

Race Report 24 Hour World Challenge, Seoul, South Korea, Oct 18-19, 2008

Report by: Martin Fryer, Captain, The North Face Emus 24 Hour Running team

Running Title: "The North Face Emus fly at the World 24 Hour Running Championships"

Australian 24 hour ultramarathon running at the international level came of age this year thanks to the establishment of a landmark relationship between the Australian Ultra Runners Association (AURA) and The North Face, global leader in outdoor footwear, apparel and equipment. The Australian team, colloquially known as "The North Face Emus" posted their best individual and team placings ever in the 6th Annual IAU 24 Hour World Challenge, held in Seoul, Korea on Oct. 18-19. Thanks to the extra support, Australia was able to field its largest Men's team of 6 runners which included team veterans Martin Fryer, Mick Francis and Paul Every along with talented newcomers John Pearson, David Waugh and Tim Cochrane, who had all shown fine form in various demanding endurance running events throughout 2008 and 2009. Unfortunately, a full Women's team could not be sent due to injuries and a lack of backup runners. Nevertheless, Shepparton's Deanne Nobbs made her international debut as the first female to represent Australia in this gruelling event and it is hoped that she will lead a full Women's team to next year's 24 Hour World Challenge in Bergamo, Italy.

The mentally and physically demanding task confronting the starters (106 men from 24 countries and 55 women from 16 countries) on this hazy, humid morning in central Seoul was to run as far as possible in 24 hours around a 923 metre clockwise loop within a loop course. The phrase "pounding the pavement" was not far from the truth as competitors dealt with a surface that was 80% concrete along with small sections of cobblestone path. The combination of this unforgiving surface and the radiant heat of the afternoon sun took its toll on many runners (including many of our valiant Emus) at a relatively early stage of the race, leaving many to battle a long night of pain, nausea and a repetitive loop of ABBA songs played over the PA system. Tough one-on-one battles were fought out throughout the night on both individual and team levels.

Despite the difficulties of such demanding conditions, some staggering total distances were notched up with eventual male winner, Ryoichi Sekiya of Japan, amassing a phenomenal 273.366K to take out his third successive title. Best performance of the male Emus went to the team captain, Martin Fryer, who ran a determined and focused personal best distance of 247.187 K (10th place) to become the first Australian to achieve a top ten finish since this race series

began. Experienced campaigner and newly christened M50 Mick Francis continued his remarkably consistent form as he amassed his second 230K plus total (232.572K, 19th place) for 2008. The youngster of the team, 28 year old Tim Cochrane, ran just under 200K (196.874K, 56th place) to bring the male Emus into 6th place of 18 teams, their best ever World team ranking and a fine effort to beat, among others, the highly favoured team from the USA (7th). Our first and only female representative, Deanne Nobbs, did us proud by running an outstanding 196.512K on debut to finish in the top 20 (19th) in the World and to climb to 4th on the all-time Australian Women's 24 Hour rankings.

I know that quite a few of our team were disappointed with their performances under the harsh conditions but I was proud of their gutsy and determined efforts and I am confident that each of them will return to this event in the future to realize their true individual potential. 24 Hour races can be merciless events and all experienced campaigners, including myself, have experienced a "bad day at the office".

Several individuals and organizations were instrumental in the success of the team and these should be acknowledged. On a personal level I would like to thank The Weston Creek Athletics Club for their generous financial assistance and my family for their patience, love and support.

The North Face Emus express their deepest gratitude to:

- Team manager: Rob Boyce, for his relentless problem-solving and negotiation skills
- Crew: Valerie, Diane, Pitsamai, Tony, Dave Snr, and Hillary, for their selfless and hardworking support to the runners
- AURA: Financial support from generous donations made by AURA members and visionary leadership shown by AURA President, Ian Cornelius
- The North Face: without whose support Australian 24 Hour running would not have such opportunities for growth and development

Selected Individual Results (MEN)

Place	Name	Distance (km)
1	Ryoichi Sekiya (JPN)	273.366
2	Fabien Hoblea (FRA)	267.074
3	Yuji Sakai (JPN)	264.389
10	Martin Fryer (AUS)	247.187
19	Mick Francis (AUS)	232.572
56	Tim Cochrane (AUS)	196.874
63	John Pearson (AUS)	192.201
66	David Waugh (AUS)	188.366
88	Paul Every (AUS)	147.612

Selected Individual Results (WOMEN)

1	Anne-Marie Vernet (FRA)	239.685
2	Anne-Cecile Fontaine (FRA)	239.252
3	Brigitte Bec (FRA)	229.818
19	Deanne Nobbs (AUS)	196.512

Top Ten Team Results (MEN)

1	Japan
2	France
3	Russia
4	Germany
5	Italy
6	Australia
7	USA
8	Spain
9	Taiwan
10	Sweden

Top Five Team Results (WOMEN)

1	France
2	Japan
3	Germany
4	USA
5	Sweden