do a bike session in the gym to get aerobically fit again.

N.M. What is a normal Alan Storey training week for you when you're in full training?

S.O. When I first started with Alan he said that the basic requirements were a long run on Sunday, a longer fast session on Tuesday, a shorter fast session on Thursday and either hills or a fartlek session on Saturday. Then just fill in the gaps with easier running. So that's what I do and it works for me.

N.M. And what about supplementary training?

S.O. The extra bits like weights are up to me. I have asked Alan about the 'extras' and he's told me he doesn't really know a lot about it. But he has recommended people that I can see which I have done.

N.M. Do you do Swiss Ball, Pilates or other core stability exercises?

S.O. I do some Swiss Ball and other stabilizing exercises. I did quite a bit of that in 1998 and I think that really helped me while I was up here to stay strong. I also think that running over the uneven terrain up here makes you strong.

N.M. As Ireland's most famous athlete, how do you cope when you go back home? Can it be a little claustrophobic?

S.O. It can be. When I first arrive home it's great but after a while it can be a bit too much. When I'm in Australia I'm away from all the attention and I can go about whatever I do and nobody takes any notice. I think I forget sometimes when I go home that every single Irish person knows me. I try to act like they don't and go about things as normal. However, sometimes when people are with me, they can be amused by it. Last year Craig Mottram came over for the Cork City Sports and we jogged back from the track. He couldn't believe that everybody we ran past called out and everyone who drove past bipped their horns. But you can't live your whole life like that. That's why it's great to come to Australia where I can be as normal as possible. A lot of people expect you not to be normal. A few times I have been with my Mother to the supermarket in Ireland and people come up and look in your shopping trolley and they'd be saying, "oh, you shouldn't be eating that!" When it's only short term you can be amused by things like that.

N.M. The last two Olympics, Atlanta and Sydney, could not be more different in regards to your performance. Your comments on both.

S.O. Atlanta was definitely a disaster. It's easy now to look back and see what was happening. But even in '97 I still couldn't see what went wrong. However, what I was doing, way back in '92, '93, '94, '95 - everything was building up and eventually everything was going to come crashing down. There was too much intensity in my life and my running. It was great while it lasted - '93, '94, '95 could not have been better years for running but I was not enjoying my running. Even though I won at the '95 World Championships it wasn't that special for me. It was great to win but if I look at the pictures of the race I wasn't really happy. It was more that I was expected to win.

N.M. Was it a relief to win?

S.O. It was certainly a relief.

N.M. A bit like Cathy Freeman in Sydney?

S.O. A bit, yeah. People just expected me to win and they thought that I could not possibly lose. And then if you don't win, it's a huge let-down. If I had lost it would have been a bigger story. Then from this it became a bit monotonous. Everyone thought I was going to win in Atlanta and maybe I got to the stage where I thought that I would win too. But I think that I knew that things weren't going right in training. I was having a lot more disagreements with my coach, Kim McDonald. I just couldn't accept him telling me what to do like I had before. Some of the sessions I did became huge events in themselves, like big races, so big that I became nervous beforehand. One session I did in 1995 was like running a World Record in training. It consisted of: (3000 metres in 8.38 / 2000 metres in 5.42 / 1000 metres in 2.44 and 400 metres in 59 seconds all with a jog lap recovery between efforts).

As Alan Storey says, "everything can't be eyeballs out!"

Maybe it was just a gradual build-up of pressure and I was trying to deny things and push them away and of course in the end, the Atlanta Olympics were a disaster.

N.M. Did the disappointment of Atlanta make Sydney all the sweeter?

S.O. Oh definitely, yes. Because I have spent so much time in Australia, I was really looking forward to the Sydney Olympics. Just being here for the build-up, seeing the way the people were excited and expecting the athletes to perform, I could be a part of that without any of the pressure that was on the Australian athletes. I felt like I was at home without all the pressure.

N.M. Did you feel the crowd support as you were running?

S.O. Oh yeah. It was unbelievable. I felt it definitely before the race and during the final I was aware of it although I was concentrating on the race.

N.M. It must have helped that the Irish Team colours were pretty close to the Australian colours.

S.O. Yeah. The gear was similar although the flags are a bit different. It was almost as though all the Australian flags that were there for the Women's 400 metres suddenly turned around and became Irish flags when the 5000 metre final began. There seemed to be so many Irish people in Sydney.

N.M. Was the crowd worth, say, a second a lap to you?

S.O. Probably yes, when I got back on to the back of the pack. I got the thought in my head, "I've been given a second chance here and I can't throw it away this time!" so I hung on the best I could.

N.M. What were your tactics in the final?

S.O. The main thing was just to keep up and be ready when any moves happened. But typically of a Championship Final it came down to the last lap. But I nearly did lose it early on. I went back and looked at the video and timed the laps. I was actually going the same pace in the early laps when I got dropped off, the others just picked it up a bit and I wasn't ready for it at that stage.

When I was off the back I thought about a comment I'd read in a Herb Elliott book. It was about the voice inside you, the voice that asks, "do you want to do this?" It was the Olympics - what are you going to say? I was able to get back on.

N.M. You must have developed a keen rivalry with Gabriela Szabo over the years?

S.O. Yes. When I was winning in '93, '94 and '95 she was behind me, the promising junior about to become a really good senior athlete. Then she always saw me as the one to beat. And now it has been reversed a bit although I have still been able to beat her a few times. I came very close in Sydney and I

think that she is always worried about me whereas I'm not so worried about her. I just try my best to keep up and I know that if I'm with her I have a good chance.

N.M. The other athletes in the world that you particularly admire?

S.O. I think that you have to have great admiration for people like Gebrselassie and Paul Tergat who have been great for so long. You see lots of Kenyans and Ethiopians who come and go. They earn some money and then they have had enough and go back home and live happily off that whereas Gebrselassie and Tergat keep putting in year after year and keep getting faster and faster.

N.M. The Men's 10 000 metre Final was part of 'the greatest night in Track and Field history' that included your race. Did you see any of the 10 k.?

S.O. I was in the dungeons of the stadium where the press people are and the drug testing takes place so I totally missed it. But I met them both under the stadium after their race. At that stage I didn't even know the result.

N.M. How were they looking?

S.O. Paul Tergat was really happy because he felt that he had run the best race that he could. He was smiling and he came over and gave me a big hug. I'm sure he felt that he'd done everything that he could do and I think he felt the same way about my race. I first had a good talk to Paul in 1998 and he's a really nice fellow. You get some athletes who are involved in their own little world and they don't really care about other competitors. But to meet someone like him who was aware of other athletes and who was so friendly was great.

N.M. Gebrselassie would have been smiling - he's got a permanent smile on his face.

S.O. Oh yeah. We call him "Mr Chipper" because he even smiles on the start line. He's the only one who looks happy before a race, everyone else is a bit nervous.

N.M. I suppose if you're that good, you can afford to smile?

S.O. I suppose so. He has certainly won everything.

N.M. What about women athletes that you admire?

S.O. Ummmm I suppose Svetlana Masterkova. What she did in '96 was great. I was in Zurich the night she ran 4.12 for a mile and that was unbelievable. But it's probably more the older athletes that I admire, people like Grete Waitz and Ingrid Kristiansen who were the pioneers in many ways. What they did back then would still be really good today. They were certainly ahead of their times and set standards for everyone else.

N.M. Sonia, in your book, "Running To Stand Still" you talked about the five undetected stress fractures in your left foot that you ran through. Apparently the specialists were dumbstruck when they checked an X-Ray of your foot. Were they just little niggles that you were able to ignore?

S.O. I think that when they are in your feet you can sometimes run through them. In 2000 I was up here training and I went over on my ankle and I thought I'd strained the ankle but I actually had a stress fracture in one of the floating bones of my foot. Anyway, after an X-Ray, I was told I could continue running because there's no pressure on the bone while running. All along I had been taking anti-inflammatory tablets to suppress the pain a bit but by doing that I was stopping the healing. When I went back to London after the 2000 World Cross-Country my foot was still bothering me a little so I had a doctor look at it and he said not to take any anti-inflammatories, just take some calcium, so I did and my foot got better almost immediately.

N.M. Do you have a medical team that looks after you?

S.O. Yes, I have a really good masseur, Gerard Hartmann from Ireland, who is nearly as good as a physio. He is so experienced that he can usually tell me what a problem is. However, he will also send me to the right person if I need an X-Ray or other treatment.

N.M. After Sydney you had a break and then came back and ran a marathon. What was the story behind that?

S.O. I was having trouble getting back into training after the Olympics and I needed some new motivation. Then I met Richard Nerurkar in a London coffee shop and I told him that we were launching my book on the Monday at the end of October. He said that he was going to do some work for the Dublin Marathon on that weekend. I said half jokingly that maybe I could run it. Then I rang up Alan and mentioned running the marathon to him and he said, "well, if you want to run it you had better start training and you had better do a long run next Sunday and these runs during the week!"

N.M. How much time did you have?

S.O. Ten days. So I started training on the Thursday with a 40 minute run, then 50 minutes on the Friday, then 2 hours on the Sunday. In some ways that probably hurt me because I was really tired from that. After the long run I just ran normally for the rest of the week. I didn't tell anybody that I was running because I didn't want any pressure. On race morning people were very surprised when they saw me emerge wearing a race number. Anyway, I just ran in training shoes. The first half was great but then it got really cold and wet and miserable so the second half was a bit of a battle.

N.M. What time did you do?

S.O. Two hours, thirty-five minutes something.

N.M. Did the last few kilometres convince you to stop at one marathon?

S.O. No, not totally. Up until 18 miles I felt great and was able to keep up with a group of fellows but then some of them began to drop off and we were into a big head wind so it became very tough. I got to the point of breaking the race down into segments, a sort of mental game.

N.M. Craig Mottram has mentioned that you changed his diet around last year when he stayed with you. What do you emphasize in your diet?

S.O. I eat pretty healthy although I have been to all the extremes where I have only eaten salads and fruit and vegetables. I also try to fill up with good fuel as soon as possible after hard and long training sessions. I probably eat a lot better up here because you're limited in the food that you can choose. We have porridge here after a morning run which is a great, filling meal. Also, up here meal times are a bit different with the morning run finishing so late. Up here we tend to eat a bigger brunch then get ready for the afternoon run. Then for dinner we eat lots of vegetables with meat or fish. It's a very simple diet, just good, basic things. People often say to me, "don't you miss out on certain things?" but I have never been a person who eats chips and burgers so I don't know what I'm missing.

N.M. Craig and Sandy Richards spoke very highly of your rice and beans meal. In fact, Craig said that he thought it was the entree. Do you eat smaller meals or is he just a very hungry fellow?

S.O. No, I just think he thought, "where's the meat?" The rice and beans meal is actually a Jamaican meal that we got from Sandy Richards but they have it with chicken and fish and things like that.

N.M. Sonia, thank you very much for your time. I hope you enjoy you stay at Falls Creek and all the very best for your return to running.

S.O. Thank you, Neil.

RUNNER PROFILE

Sonia O'Sullivan

Occupation Athlete / Mother

Age 32 **Date of Birth** 28 / 11 / 69

Height 177 cm. **Weight** 55 kg.

Married / Single Neither.

Two children - Ciara (2 years old), Sophie.

Coach Alan Storey

Personal Bests

400m. 58

800m. 2:00.69

1500m. 3:58.85

3000m. 8:21.64

5000m. 14:41.02

10000m. 30.53

Half Marathon 70.10

Marathon 2 hours 35 minutes.

Other 2000 metres 5:25.36 (World Record)

2 miles 9:19.56 (World Record)

Favourite Food Breakfast foods

Food Eaten Before a Race Fish, vegetables and rice. (night before)

Favourite Drink Skinny Cappuccino

Favourite Movie "Shrek"

Favourite Book "Running to Stand Still".

(Sonia's book - available at all "Good Book Stores.")

Favourite Music / Band U2

Favourite TV Show "Law and Order"

Favourite Night Spot asleep in bed!!!

Favourite Holiday Spot Italy

A Normal Training Week when no races in sight.

Mon. am. 16 km. easy.

pm. 8 km. easy. Gym. Drills.

Tues. am. 8 - 10 km. easy.

pm. Track Session.
 eg. 5 x 1000 metres (no. 2 & 4 faster)
 or
 4 sets of (4 x 400 metres)
 @ 72 secs for 1 & 3. 67 secs for 2 & 4
 30 seconds rest b/w. Jog lap b/w sets.

Wed. am. 16 km. easy.
 pm. 8 km. easy. Gym. Drills. Massage.

Thur. am. 8 - 10 km. easy.
 pm. 15 minutes of 15 seconds fast / 15 seconds easy followed by
 20 - 25 minute 'pace run'.
 15 minutes warm-up / warm down.

Fri. am. 16 km. easy.
 pm. 8 km. easy. Gym. Drills.

Sat. am. 5 - 6 x 3 minute hills
 or
 12 x 1 minute hills.
 15 minute warm-up / warm down.
 pm. 6 - 8 km. easy.

Sun. am. 1:30 - 1:50 easy long run.
 pm. rest.

Other Training / Recovery Sessions.

Ice bath and massage after hard sessions. Spinning class when injured. Circuits / light weights. Walking fast with Sophie and Ciara in Baby Jogger.

Favourite Training Session Any Tuesday session with Alan's group.

Favourite Race Ballycotton 10 Mile Road Race, Ireland.

Best Ever Performances 1994 London 3000 metres (8:21.64). Sydney Olympics 5000 metres Silver Medal. First in 1998 World Cross-Country Short & Long Course.

Favourite Place To Train Falls Creek.

Toughest Ever Training Session

3 x 1200 metres (70, 67, 70 secs for each 400m.) jog lap recovery b/w
 followed by
 12 x 400 metres (70 secs) with 30 seconds recovery.

Advice to Other Runners "Take things in gradual stages - you can't become the best in the world overnight! It is best to take steps to the top rather than one big leap and risk injury."

Goals for the Future "to be in my best shape ever for the Athens 2004 Olympics to run the best race of my life."

Anything else???

* have run 15.20 and 15.20 for a double "quarters" session. eg. 8 x 400 metres with 200 'float' followed by two laps jog recovery then repeat 8 x 400 metres with 200 'float'.

* one Tuesday at Olympic Park I ran 13 x 400 metres with a 400 metre 'float' and ran the Olympic Qualifying Time for 10 000 metres.

* One 'killer training session' in London during 1995 consisted of;
 3000 metres in 8.38 2000 metres in 5.42
 1000 metres in 2.44 400 metres in 59 secs with a jog lap recovery between efforts.

I had Frank O'Mara (World Indoor 3 km. Champion in 1987 and 1989) & Paul Donovan (2nd World Indoor 3 km. in 1987) to help me with pace.
 I've done this session twice, the first time in Melbourne where Susie Power helped for a couple of kilometres. That time I ran 8.45 for the 3000 metres rep.

* Irish Record Holder @ 800 metres, 1500 metres, Mile, 3000 metres, 5000 metres, 10 000 metres.

Note: Thirteen weeks after the birth of Sophie, Sonia O'Sullivan raced the World Cross-Country Short Course Race in Ireland where she finished 7th, thus helping Ireland to the bronze medal in the Teams' Race. One week later, Sonia won the Balmoral 8km. Road Race in 25.07 (25.16 for 5 miles) defeating her long-time rival, Gabriela Szabo (2nd) and Australia's Benita Johnson (3rd).