

Effervescent Fiona's



Fiona Leonard runs stride for stride with Great Britain's Julie Wilson at the Nationals in Perth.

Fiona Leonard is a pint-sized lady with a huge personality. She is a strong and focussed athlete who can diminish the nerves with her great sense of humour and infectious laugh. Her article contains valuable insights into the commitment required to set an athletics goal and work solidly towards it. I asked Fiona if I could present her profile as an 'in her own words' piece. You can hear her chatting in that strong Scots accent and her bubbly personality shines through. Over to you Fiona...

Growing up in Scotland, I lead a very active childhood. Some of my earlier pursuits were dancing (ballet, tap and modern stage), gymnastics, horse riding, swimming, and netball, to name but a few! Back then, however, athletics for females was not strongly promoted or overly encouraged; the



In focus

With Carmel Meyer

only taste I got for anything involving a sports field was at the school sports carnival, where it got as serious as the egg and spoon race! I emigrated to Australia in 1990, where I met Simon (a fellow compatriot!) We later married and had two children.

It wasn't until my late 30s that my passion for running was ignited and I introduced road running into my fitness regime. Prior to that time, I had been an avid gym goer (some may use the term, 'gym junkie'?) and a fervent aerobic queen. I embraced the

Jane Fonda "feel the burn" era and yes, it was a sight for sore eyes-sporting leotards, leg warmers, and headbands! I'm convinced that my formative dance training years must have played a pivotal role in moulding my exercise 'psyche'!

My interest in track running wasn't piqued until my children became involved in Little Athletics. It was really of a serendipitous making; following a race challenge proposed by my son Jamie after one of his track training sessions...I rose to his challenge and the rest is history...my track endeavours were born!

Shortly after I joined MAWA, it was announced that Perth had won the bid to host the World Masters Championships in 2016.

CONTINUED – next page

enthusiastic nature



FROM – previous page

This gave rise to great excitement and before I knew it, the seed was planted and my goal was set...sometimes you just have to strike while the iron's hot! This gave me a five-year window to bring my goal to fruition. However, as a 'newbie' to track racing and with no prior experience, I wondered if I'd bitten off more than I could chew! (no half measures here!) My first port of call was to experiment with various distances, before eventually concluding that I was probably best suited to 400m/800m racing. All the Masters were friendly, encouraging and inclusive. Many role models helped shape my track journey but especially the expertise and insight of colourful character John Dennehy (aka 'Twinnie' as we share the same birthday!)

In the lead-up to *Perth2016*, my husband Simon also became my mentor, coach and great support all rolled into one. He too has a wealth of knowledge to offer, as he was a very successful middle distance athlete preceding his diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis. With the saying "fail to prepare, prepare to fail," lodged in my head, I set about developing a training plan. This incorporated sessions such as speed endurance, short distance road running in order to maintain aerobic fitness, intervals and resistance training for muscle conditioning.

In a bid to help develop and improve my track performances, I decided to cast my net out a little further, taking myself out of my comfort zone to compete at Friday night Strive meets over a few seasons. I used this as a platform to explore different race scenarios in a more exposed environment. This helped build my confidence and defuse a lot of performance anxieties... proving to be hugely beneficial ahead of *Perth2016* where once

again, I would be a small fish in a big pond!

Amongst the many special and rewarding experiences I've had along the way, the highlight to date would be competing in the 2016 Perth World Championships. This was a sublime experience and I was in awe at the calibre of Masters athletes and the many outstanding performances. The icing on the cake for me personally was winning the bronze medal in the 400m (W50) and a gold medal in the 4x400m... I was elated! As a consequence, that has fuelled my desire and aspiration to compete in future WMA Championships, with my next focus being on Toronto 2020.

There have been a few 'hurdles' jumped too! Not literally, but then again, who knows, perhaps a future event beckons?! On reflection, thankfully set-backs have been minimal. Focusing on the positive, I have been exceedingly fortunate not having sustained any major injuries thus far. However, that said, I'm definitely not complacent...I'm mindful that, with ageing, often comes unforeseen pitfalls. The ideology behind my training application nowadays is more along the line of "smarter not harder" and so, my once upon a time approach of "go hard or go home" has been jettisoned! I'm going for longevity if I can.

It is difficult to be succinct when describing what motivates and inspires me as the answer falls under such a wide umbrella. In short, I'm motivated by setting goals and then working towards achieving them; that gives me a sense of accomplishment. I'm inspired by those who dare push their limits in a quest to achieve their best and Masters athletes epitomise this. With that, I thank all the amazing Masters 'family' for being a continuing source of inspiration!