

ELOISE POPPETT.

AIMING FOR ATHENS AND BEYOND.

December 2004

The last few years have been a roller-coaster ride for Eloise Poppett. As a junior athlete, Eloise was world class, posting times that were astounding, even for a senior athlete. However, just when the Sydney Olympics beckoned, Eloise was forced to take time off and re-evaluate. Now fully fit and healthy, Eloise is back and ready for a serious tilt at Athens.

N.M. Eloise, we're a few days away from the New Year and you're back at Falls Creek. How long are you here for and what are your immediate plans?

E.P. I'm up here for exactly two weeks. I arrived on Boxing Day and I'll leave on January 9th and head back home where I'll sharpen up for a couple of races.

N.M. What sort of training are you planning for your time at Falls Creek?

E.P. There will be a mixture of longer running and some shorter faster work, especially on Thursdays. There will also be threshold runs on Saturday and a long run on Sunday, so basically it's a pretty standard program that I would do at home, except that the trails are tougher up here and the air is a bit thinner. Also, training with a group makes some of the running a little faster and more competitive.

N.M. What races do you have scheduled for the next month or so?

E.P. I have a 3000 metres in New Zealand on the 15th of January then a 1500 on the 17th of January. Then after that there's the State 5000 metres on the 28th of January where I'll hopefully have a few pace-makers to help out - it would be really good to run an Olympic A or B Qualifier there. Then there's the Melbourne Grand Prix 5000 metres on the 12th of February, then the Nationals so it's all crammed into a couple of months.

N.M. You don't get that many chances to run 5000 metres so you have to be ready when they're scheduled.

E.P. Yes. That's one of the reasons I'm up here putting in a couple of solid weeks before I start sharpening up and tapering down in preparation for the important races.

N.M. What are the Athens' Olympic A and B Qualifiers for the Women's 5000 metres?

E.P. The A is 15.08 and the B is 15.20. They're pretty tough and a bit faster than the Qualifying times for the Sydney Olympics but they are definitely achievable. However, I've seen it before where harder qualifying times force athletes to lift their performance. It's funny, but when you first hear the qualifying times you think 'no way!' but after a while you start believing in yourself and you become more positive. If you believe you can do it, you can do it! Also, I'm lucky that I have Haley McGregor and Benita Johnson to push me along.

N.M. You are in pretty good shape at the moment. Last month you successfully paced Haley McGregor to a 31:43 Olympic A Qualifier for 10000 metres at the Zatopek Meeting. That must have been very satisfying?

E.P. Oh yeah. It was fantastic for Haley. She just ran so well and I was really happy for her because I know how hard she has worked. And I was really glad that I could help her out. It has also motivated me to train harder and run faster.

N.M. You and Haley embraced as she crossed the line. You obviously have a really close relationship.

E.P. Yes, we've been really good friends for a couple years now and we clicked straight away. We have a lot of laughs together. We've been away on a couple of trips together to the World Cross - Country in Switzerland and the World University Games in South Korea. We also have similar training ideas and similar interests so we get along really well.

N.M. Have you paced anyone before?

E.P. I paced Susie Power in last year's Zatopek but I was not fully fit and could only make it to 3000 metres and I was going at a slower pace than I was with Haley. Generally, I'm an even pace runner as I don't do many 'kick down' sessions in training so I'm suited to pace making. In training most of my sessions are even paced running.

N.M. How tough was it out the front into the wind?

E.P. It was pretty tough for the first ten minutes but after that I didn't seem to notice it too much.

N.M. So the plan was to run 75 / 76 second laps for as long as you could?

E.P. Yes. That was the basic plan. I would have liked to have continued on a little longer, perhaps to six or seven kilometres but I was starting to feel the pinch at about five kilometres and I was worried that I was holding her back. However, Haley said that she was so focused on looking at my back that she lost momentum for a few laps after I pulled out, before she got going again.

N.M. You also won the World University Games 5000 metres this year. That must have been a thrill?

E.P. Yes it was, even though we didn't expect a good time over there because of the heat and humidity so 15.47 was OK for the conditions. However, there wasn't much competition because the World University Games clashed with the World Championships in Paris so many of the top athletes weren't running in Korea. In many ways it was a fairly easy year to win but it was great for me because a win is a win! I've also now won at that level and can hopefully step up a level to Commonwealth Games, World Championship and Olympic level. But the trip was a great experience competing in a different country.

N.M. Your coach is Rod Arnold. How long have you been with Rod?

E.P. I started with Rod when I was eleven or twelve. At that stage we just trained twice a week and have gradually built up from there.

N.M. What were some of your early successes?

E.P. I qualified for the 1998 World Juniors in France when I was 15, finishing 11th in the final of the 3000 metres.

(Ed. Eloise ran 9:36.64 in the final after running 9:23.67 in her heat) Then, when I was 16, I ran at the World Youth Championships in Poland. I went into the 3000 metres at the World Youth Championships as favourite but finished 4th in 9:05.05. I was absolutely shattered with my result in Poland but Rod and I sat down and decided to really have a go at qualifying for the Sydney Olympics in the 5000 metres. About two months later I ran 15.18 for the 5000 metres at a Sydney Inter-Club meeting. However, two weeks later I got injured and couldn't get back.

N.M. What is Rod's basic coaching philosophy?

E.P. He has a lot of variety in my training in that we don't do exactly the same things every Tuesday or Thursday. The sessions might be similar and have the same effect but they are rarely the same. However, we do a lot of longer, slower running in the winter to build strength and a base then in the lead-up to the track season we do more intense lactic threshold running and shorter, faster running.

N.M. And Nic Bideau has some input too?

E.P. Yes, Nic gives some guidance and suggests some sessions that might be of benefit. He also manages me and looks after me as far as races, flights and accommodation are concerned. He's also been a mentor as he has a wealth of athletic experience.

N.M. How many sessions and kilometres would you do in a normal week?

E.P. I usually run twice a day except for Friday and Sunday. At the moment I'm probably covering about 110 kilometres a week but weekly it can vary between 110 - 130 kilometres. But if I'm racing, it's a lot lower, down to 95 - 100 kilometres.

N.M. What other supplementary training do you complete?

E.P. I do a 20 - 30 minute circuit every second day that involves using body weight and core stability exercises, things like push-ups, squats, lunges, sit-ups. Then there's Swiss Ball and I have a massage twice a week. I also do water running and swimming if I'm feeling sore. I often go for a swim at the beach after a hard track session.

N.M. You have mentioned some of your early successes as a junior. How did you begin in athletics?

E.P. I started off in Little Athletics. My Mum was actually a pretty good runner who was ranked nationally for the 3000 metres when she was 21 years old after only running for about a year or two. She then got married and had kids but managed to keep running and has been to the World Masters. Also, my Uncle was a pretty good runner who placed highly in the City to Surf quite a few times. So the interest of my Mum and my Uncle helped me get started when I was younger. I think I was six when I started at Little Athletics.

N.M. Were you always going to be a middle-distance runner?

E.P. Yes, I never had any speed for the sprints or spring for the jumps. However, I did hold the Under 6 Shot Put record until last year when it was finally broken.

N.M. Looking at you now I find it very hard to believe that you once held a shot put record.

E.P. Yes, I know.

N.M. When you were a junior athlete, how did your training progress from the initial two sessions a week you completed when you first began with Rod?

E.P. I'm not sure how quickly we built up the training but when I reached 15 I was probably doing up to 60 kilometres in a big week. However, when you're that young you can't afford to be doing too much. However, it's a lot different when you get older. If you've got some talent you can get by without doing too much training as a junior, but when you hit seventeen to twenty your whole body has changed and it can be tough to get through those years. However, I reckon if you can get through those difficult years, you're better for it.

N.M. And a lot of talented girls don't make it through those difficult years.

E.P. Yes, that's right. A lot of them think that they will never run fast again after their body starts to change.

N.M. Can you tell us about the 5000 metres in October 1999 when you ran 15:18.6 at just sixteen years of age?

E.P. I can remember a lot of it actually. It was an Inter-Club mixed race and it was very windy, almost cyclonic all day. Our race was at about 5:30 in the evening and about 15 minutes prior to the race the wind suddenly died down so that the conditions were perfect. In the race I had a few of my male training partners to push me along and I felt really good. After the race I wasn't that tired because it was my first ever 5000 metres and I wasn't sure how hard to push so I held back a little. I still reckon I could have run 15.10 if I had run myself right out. However, it's easy to say that now when I have no way of proving it. I got a lot of publicity from that race but ten days later I was injured and missed out on the Sydney Olympics. Looking back it was a blessing in disguise as a lot of good things have come out of the problems I had at that time.

N.M. Well, you will be happy to hear that your 15:18.6 for 5000 metres is still a World Best Time for a 16 year old girl. So it's a pretty tough record to break!

E.P. Yes, it's tough for me to break at 21.

N.M. Can you remember any of the sessions you completed in the lead-up to running 15.18?

E.P. On the Thursday night, ten days before the race, I ran 3 x 1000 metres with a 5 minute recovery between. I ran each of the 1000 metres in 2:50. We also occasionally did 8 x 800 metres (in 2:30) with a 100 metre jog recovery or 6 - 8 x 400 metres.

N.M. At 16 you were very lean, meaning you had a very high power to weight ratio, which can be of great assistance to junior athletes. How tall were you and what was your weight at the time?

E.P. I was about 170.5 cm. tall and weighed 40.5 kgs. which was ridiculously skinny - far too skinny. As a result my bone density got really low. My iron levels were fine but calcium and other important nutrients weren't being absorbed into my bones which is very serious for a developing girl and a distance runner. Then ten days after I ran the 5000 metres I developed a sore hip. At first I tried to ignore it, battling on for another week. I got lots of treatment on it but nothing seemed to work. At first we thought it was hip-flexor tendonitis then about eight weeks later I went down to Melbourne and stayed with Nic Bideau and Sonia O'Sullivan and had a MRI scan that showed I has a stress reaction in the neck of my left femur. Even though they did not find a fracture it took a long, long time to heal. I even started walking differently because I was favouring it. It would ache even at rest and because my bone density was so low and the area has such a poor blood supply, it just took so long to heal. Eventually, I was able to run by the time the Sydney Olympics came around. Sonia, Nic, Mona and Troopy came and stayed with me at Mum and Dad's house and I was able to have a run with them so that was great while I was recovering. As far as missing the Olympics is concerned, I was disappointed at the time but lots of great things have happened to me since. In that time I have become a Christian and have become a much stronger person.

N.M. Your road to recovery was a long one. What changes did you have to make?

E.P. First of all I had to change my mind set. It might seem weird but you can convince yourself that thinner is better and that you won't get injured, especially when you're running so well. And up until I developed the stress reaction I had never had an injury problem at all. I had also convinced myself that I didn't like the taste of red meat so I had to work through that as well before I could change my diet and start eating properly, including more calcium and red meat in my diet. I also began taking some supplements to make sure I was getting enough of the correct nutrients.

N.M. Were you a vegetarian at the time?

E.P. Yes, although I would sometimes eat a little chicken but I was not eating any red meat at all. Now, I still eat vegetarian meals regularly as foods like nuts and beans and tofu are highly nutritious, but I also make sure that I eat red meat twice a week, sometimes three times a week, as well as chicken and fish - I particularly like salmon steaks which are high in Omega 3 oils.

N.M. How did you resume running?

E.P. To start I had to do light weight bearing exercise like walking before gradually progressing to slow running and walking, then running. In that time I saw many, many doctors from all over the country and they all pretty well had the same view: that I had to get all the other external things right before I even started to think about running again.

N.M. How much time did you have off running?

E.P. I had exactly six months off running but when I came back I still had niggly problems with my shins. Every time I have time off running I develop shin splints - I think my calves just tighten up when I'm not running. But I was able to push through the shin niggles and it was probably another three months before I was able to do some decent training.

N.M. Did you put on any weight while you weren't running?

E.P. Yes, I did. I put on 16 kilograms. I was 56 kilograms when I started back running, which was nice because I felt warm.

N.M. At 40 kilograms you must have had extremely low body fat.

E.P. Yes, it's frightening now to look back at photos of me at the time but I was able to get through it. I'm running at about 52 kilograms now and I don't think I will have to drop too far under that to be running really fast.

N.M. Did you make any changes to your training, like running on softer surfaces?

E.P. Aahhh not really because we've always run on grass where possible. Our track sessions have always been on grass tracks and my easy runs were on softer trails. Obviously I had to start off with some 'cruisy' training and really communicate well with Rod about how I was feeling. While I was injured I was doing a lot of cross-training so my heart and lungs were a lot stronger and fitter than the rest of my body. Because of this, I had to be very cautious and not push as hard as my heart and lungs were capable of while coming back or I would become injured again. So I had to get into the gym and strengthen my body so it could handle the stresses and pounding of running.

N.M. Do you have bone density tests now to keep a check on how things are going?

E.P. Yes, I have a test every twelve months and the last one was fine - actually slightly above the normal range so it is possible to turn things around. A lot of the doctors I saw when I first got injured said that I would probably never fully recover because when I was sixteen I had the bones of a seventy-five year old woman and I only had three years to rebuild them as female bones peak at nineteen years of age. After nineteen female bones slowly decrease in density. So, for a while my focus was not on my running but on strengthening my bones because in the long run, stronger bones would help me be a better, healthier runner.

N.M. Do you take calcium supplements?

E.P. Yes, I take Calcium Complete plus a Multi-Vitamin. As I said before, my iron levels and other nutrients are pretty good so I don't have to worry too much there.

N.M. What do you do when you're not running?

E.P. My older brother and I have a Personal Training business. We own a studio in Sutherland and over time have built up a pretty good client base. We've been doing that for about a year and a half and it's going well. At times it's tough having a business and trying to train but I get by. Also, I'm getting married in April so there's a lot of exciting things going on in my life at the moment.

N.M. You mentioned that you are a born again Christian. How did this come about?

E.P. One lunch time a new girl at my school started talking to me about God and God's love for me and how Jesus died for me. Anyway, she invited me to her church. And even though I was a bit confused at the time and didn't know much about God, I went along with her. I thought that God only punished people but the message was amazing and it spoke to my heart. From that moment on I wanted to accept Jesus and live for Him. My whole perspective on life and running and my family changed from that moment and now I feel a much more complete person.

N.M. What are your plans for after the Olympics?

E.P. Geeh, after the Olympics? I haven't thought that far ahead.

N.M. Are there any plans to move up to the 10000 metres?

E.P. Eventually I think I will move up in distance but not for a while. I'll still be only 22 next year so I think I can run a lot faster at the shorter distances. Also the 10 k. is a gruelling event - I've seen that running the first half in Haley's race, but I'd definitely love to win the Zatopek one day and race some of the big 10000 metre races overseas. Basically do what Benita Johnson is doing now.

N.M. What about moving back down to the 1500 as you have reasonable speed over the shorter distance?

E.P. Probably not. If anything I'd move up but at the moment I want to give the 5000 metres my best shot. Six months ago I was a 3000 metre runner who could run 8.56 any day of the week whether it be a time-trial or a race. Now I have to run under 9 minutes and keep going for another five laps so that is what I have been training for. Hopefully that will happen during the next few months.

N.M. I'm pretty sure that your 8:56 is still the Australian Under 20 Record although Georgie Clarke equalled it in a mixed State League race a few weeks ago.

E.P. Yes, she ran really well and I know all about running fast times in mixed races. Unfortunately, mixed race times don't usually count but Sonia and Benita have said that they're willing to pace me through for some fast times so we don't really need the men to run fast.

N.M. You mentioned Sonia O'Sullivan. She must be a great inspiration to you?

E.P. Yes. I think I met Sonia when I was 15 and I was down in Melbourne for the Under 20 Nationals. That was also the first time that I met Nic Bideau and he hooked me up with a sponsor. We went out for dinner and talked and talked about running and their experiences overseas which was fantastic for a young kid who wanted to be a runner. Anyway, I've been friends with them and stay with them when I'm in Melbourne, ever since.

N.M. This is a chance to give some value to those who support you. Who are your sponsors?

E.P. New Balance and 'Live It Fitness' and I'm just trying to think?

N.M. You can't leave someone out!

E.P. I know Aaahh New Balance is the big one and I love to be associated with them because they really support running across Australia rather than just a few select athletes. They support Athletics Australia and the Noosa Bolt and countless other races across the country. They also support women's running.

N.M. Eloise, thanks very much for your time and all the best for the up-coming year. I hope you run sub 15.08 in the next few months.

E.P. Thanks, Neil.

Note: Unfortunately, Eloise had to cut short her training time at Falls Creek and head home to receive treatment for shin soreness. At the time of writing, Eloise is back running and planning on heading overseas in an attempt to qualify for the Athens Olympics.

RUNNER PROFILE

Eloise Poppett

Occupation Athlete / Personal Trainer / Student studying Exercise Science at Woolongong University

Age 21 Date of Birth 9 / 11 / 82

Height 172 cm. **Weight** 52 - 53 kg.

Married / Single Engaged to Jony Wellings

Coach Rod Arnold

Personal Bests

1500 m. 4:15

3000m. 8:56 (Australian Under 20 Record)

5000m. 15:18.6 (World Best for a 16 year old girl)

Favourite Food Fruit

Food Eaten Before a Race Cereal and yoghurt.

Favourite Drink Tea, coffee, water

Favourite Movie ?

Favourite Book "Romans" (from the Bible)

Favourite Music / Band "U2" / "Delirious"

Favourite TV Show "Seinfeld", "Rove" - anything that makes me laugh.

Favourite Night Spot "Northies" in Cronulla

Favourite Holiday Spot Noosa and Yamba (on the New South Wales coast).

A Normal Training Week.

Mon. am. 50 mins. easy
pm. 30 mins. easy

Tues. am. 30 mins. easy.
pm. Track Session (long)
something like:
8 x 1000 metres @ 5 km. Race Pace with 200 metres jog recovery.

Wed. am. 60 mins. easy
pm. 30 mins. easy

Thur. am. 30 mins. easy
pm. Track Session (short)
something like: 8 x 400 metres with a 200 metre 'float'

Fri. am. 45 mins. easy
pm. REST

Sat. am. Threshold (15 - 20 mins.) or a Track Session
or a Race
pm. 30 mins. easy

Sun. am. 90 mins. easy.
pm. REST

Other Training / Recovery Sessions.

Massage, Swimming, Water Running, Swiss Ball, Circuits.

Favourite Training Session 8 x 400 metres with a 200 metre 'float'.

Favourite Race Noosa Bolt.

Best Ever Performances Running 15:18.6 for 5000 metres at Sydney Inter Club as a 16 year old.

Favourite Place To Train Falls Creek and at home in Sydney.

Toughest Ever Training Session 5 sets of 5 x 300 metres (51 seconds) with 100 metre jog between reps and a 300 metre jog between sets.

Most Admired Runners / People Sonia O'Sullivan, Benita Johnson, Haley McGregor, Craig Mottram.

Advice to Other Runners

"Enjoy running!"

Goals for the Future

1. Make the 2004 Olympic Team.
2. Win gold at the 2006 Commonwealth Games.
3. Make the final at the 2008 Olympic Games.
4. Win a medal at the 2012 Olympic Games.