

Classifieds

Covering the Cygnet, Huonville, Franklin, Ranelagh & Channel areas

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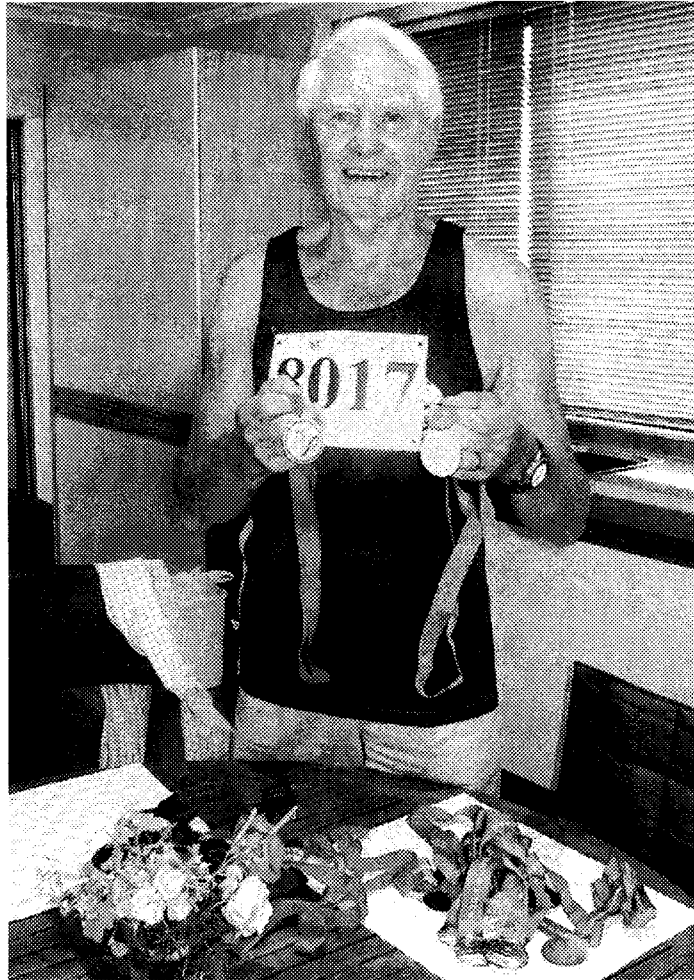
Fun and Masters Games

Never too old

"You're not supposed to be doing this. You've got white hair!" If they didn't exactly say this, Rik Whiting knew that's what they were thinking as he kept up his daily 'keep fit' runs while working in China. It was an attitude he's met elsewhere. Whilst visiting the Cook Islands he came across an athletics event and went to register as a participant. "You're too old for sprints," he was told. But he was accepted for a half-marathon. At the half-way mark and running third - with a big gap to the two New Zealanders in front of him - he heard a motor-bike pull up behind him. A big Cook Islander got off, started running - and beat him to third place. Rik didn't protest, generously conceding that it was a face-saver for the Islanders, and felt it was probably punishment enough for them to be beaten by the Kiwis! There's more to long-distance running than just pounding the turf, and Rik has some great stories to tell. His ambition? "To run a good time, and have a good time." Rik has just returned from the Australian Masters Athletics Championships, held this year in Perth, and judging from the swag of medals he's brought back he achieved both those aims. He returned with two gold medals in the shot-put and discus events and three silver medals for the 800, 1500 and 5000m events. Coming second in the 80-85 year age group to a 'youngster' who'd reached 80 just a week before the competition has made him determined to shine in three years time when Rik moves up a group, and the 'youngster' is left behind for a while!

The man and the runner

Rik Whiting is 82 years old. Widowed and recently remarried, he and his wife Margaret have a beautiful garden and a B&B business in Kettering. These days his daily regime involves running three kilometres uphill and



Rik with his many medals

back, to develop endurance, lung capacity and muscle strength, or sprinting around the Kettering Oval to develop speed. He's fairly new to the competition circuit, having discovered the international standard athletic track at the Domain about a year ago. "It's something I've tapped into that I didn't realize was there," he said, having discovered there are weekly events "all over the place." A couple of weeks before the State Championships Rik asked to "have a go" at the record for the 3000m event. He's full of admiration for the organisation that takes place behind the scenes. In Perth, for

example, 527 athletes needed accommodation, with technical specifications and medical guidelines for events at Olympic standard. For his State record attempt, three people officiated as timekeepers. He now holds the State 3000m record for his age group, at 16m 22.1s, shaving over two minutes off the previous record.

Great memories

Because he considers it the most testing, Rik relishes the 800m. "It's virtually a sprint for half a mile," he said. "But the crowning glory is to run a

marathon." He competed in the London Marathon in 1996. "It never leaves you," he said. "I still get flashes [of memory] from it." After six months training he just scraped in, qualifying as an Australian after places for British citizens had been filled. "The champions move off first, then the rest trickle through, like squeezing toothpaste out of a tube," he laughs. "And because of the mob you don't get into your rhythm for perhaps five kilometres. It's hard to believe how good it is to have thousands of people cheering you on." Friends and family had pre-arranged a spot to be seen and wave from, and Rik didn't miss them! He is forever grateful for a running mate - "a big fellow with flat feet" - who talked him through the last few kilometres, made difficult for Rik by a tricky right leg, "over Tower Hill, past Buckingham Palace, down the Mall - it was my toughest race of all time!"

Master movers

The Masters competitions aim to keep people fit and healthy into older age, and to have a good time, and the record numbers of competitors in Perth reflect the growing membership. Social runs are organized, hosted by volunteers who then open their homes for members. "It's a good time to gather, perhaps for a barbecue, to socialise and talk over the events," says Rik. For the Masters athlete, whether sprinter or long-distance runner, that legendary loneliness is really all about togetherness.

JUDY REDEKER

Contact the secretary, Mike Walker, on 6244 6229 or email mikejoy@netspace.net.au for further information. You can also visit www.tasmastersathletics.org.au

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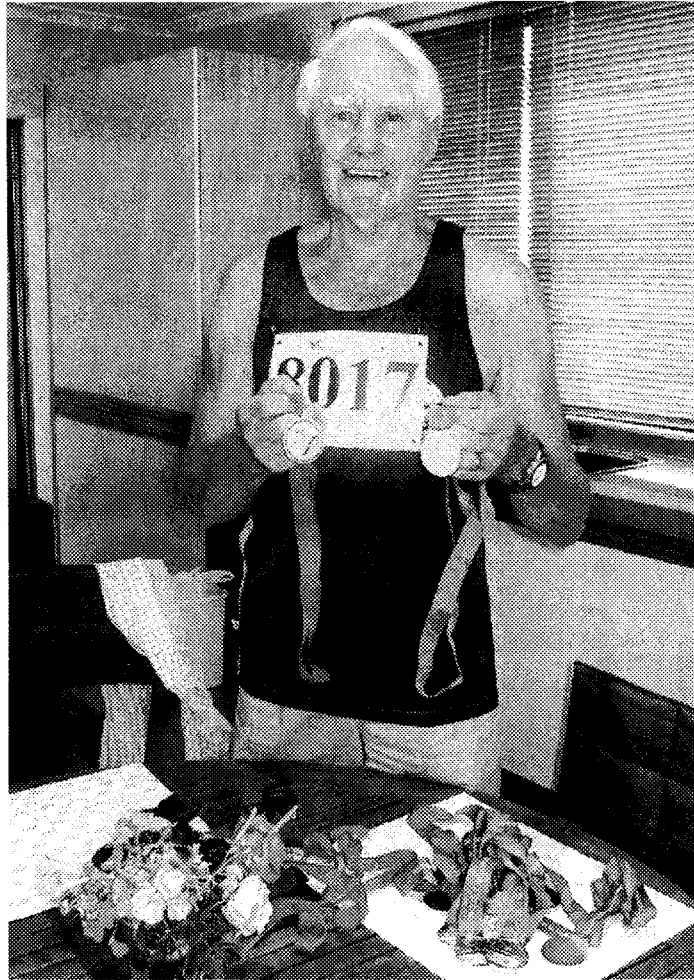
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