

# A BIT OF A CHAT AND A COFFEE WITH 'SCRIVO'

June 2001

A few Saturday's ago I was fortunate enough to catch up with 'coaching guru', Bruce Scriven at the Zen Coffee Shop for a chat and a cuppa. This is the full transcript of that discussion, a copy of which is in the hands of Bruce's Solicitors, "Martin, Barton and Fargo". All names and dates have been changed to protect the innocent.

**N.M. Bruce, first - congratulations on your appointment to the coaching panel for the up-coming World Athletics Championships. On a personal note, it must be a highlight of your coaching career?**

B.S. It certainly is a highlight and it's doubly so because we have some Geelong representation in the team with Georgie and Craig. Also my great mate, 'Bart' will be there too as a member of the team in the medical area.

**N.M. What exactly will your role be?**

B.S. I'll be in charge of the middle distance and distance events except, of course for the walks where Ron Weigel will be solely responsible, thank heavens!

**N.M. How many athletes will you be looking after?**

B.S. I think it's eight or nine, depending on whether Grant Cremer makes the team or not.

**N.M. When and how did your coaching career develop?**

B.S. It basically started as a school coach when I was talked into being involved with the Corio Club and some students I was teaching. I was coaching them at the school level but they did not have a coach at the club level - people like Shaun Ballans and his sister, Tracey, Ken Massari and so on. That's basically how I started.

**N.M. Who has influenced your coaching?**

B.S. Quite a number of influences, from Bob Fowler to some of the better known Australian coaches such as Dick Telford and Chris Wardlaw and most certainly Peter Fortune. Internationally I would say Luiz de Oliveira who is the coach of all the great Brazilian middle-distance runners. He came and stayed in Australia for a while and I certainly learnt a lot from him in a couple of weeks. Also, I would have to mention England's Alan Storey and Nick Bideau for his great wisdom and experience.

**N.M. Specifically, what sort of sessions did de Oliveira and Storey emphasize in their training?**

B.S. With de Oliveira it was what he called 'race play' which was making sessions very specific so, for instance, if you were training for an 800 you might do 300 fast, 200 easy, then 300 fast so that you 'played' working on the start of the race and the finish. Alan Storey was very much into getting a great endurance base then incorporating 'varied pace running'.

**N.M. How many athletes are you currently coaching?**

B.S. Probably, at various levels, about 15 - 20. I try not to count them.

**N.M. Do you have any preference for coaching sprinters to middle distance runners?**

B.S. Ahhhhhh..... probably a preference for middle distance and distance runners. However, I'd better be careful as Clayton Veltman should be here soon!

**N.M. What about your own athletic sporting career?**

B.S. I was one of those school athletes who could probably make the sprint team but was better at middle distance. I was roughly a two minute 800 metre runner. Then when I came down to Geelong I ran with the Geelong Cross-Country Club for medium results.

**N.M. When you were growing up, who were your sporting heroes?**

B.S. Probably the great athletes - people like the great Herb Elliott, and Landy I remember quite well. Ron Clarke, too. Any of the really successful Australian athletes were my heroes back then. However, I was interested in a number of other sports so I followed the great Australian tennis players and cricketers and footballers.

**N.M. So, it's fair to say that you've got all-round sporting interests?**

B.S. Yeah, I certainly love sport.

**N.M. What is your exercise regime now?**

B.S. I still run virtually every day, as much as I can, running anywhere from 30 minutes up to no longer than an hour. I also do a bit of gym work say, five days a week. I love a game of tennis and what ever else is on the go.

**N.M. At this very moment in time, if your life depended on it, what could you run for 5 k?**

B.S. I always wanted to be able to forever run under 4 minute k's but I can't do it anymore so I'd rather not guess.

**N.M. Can I put you down for "just" over 20 minutes then?**

B.S. You'd better put down over 20 minutes!

**N.M. A few people who know you well, doubt that you sleep. How do you fit in all your teaching, coaching and personal commitments?**

B.S. Geah, that's a pretty heavy question, Neil! Well, given that I will be retiring from teaching shortly I could say that teaching has taken a backward step over the last few years, but I do need to keep focused on that because I do teach Year 12's. Some days are obviously really busy and it's really hard to fit everything in so it's going to be good to be coaching full-time shortly.

**N.M. Outside of athletics, what interests do you have?**

B.S. I do love a glass of red wine and sparkling white wines and a good Sauvignon Blanc. But on a more serious note I love many different types of music, including lots of modern stuff. However, Irish music is a real favourite.

**N.M. Are you a fan of "Van Morrison" and "The Chieftans"?**

B.S. Van Morrison is probably one of my favourites. Yes!! Yes!! The Chieftans too!

**N.M. What about other interests?**

B.S. I like a good book. I've read all of John Fowles books which includes "The Magus" and also Patrick White and other good Australian stuff.

**N.M. With you teaching literature, it comes with the territory, I suppose?**

B.S. It does.

**N.M. What about horse-racing?**

B.S. I love horse-racing. It's probably my real relaxation.

**N.M. Are you successful on the punt?**

B.S. I actually don't punt a lot. But I've had my share of luck. However, one has one's ups and downs with punting.

**N.M. Another highlight must have been the last two Olympics with Paul Byrne, Georgie Clarke and Craig Mottram selected. What memories do you have of Atlanta and Sydney?**

B.S. One of my greatest memories of Atlanta is just walking into the stadium on the first day. I often tell the story of how glad I was that Paul wasn't running on the opening day - he was running the next day, because it was quite overwhelming just seeing the size of the stadium. We'd also had a harrowing time just getting there because Paul had an operation not long before Atlanta. I remember thinking, well, he's in the team now, there's not much more we can do, let's just enjoy the experience. And we certainly did that. We have some fantastic memories of Atlanta.

Sydney of course, being a home Olympics, was fantastic. I have not heard one person say anything but great things about Sydney and I guess it's something we won't be able to do again. Well, not in my lifetime, anyway.

**N.M. At the Australian Olympic Selection Trials, what were your thoughts while watching the last lap of the Men's 1500 metres?**

B.S. I still thought Craig would win but it was never going to be a clear cut win which I thought it might be leading up to the race. And then up the straight, with Craig's fall..... I suppose traumatic is the word that best fits.

**N.M. What happened next? How did you prepare Craig for the 5 k which, if I remember correctly, was less than an hour later?**

B.S. Well, first of all I had to find him, which I did. However, I had all sorts of help, it was quite amazing, really. There was the Nike crew and the M.T.C. crew, Shannon and phone calls from Nick Bideau and I seem to remember that Andrew Lambart was around so it really didn't take much convincing to get him ready. Of course, he was devastated at the time but it was something that had to be done so he did it.

**N.M. And what about physically ready - just a massage and a light jog?**

B.S. Yeah, I think he did have a light massage but I'm not really 100% sure. He certainly warmed down a bit then warmed up again and away he went. There wasn't much time to do anything else other than that.

**N.M. What race instructions did you give him?**

B.S. Just to sit with the other contenders if he could but we were aware that Wardlaw was saying that the marathon runners, who were also in the race, would try to blow them away after a couple of kilometres but as it turned out it was the class 5 k runners who were in the finish.

**N.M. You have watched and followed athletics for a long time. What's the best performance you have witnessed?**

B.S. I would have to say Michael Johnson's 200 metre run in Atlanta (Johnson ran an unbelievable 19.32 to put the World Record out of the reach of mere mortals for decades!)

But that whole race was fantastic - I think that the second and third runners in the race were also close to the old World Record and then they got down on their knees and bowed and scraped to 'the great man'.

**N.M. Geelong is only half jokingly referred to as the "Geelong Institute of Sport". Why are there so many promising athletes around Geelong at the moment?**

B.S. I think there are a number of reasons. State League is an absolutely great contributor to the success of our runners. It is no coincidence that we had virtually no one, we got into State League and then we started to improve. We've also got a good track. And I reckon that Geelong is one of the best places in

the world to train because we've got a number of beautiful venues. In some ways we take it all for granted because we live here but when you go away you realise how lucky we are. We don't have to travel far, there's not the hassle with traffic. We also have Eastern Park, the river, the beaches, the You Yangs, clean air, good environment, nice people. What more can you want?

**N.M. Every Tuesday you and a group of Geelong's best runners travel to Melbourne to train with Melbourne's best middle and long-distance runners. How does this work and what do you hope to gain?**

B.S. It works to varying degrees, I think. Overall, it has been very worthwhile. What we try to do is work out a program that we think will fit all of the athletes and we adjust the times to suit capabilities. What we hope to achieve is a major breakthrough by getting the best to train together to push forward so that Australia can get back to where it used to be in the world of middle-distance running.

**N.M. On any given Tuesday, how many different groups would be training with you?**

B.S. Probably three or four groups running differing paces.

**N.M. Do you co-ordinate workouts with the coaches of the other athletes?**

B.S. Yes. For example, Kris McCarthy is coached by his father so we discuss the session and what Kris should be doing during this phase of his preparation.

**N.M. What session did you do last Tuesday?**

B.S. Craig Mottram and Michael Power did 1000 metres at 67 seconds per 400 metres, 30 seconds rest, 400 metres in 59 seconds, jog 200 metres. Craig and Michael did this four times. Most of the others did the same session but at their level.

**N.M. What did Georgie do?**

B.S. She did a 1200 to start with, then 30 seconds rest followed by a 400. She then had a longer break then did a 600 with a 30 second rest followed by a 300. She then finished with some 200's.

**N.M. You and many of your athletes work with Nick Bideau. What does this involve?**

B.S. Nick manages about four or five of them which means that Nick and I co-ordinate a lot of things. I view it very much as a team thing. He's of enormous help, particularly with the overseas program, accommodation and that sort of thing for the athletes that go on to race in Europe. Also, he has a wealth of athletic experience.

**N.M. For a while you were involved with the Geelong Football Club. What did this involve and what memories do you have of this time?**

B.S. Very good memories. I had a number of positions there. The first year or two I co-ordinated their pre-season program, then for a year or two I was just "running coach", then two years co-ordinating the overall fitness program. Finally I became "sprint coach" for the last couple of years. There were lots of good memories and lots of good people to work with. I was very lucky to have worked with people like Malcolm Blight and Gary Ayres. When you're working closely with people like that you can't help but learn.

**N.M. Athletic coaches are the 'flavour of the month' with football clubs right now with John Quinn at Essendon and Boydan Babijczuk at Hawthorn. Is there a chance you might be lured back into football coaching?**

B.S. I would say none what-so-ever. I sort of feel like I belong in athletics and that's what I really want to do. I also think that with some of the footy stuff you need to be a bit younger too considering the amount that needs to be done. Anyway, I want to be a full-time athletics coach.

**N.M. You mentioned Malcolm Blight. Is he an eccentric genius?**

B.S. I think he's a genius - I'm not sure that he's all that eccentric. He's actually a very, very practical person who manages people well. However, he sometimes manages people well by surprising them and I think that's why some people call him eccentric. If you watch Malcolm Blight's record, although I haven't followed it as closely over the last few years, almost every game we played we were in front at quarter time and that was because of his planning - he was so much smarter than many of the other coaches. I remember one match against West Coast. We had about eight players out and we knew we couldn't win the match but we were still in front at half time because of his planning and tactics. So I reckon, yes, he is probably close to a football genius.

**N.M. Which of the Geelong footballers would have made great athletes?**

B.S. None of them.

**N.M. You introduced the 5 x 1000 metre Time Trial (with double run time recovery) as a Pre-Season Fitness Test. What sort of times were the footballers running?**

B.S. The times varied enormously. There were some good athletes there in those days, people like Marty Christensen and Barry Stoneham, who in his lighter days was a sub 2 minute 800 metre runner. They could run close to 3 minute kilometres. Then you go out to Billy Brownless and Gary Ablett who would struggle just to run five lots of one kilometre.

**N.M. Talking of footballer / athletes, both David and Tim Clarke had great athletic potential, especially considering they were only part time athletes. What memories do you have of their running days?**

B.S. Timmy did run internationally. He was an Australian junior representative in the World Cross-Country. That is a measure of how good he is. There is no doubt in my mind that he could have been an international athlete. David, well, he is super talented and could have been a top runner, also.

**N.M. Bruce, next year there will be some changes in you life in regard to work and coaching. Could you please explain these changes?**

B.S. Well, I will be retiring from teaching so that will be a huge change. Next year I won't have two jobs.

**N.M. Are you looking forward to that?**

B.S. Yeah, I am looking forward to that. It will be fantastic that I can devote myself fully to what I really love doing, not that I dislike teaching, Neil - I don't want you to think that, you being a fellow teacher.

**N.M. Well, thank you very much for your time. One last question: what will Bruce Scriven be doing in ten years time?**

B.S. @#\$#!&, who knows???? I'll be happy to be still alive I think, Neil.

**N.M. Still down at Landy Field most nights of the week and on Saturday mornings, under drizzling skies, like this morning?**

B.S. Well, that would be nice, wouldn't it! I hope so.