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Athletics Canada: The Fast Lane

Canada's Middle-Distance Depth

In the late eighties and nineties Canada was known internationally as a sprinting power with names like Bailey, Surin, Gilbert, McKoy and Esmie. Canada's current depth now lies in middle-distance events with names like Nate Brannen, Reid Coolsaet, Kevin Sullivan, Gary Reed, Diane Cummins, Carmen Douma-Hussar, Hilary Stellingwerff and Megan Metcalfe.

Martin Goulet, Athletics Canada Chief High Performance Officer, feels the depth is representative of strong middle-distance coaching and expertise in Canada, "Our middle-distance strength is a reflection of the quality and expertise of our coaches and the training groups they have been able to institute." Goulet mentions, "Strong training groups, such as the ones established in Victoria and Guelph, and the newly formed group in Toronto, play a large factor in bringing together our athletic talent with equally talented coaches who can bring these athletes to the next level. For example, the University of Toronto project is bringing together a group of coaches and athletes under the mentorship of coach Hugh Cameron, a world-renowned distance running expert. These coaches used to be working in separate groups - the synergy of working as one larger group and sharing knowledge and ideas is already making a difference. We caught up with a few of these athletes and their coaches as they prepare for Beijing.



Name: Hilary Stellingwerff

Event: 1500 metres

Coach: Dave Scott-Thomas

Recent accomplishments: Member of 2007 World Championships team & 2008 World Indoor Championships team

Hilary Stellingwerff

Hilary on her Olympic plans

In terms of Olympic preparation, I plan on having strong training for the next two months using the strength I've gained from the indoor season, and then I'll start racing in May in order to obtain the (1500 metres) Olympic standard. We are aiming for a few good races in late-May and June. I plan to have fulfilled all of the Olympic criteria before the Trials in Windsor, allowing me to just focus on defending my national 1500-metre title. Hilary on how she feels.

I feel pretty fit from the hard training I've done over the past few months. We really tried to focus on good base and endurance because the long summer season means you need a good base to be fit until the end. Of course, I'm not in peak shape now (and would be worried if I was since it's five months to Beijing!). I'm confident that I'm going in the right direction. As my coach Dave Scott-Thomas said, my workouts have been great and everything indicates that I'm on my way to another good summer with personal best times and the Olympic Games as the main focus.

Hilary's coach on Hilary

Hilary's coming off the best summer season of her life. With each year she gets stronger and faster and her progress so far this season indicates that the trend will continue. Her workouts so far this year have been excellent, and we have yet to move into really specific track sessions. Her strength is good, speed is good, overall fitness and balance is good. I'm excited to get into the competitive season.

To follow Hilary's quest for Beijing

www.runhilaryrun.ca



Name: Megan Metcalfe

Event: 5000 metres

Coach: Sean Cleary

Recent accomplishments: Gold medal at the 2007 Pan American Games, set new Canadian record at 2008 World Indoors

Megan Metcalfe

Megan's coach on Megan

We're very excited with Megan's preparations for this summer. Her winter build up could not have gone better. This is the fittest that she's emerged from winter preparations. We are confident that she will have

her best spring and summer season of her career. The Olympics are obviously the goal. Not only qualifying for the Olympics but securing a spot in the final has been the goal for the past years.

Megan on how she feels

I feel that after Valencia (2008 World Indoor Championships), I am on track for good things this summer. I feel that my performance in the heats of the 3000m (8:48, new Canadian Indoor Record) shows that I am capable of both running fast times and racing with the best in the world. My performance in the final, which was not very good, taught me that it is going to be a battle and I need to be in top form to compete with the best.

Megan's plans for the outdoor season

I am still working on finalizing my race schedule, my plan is to run a 5000 metres race in the middle of April in California to try and achieve the 'A' standard of 15:09. In preparation for this I am keeping things simple, working hard and keeping training consistent. After that it will back to the track for some good quality, hard workouts before a mini European tour at the end of May and early June. My goals for these races will be first to hit the selection criteria to qualify for the Olympic Team, and secondly to be able to race 5000m against the best in the world with a few days rest.

Hopefully I will have succeeded in both of these tasks and be able to fly back to my home training base happy, relaxed and excited going into the Canadian Championships with confidence that I will be selected to the team. That will give me a good training block before we depart for Beijing. Since the conditions there are expected to be challenging, I will do a lot of workouts in the heat of the day and as uncomfortably as possible to prepare.

A lot of the small detail will likely change over the next three months, but my basic plan is to get faster, stronger, tougher and more experienced. I am pretty confident that I am on the right track, I just need to put it all together and prove it.

To follow Megan's quest for Beijing

www.megontherun.com



Name: Gary Reed

Event: 800 metres

Coach: Wynn Gmitroski

Recent accomplishments: Silver medal at the 2007 World Championships

Gary Reed

Wynn Gmitroski, Gary Reed's coach on Gary's preparation

We are 160 days (at time of interview) from the 800 metre heats in Beijing. In my opinion Gary is right where I would like to see him at this point of the season. How he got to this point has been a little different this year in preparation, but all that matters right now is we are both relaxed about his current fitness and health. Gary will stay in North America and will likely run in New York, Prefontaine, the Harry Jerome and one more meet to be determined.

Wynn on Gary being a chaser rather than a chaser

We spend more time talking about things and making sure we are both realistic with what we are doing. The key is with the success he has had; only slight modifications need to be included into his training. When things have gone well, it's not the time to make major changes to the program. The only time we would look at that is if something unforeseen comes up - then we would just deal with it. Gary is well aware that his success has put him in a new position, as a target, but he is ready for that, it is all part of the process.

Wynn on the silver medal at Worlds

We talked about that and reviewed the pictures of the finish (Gary was leading with 50 metres to go but was edged out at the line by Alfred Kirwa Yego) in reality he didn't let up. Maybe he timed the finish line too early, but not having seen all the pictures previously gave me the wrong impression. Further review showed he did do almost everything he could have. He was in the optimal performance state where he hardly even remembers the race, he was on automatic pilot. There are a few little things we added to his training to work on the last 50 metres of the race and improve the finish but I don't want to make that public right now.