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### A Brief Chat With Hilary Stellingwerff

By Peter Gambaccini

Photo by Victah Sailer

**Hilary Stellingwerff**, Canada's 1500-meter champion in 2007, will compete in the women's mile at the New Balance Games in the Armory Track & Field Center in New York on January 19 in a field that includes Carmen Douma-Hussar, Sara Hall, Amy Mortimer, Megan Metcalfe, and Lillya Shobukova.



Stellingwerff was fourth in the New Balance Games in 2007. The 26-year-old University of Wisconsin graduate from Guelph, Ontario set personal bests of 4:05.69 for 1500 meters, 4:28.62 for the mile, and 2:02.20 for 800 meters in 2007. She was a 1500-meter semi-finalist at the 2007 World Championships. In October, she won the Lausanne Quarter-Marathon, a distance slightly longer than 10-K, in Switzerland. She and her husband Trent now reside in Lausanne for much of the year but she is currently training in Phoenix with Jo Mersh, formerly Jo Fenn, a 2004 World Indoor Championships 800-meter bronze medalist who will also be at the New Balance Games.

**You're sort of becoming a regular at the New Balance Games in New York. Do you go many places with an atmosphere like that? Your mile race is in the middle of a meet with 5,000 high school athletes and their cheering fans. It's got to be one of the more boisterous running experiences you've had, we would think.**

**Hilary Stellingwerff:** Oh absolutely. It's awesome. I don't go just because it (New Balance) is my sponsor. I got because it's an awesome atmosphere and Ian (Brooks) does a really good job with announcing and getting the crowd going. Because it's a high school meet, it's just packed. We were just watching last year's race. I was showing Jo what it was going to be like (on a video of 2007's Games), and she was like "that's a high school meet? What is this? It seems like Golden League." I love it there. It's a good race to open up with, because the field's are usually very competitive. And you never know this early in the season who's going to be ready or who's going to be bold. It looks like a good field. I think it's just "try to go out there, and try and take the win." and run fast.

**You're in Phoenix now. In past years, where would you be at this time of year? Do you usually try and get out of Switzerland?**

**HS:** It depends on the weather, I guess. I try to go somewhere warm. This year we chose to do Phoenix just because I was staying in the U.S. to do New Balance Games. In the past, I was training on the indoor track in Guelph (Ontario), where my coach is. Basically, this year I said "oh, I want to get out of the snow and into some warm weather" and there were a couple of athletes out here so I decided to come to Phoenix.

**Who is down there with you? We heard Jo Mersh, the former Jo Fenn from Great Britain, was.**

**HS:** Yeah, that's right. My husband started coaching her and so we can coordinate our programs together, we decided to rent a condo down here and we're training together. We just got here about a week ago and we're going to be here until New Balance (Games). We're going to go to Portugal after, probably later in the winter. Jo lives in Birmingham (England) now. She contacted my husband because she needed a change of pace. He's been coaching her for the last few months. She comes and stays with us in Switzerland for bouts of time so I have a training partner in her whenever she can come.

**Does she still consider herself mainly an 800-meter runner?**

HS: Yes, she does. That's her focus.

**Well, you had a pretty good 2007, wouldn't you say, with personal bests in the mile and the 1500 and a ranking in the global top 30? It seems like you're doing something right and headed in the right direction, doesn't it?**

HS: Yeah, it was definitely somewhat of a learning year for me because it was the first I got into some of the Golden League and Grand Prix meets, so it was just getting some racing experience and trying to PR off of those kinds of races because it is a different form. Like you get bumped around by 12 or 15 girls who can run between sub-4:00 and 4:08, say (for 1500 meters). It's a little bit of a different tactical experience, so that was a big step for me. And then making it to World Championships was really one of my goals. So it was a good year. I wanted to run a little bit faster, but that didn't quite come.

**Did Canada send three women in the 1500 to the World Championships in Osaka?**

HS: Well, they did, but Malindi (Elmore) got a stress fracture got a stress fracture in our training camp, or she found out that she had it, so it was just Carmen (Douma-Hussar) and I.

**In the off-season, you tend to some other kinds of races and distances. Your website mentioned a quarter-marathon on October 21, which is a little bit more than a 10-K.**

HS: That's right. I try to do between five and 6k races, but because that was in Lausanne and I was just coming back (to the city) and I said "oh, I'll jump in the 10-K." That was fun. I'll try to do either cross country or road races, but in Switzerland, it's more road races.

**That Corrida Bulloise you did on November 17, which was that?**

HS: That was a road race. When they these road races that are five or 6-K, they're 1-K laps in town centers. They're super fun. Actually, that one was 600-meter laps.

**That's almost a track race.**

HS: It is! But they're on cobblestones and stuff, so the footing isn't great, and it was raining. Actually, it was freezing. It's definitely not the same as a track race. I like it because it gets away from the track.

**And in those races, there's more of an element fun and not really any pressure because that's not considered to be your specialty.**

HS: No. I mean, I want to work hard and lay it down, but I don't feel so much pressure because I'm not aiming for that and I can just do a lot of miles and jump in them as a good workout.

**You have two other indoor races scheduled in Germany, don't you?**

HS: I'm doing a 3-K in Stuttgart on February 2 and a 1500 in Karlsruhe on February 10 and basically my thought is that if I qualify for the World Indoors without peaking, then I'll do it, but if I don't then I'll keep on focusing to the end of May and the beginning of June. There are four races then that I need to do to get a qualifying time for the Olympics. That's what I need to aim for.

**What would actually get you qualified for World Indoors?**

HS: 4:11.50 (in the 1500). You can do it in the mile; it's 4:30-point something.

**As far as qualifying for the Olympics is concerned, we know Canada has its own standards. You ran 4:05.69 last year for the 1500. Is that enough to impress them or do you have to do something this year?**

HS: The "A" standard is 4:05.70, and I was just under that (in 2007). I have to get that one time this year between May 1 and July 6 or I have to get two "B" standards. It's kind of complicated, but basically I'm looking to get the one "A" standard.

**Would you say your training has changed much in the few years you've been out of college? Do you find yourself able to handle more as each year goes by?**

HS: Definitely. I really feel like I've been able to make some significant steps in what I can handle. Mostly the volume and intensity; I could basically do one or the other in college and now I'm starting to be able to get the mileage up, doing lots of tempos, and then I've been able to add the intensity so now I can do even two workouts a day sometimes.

**Do you have an indoor track facility in Lausanne you can work out on?**

HS: There's one about an hour away. But at the lake (Lausanne is on Lake Geneva), there's no snow, so you can just run outdoors. It's like you forget that it's winter.

**Weren't you working part-time in some capacity, and didn't you give that up?**

HS: I was a writer for a magazine at the University of Guelph called "Research" Magazine. Yeah, I gave that up because I wanted to take my training more seriously and I wanted to go to more training camps,

and I've been able to do that. I do coach at an international school in Lausanne, but it's not as intense as working part-time.

**What is it that brought you to Lausanne? Is it something your husband is doing?**

**HS:** Yeah, he's an exercise physiologist for Power Bar, and Nestle owns Power Bar, and he works at their research center in Lausanne.

**So you are you pretty happy with life as an expatriate?**

**HS:** Yeah, I'm lucky because my husband can train with me and be my secondary coach. It is nice that way. I've been able to hook up with a couple of athletes in Lausanne. Actually, Maryam Jamal (an Ethiopian now running for Bahrain) is based here. She won the World Championships in the 1500. I do some training with her and go to some training camps at altitude with her. You think you work hard until you see someone like that. It really sets a standard and it gives me a good perspective to say "okay, this is where I need to be and this is where I need to push."

**Does Jamal do more than you, or does she just do everything faster than you?**

**HS:** She does a lot of mileage, like 100-mile weeks. Right now, I'm doing about 75 miles a week. In terms of workouts, if I was going to average five times 1-K in 3:00 (each), she would average them in 2:50.