

HEY THERE, GEORGIE GIRL!

January 2004

Georgie Clarke burst onto the Australian athletics scene like a blonde haired comet in the late nineties. Running times that stunned the world, the Jan Juc teenager with the big heart and the prodigious talent went on to represent Australia at the Sydney Olympics as a sixteen year old. And despite experiencing a few ups and downs over the last two years, an older and stronger Georgie Clarke is back and ready to continue her rise to the top.

N.M. Georgie, today you completed your first ever Falls Creek long run, finishing along the dusty, rocky, windy, hilly Bogong High Plains Road before arriving at Langford's Gap. How far did you run and how do you feel?

G.C. I'm not sure how many kilometres I covered but I ran for one hour and 36 minutes, which is the longest run I've ever completed by a long way. And I didn't feel too good, especially the last 30 minutes, where I really struggled.

N.M. And on Thursday you completed a fairly intense track session in Geelong before heading up here.

G.C. Yes, I ran 4 sets of 300 metres (30 seconds recovery) 200 metres with a lap jog between sets. But it was good because I haven't done much speed work lately and I needed to start running fast in preparation for the up-coming Australian domestic season.

N.M. How fast were you running the 300's and the 200's?

G.C. Pretty close to as fast as I could go. The aim was to do the 300's in about 47 seconds then run as fast as I could go for the 200's, which was about 30 seconds.

N.M. I hear that you had older brother Tim as a training partner.

G.C. Yes, Tim is great like that and even though he's playing A.F.L. football with Hawthorn, he still runs very well.

N.M. What races do you have planned for the next few months?

G.C. I'm not 100% sure but I'm definitely running Brisbane on the 23rd of January, then Canberra and Melbourne with probably a few Inter - Club races thrown in. A lot will depend on how the training is going and what Nic wants me to do.

N.M. And of course, all the top athletes are trying to run qualifying times for the Athens Olympics. The A Qualifier for the 1500 metres is a very challenging 4.05.

G.C. Yes it is tough, a lot tougher than Sydney but I can only do what I can do and run as fast as I can. If I get it, I get it and if I don't, I'll just keep working harder so I run well the year after. I still think, that because I'm still young, my best running years are still a few years away. However, I'm going well at the moment so I'm very optimistic.

N.M. Let's back track a little. Bruce Scriven tells the story of your first training session with his group. At the time you were only 11 and a mere slip of a girl. Anyway, you turned up a few minutes late for the session at a golf course and the others had already run off to warm-up. Bruce said that the group was running down to a tree at the other end of the course then back so suggested that you run off and join the group on their return journey. However, you took off like a rabbit, quickly caught the group, rounded the tree then beat them back. At the time, Bruce thought, "crikey, this little girl can really run!" Do you remember that session?

G.C. Yes, I remember the session. I'm pretty sure we were running 1000 metre reps around the golf tees. I've always been able to run, even when I was really little. I think that most young kids who are pretty fit, have some ability and really love what they're doing, can do some pretty amazing things.

N.M. You must have given some of the older boys in the group a shock?

G.C. I don't know about that - I've never asked them.

N.M. What other sports did you play when you were young?

G.C. I played lots of netball and I snow -skied from the time I could walk. As a family we did a lot of things together and I spent a lot of time with my brothers and did a lot of what they did. Both David and Tim were very talented junior athletes and are now playing A.F.L. football. (David with Carlton after transferring from Geelong and Tim with Hawthorn)

N.M. You mentioned netball as a sport you played. When did you stop playing netball?

G.C. I really enjoyed netball but had to stop when I was 15 because it was becoming too hard to run and play netball. Also, because I was starting to increase the intensity of my running, I needed to be fresh for each session and to recover properly between sessions. When I played netball in the morning, then had running training an hour later, it was just too much. But up until then I did lots of different things like surf life saving but with the Sydney Olympics in 2000 coming up, I basically stopped everything else in the winter of

1999 to concentrate on running. Looking back, many people could say it was a mistake because I was so young but to me it wasn't because it was a once in a life time opportunity for me to make an Olympic Team in our own country. If I had my time again I wouldn't change a thing.

N.M. A little known fact about you is that you learned ballet when you were younger.

G.C. Yes, I did but only until I was seven or eight. I enjoyed ballet but back then I wasn't running so I could try lots of different things.

N.M. In your early running years, say when you were 12 or 13, how much training were you doing?

G.C. Ummmmm I'm not that sure as I don't have a diary from back then. However, I remember running on the track on Tuesday and Thursday with a race on Saturday. Then I'd also go for the occasional 20 minute jog along the beach with Dad. Back then I would never run over half an hour.

N.M. One of your old training partners from your early years, Richard Jeremiah, mentioned that one of Bruce Scriven's favourite sessions for the younger athletes was 200 metre reps. Do you remember doing a few 200's when you were younger?

G.C. Yes, we did lots of different things with Scrivo - 200 metre reps, 300 metre reps. But back then I didn't do much over 600 metre or 800 metre reps on the track until I was 15. For longer stuff, like one kilometre reps, we'd usually train away from the track. However, I never did anything longer than one kilometre reps. Back then I struggled a bit with the longer stuff as I lacked strength.

N.M. And despite you saying that you lacked strength as a youngster, you were a junior phenomenon. In fact, you still hold the following World Age Group Records:

800 metres	12 year old	2:08.83
1500 metres	12 year old	4:24.96
1500 metres	13 year old	4:17.53
1500 metres	14 year old	4:17.53
1500 metres	15 year old	4:06.77
1500 metres	16 year old	4:06.77

In fact, at 15 years of age you were faster over 1500 metres than Olympic Champions, Sebastian Coe, Noredidine Morceli, Steve Cram and Steve Ovett when they were the same age.

Can you remember running any of those times?

G.C. I remember running most of those races but I can't remember how old I was at the time. What a lot of people might not understand was that I would never start off a season running those times. I might have run 2.08 for 800 metres as a twelve year old but that was after running heaps of races. When I started racing in September I might be only running 2.20 and with each race I'd get fitter and fitter and faster and faster. These days we don't seem to race as much and sometimes I think that may be a disadvantage for me but it's whole different situation when you're eighteen or nineteen where you need to train more to become strong. When I was younger I could race a lot because I wasn't training so much. However, if I did that now I might be struggling to run 4.30!

N.M. You still hold many Little Athletics records in Geelong. Your memories of Little Athletics.

G.C. I didn't like Little Athletics all that much because I would become frustrated as I just wanted to run the middle distances and they couldn't tell me when my event was on and I didn't like sitting around waiting all morning for my races.

N.M. I would guess that many of your races back then would have been time-trials?

G.C. Sometimes, but there were some pretty talented kids racing over 200 metres and 400 metres. I'm not sure where they all go but there's lots of good runners in Little Athletics.

N.M. At 15 years of age you ran 4:06.77 in Hobart with Sarah Jamieson and Benita Johnson close behind. I would argue that your 4:06.77 is one of the better World Age Group Records. Can you remember the race?

G.C. Yes, I can. It was perfectly paced. That year we had a couple of Kenyan girls who were running really well and they took us through to 1000 metres - that's one of the big problems in Australia, we don't have girls who can take us through the first kilometre. It tends to be 'dog eat dog' and there's not a lot of girls who want to help each other out so it's tough racing out there.

N.M. When you were 15 you had some pretty big decisions to make. Did running 4:06.77 in Hobart mean that 'all systems were GO for Sydney?'

G.C. The decision was pretty much made in June 1999. At the time I was in London with my current coach, Nic Bideau and I'd just won the World Youth Championships over 800 metres even though I wasn't in great shape at the time. Back then I wasn't training all that much - I was just relying on my speed and natural ability. One day Nic took me for a run around Bushy Park and I couldn't keep up. We ran for 66 minutes which was a long way back then. I remember that I nearly collapsed when I'd finished but he told me that if I worked a bit harder and got a bit fitter, that I could make Sydney. Who's going to pass up going to the Olympics? So when I got home I decided to train really hard - I started running 35 minutes on a Monday, 45 minutes on a Wednesday, 60 - 70 minutes on a Sunday as well as the sessions I would normally do on Tuesday / Thursday / Saturday. And with the increased mileage, I improved out of sight.

N.M. How many kilometres would you have been doing in a big week back then?

G.C. In 2000 I was doing about 60 - 70 kilometres a week
- not a lot, when you consider a lot of my older competitors would have been doing well over 100 kilometres a week, but 60 - 70 kilometres was probably a fair bit for my age.

N.M. And a big increase on what you had been doing.

G.C. Yes, a significant increase.

N.M. Making the Olympic Team must have been a huge thrill and a great reward for all the hard work. What are your memories of Sydney?

G.C. The Olympics were absolutely awesome. Which athlete wouldn't want to represent their country at an Olympics? Because I was young the racing was pretty tough but I had a great time and it was a wonderful experience.

N.M. Waiting in the call room for your heat of the 1500 metres. How did you feel?

G.C. I'm not one to get too carried away so I tried to just treat it like any other race. However, at the time it was all a bit overwhelming for a young girl and a lot of things tended to rush by in a bit of a blur. I did not think too much of it at the time but in years to come I'll look back and fondly remember a pretty special time in my life.

N.M. In your heat you relaxed a little a few metres from the line and almost missed qualifying for the semi-finals.

G.C. Yes, that's a bad habit of mine - I sometimes don't run all the way through the line. I also think it was also pretty tough out there - I was there with 200 metres to go then everyone started to kick past me because I was young and lacked their strength. That's another reason why I needed to do the mileage, so I would have the strength to finish off my races.

N.M. So you made the semi-final. Your memories of that race?

G.C. Like I mentioned before, everything seemed to rush past so quickly. There were pretty big expectations of me at the time but I was happy to make the semi-final. However, even though I trained hard to get to the Olympics, in many ways it came easily as I'm training a lot harder now and I'm a much stronger and tougher athlete than I was in 2000.

N.M. What are your memories of the Olympic Opening Ceremony and life in the Olympic Village?

G.C. I think everyone saw how awesome the Opening Ceremony was and for the athletes the whole Olympic experience was fantastic. While I was not training I spent a lot of time in the Nike tent that was just outside the Village. I would meet Mum, Dad, my brothers and my best friend, Shay there and we'd play games and watch TV. They also had really good food in the Nike tent. We'd also go out for trips down to Parramatta or Bondi. As far as the Village was concerned, I didn't spend too much time there as I would be training or racing or out watching other sports. The main things I did in the Village were eat, sleep and occasionally hang out with my room mates, Tatiana Gregorova and Jana Pittman.

N.M. Did you spend any time celebrity spotting in the Village and did you get to meet any of the super-stars from other sports?

G.C. No, not really. I'm not really into that sort of thing. Obviously, I saw the top runners but I've seen them at races before so that wasn't such a big deal. I did see a few of the top swimmers like Ian Thorpe but the Village was huge and you could go days without seeing anyone you knew.

N.M. During the last few years you have had a few ups and downs, like a lot of teenage female athletes. What were some of the problems you experienced and how did you work through them?

G.C. I had a few problems immediately after Sydney - nothing too serious as I was still running, just not running as much. In 2002 I was back running well, then at the end of the season I developed quite a serious knee injury that kept me out of the Commonwealth Games. Initially, I had bursitis under the IT band but that had improved by August. Then I had general swelling in both knees that caused ongoing problems for the next 12 - 16 months that stopped me from running. At the time there was no real diagnosis of what was wrong but it was probably just a growing problem. Also, at that time my body was changing and at first I found it hard to adapt, both physically and emotionally, when I did get back running. I kept rushing back instead of being patient and realising that it would take time to become fit and run fast again. In the end I was forced to take a long time off from running and as I'd had no time off since I was eleven or twelve, at first, it was pretty hard to take. But I've been on the way up since April of this year and with all the hard work I've been putting in, things are going well again. However, I think that it will be another year or so before I'm running at my absolute best. You don't see many young girls on the middle-distance circuit overseas as it's such a tough event to run at the top level. Also, a lot of young girls struggle from 15 - 19 years of age because their bodies are changing. But it's not abnormal so you just have to accept it.

N.M. Eloise Poppett said exactly the same thing: that a lot of teenage girls hit the 'difficult years' and think that they will never run well again and give it away.

G.C. Yes, that's true. I think you need a really good support group around you, which I do, and believe that with hard work and perseverance you can run fast again. I'm definitely working hard and I'll keep trying my best until I'm running as well as I know I can.

N.M. Even though it was hard at the time, physically and mentally did you need a break from running?

G.C. I think that because everything came so easily to me when I was younger, I needed to have things put back in perspective a little, not that I ever got ahead of myself. However, the time off gave my body a chance to develop and gave me some time to appreciate the things that I had achieved and the things I still hoped to achieve. At the time I thought that the time off was the worst thing that had happened to me but because athletics is such a tough sport that requires so much hard work and dedication and I hope to be in the sport for a long time, the time off has helped me a lot.

N.M. And you're hungry again!

G.C. Yeah I'm certainly hungry but I'm also patient and I know what it's going to take and how hard I'll have to work. But as long as things are progressing forward, I'm happy.

N.M. While you were out injured you did Pilates. Are you still doing Pilates?

G.C. No, Pilates is a bit slow for me. It was good at the time because I couldn't do any gym work because of the pressure on my knee but now that the knee is OK, I do gym work instead.

N.M. What gym work do you do?

G.C. I do bits and pieces although not a great amount because we're running so much. I do a little bit with weights but most of the work I do involves sit-ups / core stability work and circuits involving my own body weight.

N.M. Earlier this year you 'bit the bullet' and headed overseas even though you were not fully fit. While overseas you trained with Sonia O'Sullivan and Benita Johnson, who were both running really well at the time. Those sessions must have been challenging?

G.C. As I was really unfit, those first few sessions were very tough and I was constantly out the back and at the time I hated every minute of it. But it was also good because it pushed me and made me realise how much work I had to do to get back. Eventually, I started to regain fitness and if I did that four months now it would be a totally different story. I also appreciate Sonia's and Benita's support at the time as they were both fantastic to me.

N.M. And both of them have been there and done that.

G.C. Yes they have but they're both really nice people too.

N.M. You mentioned before that Nic Bideau is now your coach. Why the change and what is Nic's basic coaching philosophy?

G.C. What a lot of people might not realise is that Nic has been around ever since I was eleven and has had a big impact on my whole career. And although Scrivo has done a fantastic job coaching me when I was younger, Nic was always around offering advice and helping out too. And for most of the time Nic and Scrivo acted as a partnership but unfortunately that didn't work at the end so I had to choose between one or the other. In the end I chose Nic because I thought my career was better served by going with him. As far as training goes, it hasn't changed much except that I'm doing more of it.

N.M. How many kilometres would you be doing in a big week now?

G.C. About 115, maybe 120, but that's pushing it.

N.M. How many days do you run twice?

G.C. Three days a week, maybe a bit more up here.

N.M. With the increased running, do you feel as though you're getting stronger?

G.C. Yes, slowly because the longer stuff is my weaker area as I found out on this morning's long run.

N.M. At the moment you're concentrating on the 1500 metres but what do you think will eventually be your best distance?

G.C. At the moment I like the 1500 and I'll stay with it for a while. I think my engine runs out at 3 kilometres but who knows in a few years time. I still like the faster stuff although I'm not very quick at the moment. Maybe by the end of the year I'll be back down to 2.01 for 800 metres.

N.M. A couple of weeks ago you ran 8.56 for 3000 metres at State League on a very hot night. That must have been very satisfying?

G.C. Yes, that was really good. It was a P.B. and showed that I'm going forward so hopefully I can follow up with a few more P.B.'s.

N.M. When you're not running, what do you like to do?

G.C. I'm studying Health / Science at University although I'm not sure what career I want to follow. I chose this area because it gives me lots of choices. I also hang-out with my friends, go to the movies, I love shopping. I guess I live a pretty normal life when I'm not racing or training.

N.M. Georgie, thank you very much for your time. All the very best for the up-coming season and I hope you run that sub 4.05 and make it to Athens.

G.C. Thanks, Neil.

RUNNER PROFILE

Georgie Clarke

Occupation / School Second Year University Student

Age 19 **Date of Birth** 17 / 6 / 84

Height 170 cm. **Weight** 48 kg.

Married / Single Single

Coach Nic Bideau

Personal Bests

400 m. 55.0

800 m. 2:01.7

1500 m. 4:06.77

3000m. 8:56

Favourite Food Avocado

Food Eaten Before a Race Banana or toast

Favourite Drink Mineral Water

Favourite Movie ?

Favourite Book ?

Favourite Music / Band Whatever is on the radio

Favourite TV Show "24"

Favourite Night Spot The Beach

Favourite Holiday Spot The Whitsundays.

A Normal Training Week.

Mon. am. 30 - 50 mins. easy.
pm. 30 mins. easy plus drills / strides

Tues. am. 30 mins. easy.
pm. Track Session: This varies but something like:
2 x 1200 metres in about 3.38 with a lap jog recovery.
3 sets of 400 metres in about 68 seconds (40 seconds recovery)
200 metres in about 30 - 32 seconds.
Lap jog recovery between sets.

Wed. am. 50 - 60 mins. easy.
pm. REST

Thur. am. 30 mins. easy.
pm. 15 minute warm - up
20 minute 'pace' run.
15 minute cool - down

Fri. am. 40 - 50 mins. easy.
pm. REST

Sat. am. Track or Fartlek Session: This varies but something like:
2000 metres (in about 6.20)
2 minutes recovery
3 sets of 4 x 300 metres (30 seconds recovery between reps / 3 minutes recovery
between sets)
pm. REST

Sun. am. 60 - 80 mins. easy.
pm. REST

Other Training / Recovery Sessions.

Massage, gym, circuits, swimming at the beach

Favourite Training Session any track session.

Favourite Races 1500 metres.

Best Ever Performances Winning World Youth Championships 800 metres (1999) and 1500 metres (2001) 2000 World Juniors 800 metres (second) / 1500 metres (third)

Favourite Place To Train Jan Juc / Geelong

Toughest Ever Training Session Any speed sessions on the track with short recoveries (lots of lactic!)

Most Admired Runners / People I admire many athletes.

Advice to Other Runners

“Believe in yourself and be patient and consistent.”

Goals for the Future

“To stay uninjured for as long as I can and to win as many races as possible.”
