

THOUGHTS ON EDMONTON

From the personal diary of Australian Team Coach,
Bruce Scriven.

Many names, dates and places have been changed to protect the innocent.

“For me, some of the highlights from Edmonton were seen on the training tracks rather than in the main stadium.

Watching many of the world’s great athletes prepare for centre stage was a tremendous learning experience.

The Kenyans would prepare by running literally hundreds of laps around the infield.

The Ethiopians would group together, starting slowly and then gradually building the pace, usually led by the great Haile Gebrselassie. In fact, as the group passed the finish line for each lap, Gebrselassie would ease to the front for a few strides just to show who was ‘the King’ or perhaps the other Ethiopians were paying their respects to ‘the great man’.

Other countries seemed to have a more individualised program or perhaps they just didn’t have the depth of numbers of the leading African countries.

A coach who I have long admired, Luiz de Oliveira, qualified eight athletes for the Championships - four from his home country, Brazil. Having prepared athletes of the quality of Joachim Cruz, Jose-Luis Barbosa and Mary Decker - Slaney, I knew that Luiz’s group would be great to watch.

He worked one morning with Letitia Vriesde, a 37 year old 800 metre runner from Surinam. Letitia’s task was to run 3 x 500 metres in around 70 - 72 seconds with an 8 minute interval. She ran the first 500m. in 70.2 and the second in 71.9. The problem was that after the second run she was writhing on the track in pain, full of lactic acid.

Luiz’s response to Letitia’s efforts was, “Letitia, you will finish the session with honour, you will run 300 metres in 41 - 42 seconds!”

Letitia did exactly that and some eight days later ran 3rd in the final of the 800 metres, beaten only by Mutola and Graf.

The coaching messages in this session were strong and clear:

- * know your athlete.
- * don’t kill the athlete on the track but do get the necessary work done.
- * plan backwards from your major events - this was Letitia’s last serious session before the World Championships began.

Clearly the athlete and the coach shared a mutual respect and the results speak for themselves.”