

**LOUIS ROWAN.
MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME.
June 2004**

Louis Rowan is arguably the most improved middle-distance runner in Victoria after an excellent summer track season where he gave many of the top athletes a real scare. So, just what has he been doing to turn a talented, but inconsistent "Fun Runner" into an athlete with a realistic shot at bigger and better things. Over a cuppa, I was lucky enough to catch up with Louie for a chat.

N.M. Louis, as we speak it's the off-season for track. What have you been up to?

L.R. I've been training really hard, trying to build up the kilometres. I've gone from last year's track season where I was doing between 60 – 70 kilometres a week to now, where I'm trying to run over a 100 kilometres a week to build up a base. So I'm doing a few more kilometres, not that much harder stuff, but rather lots of good steady running that I can absorb. Jaime Werner, my coach, has put a lot more structure into my running. I'm also a lot more consistent with my training now.

N.M. How many sessions are you doing each week at the moment?

L.R. There are usually three main sessions. On Tuesday night we usually do a fartlek session or a threshold session, on Thursday night we usually do a short or long hills session, then on Saturday we run over the sand dunes at Breamlea, so there's a bit of variety in the harder session that we do.

N.M. How many days do you double-up at the moment?

L.R. I double-up three to four days a week for a total of 10 – 11 runs a week.

N.M. How long is your longest run?

L.R. Usually about 70 minutes on Sunday. I don't feel that I need to go any further than that.

N.M. What sort of pace do you usually run at?

L.R. For my easy runs it would be about 4:30 min / kilometre pace so it's pretty relaxed. If I'm feeling good it might be 4 minute kilometre pace.

N.M. What are your plans for the up-coming summer track season?

L.R. Over the next three or four months I just want to be really consistent with my training so that I know I have a great base for the summer track season. Every other summer I've had nothing to work with and have struggled with consistency. I'm sure that if I can get a lot of running into my legs I will have more strength for the 1500 metres. I've come from an 800 metre background and have lacked the endurance to run a really good 1500. This year I'd like to attack my races more from a 5000 metre preparation so that I can run on strongly when it counts.

N.M. What specific summer track races have you pencilled in?

L.R. I want to concentrate on the Grand Prix races and the Nationals, of course, and hopefully I'm around the mark.

N.M. And long term, you'd be looking at the 2006 Commonwealth Games?

L.R. Yes, I am, and even the 2005 World Championships are a goal.

N.M. Last summer was a big breakthrough time for you in running but the previous year your running was all over the place. In fact, you found that after checking through your training diary, you had averaged only 30 kilometres a week for the year. Were you shocked to see how little running you were doing?

L.R. Yes, I was shocked. But I knew that I hadn't given myself a fair go. You hear of athletes running 160 kilometres a week or more and you think that's pretty unbelievable but now that I've started to train properly, I can see what it takes to be really good at this sport.

N.M. Why were you only averaging 30 kilometres a week? Were you injured a lot?

L.R. No, I wasn't really injured. Mainly, there wasn't much structure to my training but mainly it was because I just loved to run hard. Every session I would go out and just flog myself. There were no long runs or recovery runs or steady runs – it was basically all race pace or flat out. So the 30 kilometres was 30 kilometres of quality.

N.M. What was a standard week for you back then?

L.R. I'd do an hour of hard hills on Monday, a Veteran's race at Landy Field on a Wednesday that might be a hard 1600 metres or a hard 3000 metres, a hard track session on Thursday night that would be something like 6 x 300 metres or 10 x 200 metres and in the summer I'd do a track race on Saturday afternoon. And that was about it, there wasn't much else in between.

N.M. Actually, looking at what you did, it's pretty amazing that you were able to run as well as you did without breaking down.

L.R. Yes, but I just love to race, that's why I run.

N.M. What were some of your P.B.'s back then?

L.R. My 800 metre P.B. came down pretty quickly to 1:52 because of all the quality I was doing but I really struggled to get under 4 minutes for 1500 metres. Then, for a 3000 / 5000 metres I was pretty hopeless because I didn't have any endurance. Now I'm starting to get my times down a bit for the longer distances but there's still a fair amount of improvement to come. (Ed. Louis has recently run the following times for 3000 metres (8:18) 5000 metres (14.38 - road) 10 000 metres (31.41 - road)

N.M. Apart from running a lot more, what other changes have you made?

L.R. I'm trying to get my body stronger and more prepared for the type of racing and training I'll be doing. I'm now doing weights and working hard on improving my core-stability because that has been a real weakness in the past. With the weights, I'm concentrating on the upper body, chest and back but also doing some squats and lunges. I've also seen a dietician. She says that I haven't been eating enough carbohydrates. She was also a little worried that I wasn't eating soon enough after my sessions. For example, for our Saturday morning session at Breamlea, I wasn't eating before the run and afterwards I was pretty stuffed and not hungry and would not have anything to eat until I arrived home at about 11:00 am. She suggested that I have a sports drink and a banana within 30 minutes of finishing to help recovery.

N.M. How many days a week are you doing weights and core-stability work?

L.R. We do weights twice a week. Then, I also do a core-stability session twice a week at home by myself. I also have a massage once a week.

N.M. Over the years you've also had a chronic back problem. Is that improving as you've become stronger?

L.R. It's still not quite right but it's getting better, even though I've had problems with my back three times in the last month but I've been able to get over those problems in a day or two. I see a chiropractor once a month and he says it comes from poor posture affecting a couple of joints in my back. Also, I had a pretty big operation a few years ago that involved cutting through my stomach muscles and they haven't really regained their full strength yet.

N.M. Your coach, Jaime Werner has obviously made a big difference to your running. What exactly has he added to your running?

L.R. Jaime really loves his running and he really wants to see me do well. He's also willing to work in with me and help me achieve my goals. However, most importantly, he's really added some structure to my training so I know where I'm going and what I have to do to get there. He's also someone I can really get along with so he's a friend as well as a coach. Jaime's come from a walking background but he knows a fair bit about athletes and middle-distance running in particular. And what he doesn't know, he's prepared to do some research to find out the answers.

N.M. And I guess it helps that he's fit enough and fast enough to go out and do a lot of the running with you?

L.R. Yes, definitely. Last year it was usually just Jaime and me training but now we have a great group that works really well together.

N.M. Who is in your training group?

L.R. There's Matthew McDonough, Ross Young, Kim McDonough, Mark Boxer, Paul Schnyder and a young kid, Ryan Smith, so there's some very good runners to train with. Then there's some guys in Adelaide: Kym Morgan, Paul Morgan, Shane Tiele and John Cressey who have been following Jaime's program. A few of them are hoping to move over here to train with us. Also, Jaime does most of the sessions with us.

N.M. You have mentioned the races you hope to do this year but last year you had problems actually getting into races?

L.R. Before last season I sat down with Jaime and said that I really wanted to race some of the Grand Prix Races and what did we need to do. At the time I was keen to do some Fun Runs as well but Jaime wasn't keen on Fun Runs at all, so initially there was a little conflict. Anyway, I went on a holiday to Tasmania and competed in a Fun Run down there and was planning to run the Mountain to Surf Fun Run in Lorne. But the Brisbane Grand Prix was looming and many of the other athletes were running reasonable times and I didn't think I was going to get a start. Jaime rang up and asked if I was a chance to get a start and the answer was, 'probably not!' Then Jaime asked, 'what if he runs a P.B. time at State League?', instead of the Mountain to Surf, and they said, 'that would certainly help'. So we changed our plans and raced at Doncaster. Coming off some really good training in Tasmania, I was feeling great and ended up running 3.46 for 1500 metres, which was a 3 second P.B. Straight after that, Jaime was back on the phone and this time they said that they had seen what I could do and I was in. In many ways, the hardest thing is to actually get a start, then you can say if I run OK, I should get another run.

N.M. So, the Fun Runs have been put on the 'back-burner' since then?

L.R. They have. I have seen the wisdom of Jaime's thinking.

N.M. So it's no use being the "Fun Run King" when there are bigger fish to fry?

L.R. Yes, but I'll still run the occasional Fun Run if they fit in with the total program.

N.M. Let's go through a few of the other races from last year. In December, you raced the Zatopek 1500 metres in December, where you ran 3:48.91 for 11th place. Your memories of that race?

L.R. I was pretty disappointed with that run. It was probably that night that I did a bit of soul-searching and after the race thought, 'that's just not good enough!' Going into the Zatopek I was expecting to run a bit quicker but after the race I decided that I needed to get a lot more serious if I was going to get anywhere against the better runners. At that stage we had been doing a little bit of work but I wasn't really committed.

N.M. How did you run the race?

L.R. Basically, I just ran out of legs. During the third lap, I was in so much pain and was quickly going back through the field. Actually, it was pretty demoralising to see in a race just how unfit I was compared to the other guys. I remember saying to Jaime the next day that my Zatopek run just wasn't good enough and that I was ready to really put my head down and work hard.

N.M. And two months later the hard work started to kick in when you ran the 1500 metres at the Telstra Grand Prix in Melbourne. In that race you finished 5th in 3:42.87, a huge improvement in such a short time. What exactly did you do in those 8 weeks?

L.R. It was really more a change in attitude to training than anything else. Instead of just turning up to a session and moping around, I really put my head down and thought I'd have a 'real go'. In those 8 weeks, for every quality session, I gave it my 'best shot'. In the Melbourne Grand Prix I thought I would not worry about tactics too much, I would just 'go for it'.

N.M. And you used your famous charging finishing burst to fly past a few runners over the last 100 metres. Have you always had a fast finish?

L.R. Yes, I have. People have often commented that I should use this finishing burst earlier but it's not that easy. It's like I have a huge adrenalin rush when I know the finish is within sight. It's then that I can give it everything I've got. Also, it's quite exhilarating to be passing people, so that spurs me on to run even faster.

N.M. Are you also looking to be a little closer to the lead with 500 metres to go so that your finishing burst puts you in a position to win the big races?

L.R. For sure. Up until now I haven't had the fitness and confidence to go with the stronger athletes over the first two laps, but it's something that will be possible as I get more miles into my legs.

N.M. You raced Youcef Abdi and Alastair Stevenson in quite a few of your races last summer. What did you learn from observing Youcef and Alastair up close?

L.R. From what I could see, they are very professional about what they do, even down to how they warm-up and prepare for races. They are also very gutsy in how they race – they are not afraid to go out hard and put it on the line, especially this year when they were chasing Olympic qualifying times for Athens. I also think, that because they were easily the best runners going round, they had to do all the hard work if they were going to run fast times.

N.M. From Melbourne you travelled to the Australian Championships in Sydney, which also served as the Olympic Selection Trials. What happened there?

L.R. I ran a poor tactical race in my heat, running three wide for a fair way, but qualified for the final, running 3:46.88. So after the heat I said to Jaime that I would go out hard in the final and run from the front and the others would have to go around me. However, unbeknown to me, pace-makers had been organised for the final to help Youcef and Alastair run fast, so I don't think I was too popular with the other guys when I went to the front from the gun. But, I don't think running that way was to my detriment and in the future I'll be looking to run that way more often as it's a much cleaner race up front. (Ed. Louis ran 3:45.01 in the final for 9th, Youcef Abdi won in 3:38.43 from Alastair Stevenson in 3:38.78)

N.M. Tactically, are you improving?

L.R. Yes. To begin with I was pretty poor tactically, but the fitter and more confident I get, the better tactical races I run. Also, the more races I do, the more knowledgeable I become about what to do in a given situation and how each of the athletes likes to run.

N.M. The Nationals was one of your last races for the season as you were beginning to run out of legs by then but you also won the Victorian 1500 metre title running 3:45.03. Being Victorian Champion would have been a big thrill?

L.R. For sure, it was a huge thrill, especially seeing it was a pretty tough day and 45 degrees.

N.M. Twelve months ago could you envisage being Victorian 1500 metre Champion?

L.R. No, never! Twelve months ago I was seriously thinking about giving the running away and taking up Modern Pentathlon as I didn't think I was capable of running fast enough. I thought back then that 3.42 would be my ultimate limit whereas now, I know I can run much faster than that.

N.M. What are you like at swimming and shooting and fencing and horse riding?

L.R. I'm a terrible swimmer but I wasn't too bad at fencing.

N.M. You'd certainly have a long reach for fencing. What about pistol shooting and horse riding?

L.R. I had a go at shooting and think that would have been OK. Also I get a bit of practice at shooting and horse riding down on the farm but in the end, I'm really happy I persevered with the running.

N.M. You defeated our own Mark Tucker in the Victorian 1500 metre Championship by half a second or so and Mark has since become the 38th Australian to run under 4 minutes for a mile (3:59.9). Is a sub 4 minute mile on the agenda for the up-coming track season?

L.R. Definitely, I'd love to run under 4 minutes but we don't get that many chances to run mile races these days.

N.M. You have run quite a few pro races over the last few years. Do you intend to cut back on the pro running a bit and use them just as the occasional hard training session?

L.R. Yes, I think so. I haven't run pros for over a year now. I enjoyed running with the professionals, using it as a training tool and getting practice at running people down but then again, when you sit down to plan out a season, it's hard to fit them in around the more important races.

N.M. I suppose the pro races are like the fun runs: you have to use them to your benefit, when they fit in with your schedule.

L.R. That's right.

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

L.R. Aaahhh I think the 1500 metres is, and will be my best distance. Eventually, when I get stronger, I think I should be able to run a good 5000 metres. Jaime has become good friends with the Tanzanian coach, Suleiman Nyambui (1980 Olympic 5000 metre silver medallist) and he reckons I'm a 5 k. runner so perhaps he's a good judge.

N.M. How did you start in athletics?

L.R. I didn't really start until I was 19. At that time I had just finished school and I had become a bit of a slob. In fact, you know you're really a slob and in bad shape when you drive the car down to the milk bar even though it's only a few hundred metres away!

N.M. Louis, that is seriously lazy!

L.R. Yes, I know and I'm not proud that I did that! But anyway, I've always enjoyed running so I thought I'd go down to Veterans Athletics at Landy Field one Wednesday night. They're a great bunch of guys down at Vets and they made me feel really welcome so I just went from there. After a while I began running in the Geelong Cross – Country Club on a Sunday morning. From there, I joined St Josephs Athletics Club for the summer track season.

N.M. Did you do much running as a kid growing up?

L.R. Yes, I did a little bit at school. I remember running a school record of 2.12 for 800 metres at St Josephs but that was a pretty ordinary time. But I ran that on almost no training so I'm sure I could have run much quicker if I was a little more serious back then.

N.M. What interest do you have outside of running?

L.R. I'm really into horse racing in a big way. My brother and I really love horse racing. A horse is a magnificent animal that is captivating when it's running at speed. Ever since we were kids we have wanted to be involved with horses, whether it be as a horse trainer or horse breeder. My Great Uncle bred horses and when he died we took over his horses. We also purchased a bit of his farm and we continued the horse breeding.

N.M. Have you had any horses of note?

L.R. Not as yet, but we've had a winner at Warrnambool over the three-day carnival – that was a big thrill.

N.M. You mentioned earlier that you've had a major operation. What was the problem?

L.R. Since I started running I've never been able to run a 5 k. or a 10 k. flat out and after a race I'd just collapse into bed for the rest of the day, feeling as crook as a dog. And even at work, I used to say to my brother, Marty, "Geeh I feel sick!" And he used to think I was faking it to get out of work. And over time it seemed to get worse until it got to the stage where I could hardly train at all. Anyway, I went to a few doctors and they couldn't really help me but eventually I went to see Chris Bradshaw at the Olympic Park Medical Centre. He said that he thought he could hear a blockage in one of my arteries so he sent me to the Alfred Hospital where I had lots of tests including an angiogram. Eventually, they found the main artery leading to my stomach and bowel was 99 % blocked so they said, 'it's probably best to get it fixed.' Then I was sent to a surgeon who said that he'd only ever done one similar operation before and was not keen to operate. Eventually, I convinced him that I really wanted it done so he said, 'OK'. Once they opened me up they found that my diaphragm was squashing the artery. That was why I was feeling so sick when I ran – there was a lack of blood getting to the muscles and my stomach and bowels. Afterwards, he said it was a really good operation to do as it was pretty nasty in there. And then, after that, I thought I was in big trouble because when I had recovered from the operation, I went for an easy jog and my heart-rate was sky high – I was just jogging and it was 220 beats per minute. At the time I thought that my running career might be over. But over time the heart rate gradually went down and since then it's been pretty good.

N.M. Is the heart - rate still relatively high?

L.R. Yes, higher than it was before the operation. Before the operation my maximum heart-rate was about 192 beats per minute but now I can get it up to around 210 beats per minute.

N.M. And are you feeling much stronger on the longer runs and in longer races?

L.R. Oh yes, much stronger. I'm also eating much more which is obviously giving me more energy.

N.M. After the operation you were saying that most people who have had this operation put on a heap of weight.

L.R. That's right. One girl weighed only about 40 kilograms before the operation because her body was deprived of calories and nutrients but afterwards she really stacked it on.

N.M. You didn't think you were going to turn from a lean distance runner into a burly shot putter? (Ed. Louis is 194 cm. tall and weighs about 64 kilograms)

L.R. No, not really. I've always been very lean and I come from a pretty thin family so I suppose I have the right metabolism.

N.M. Because it was a major operation that involved cutting through a lot of stomach muscle, do you think this is contributing to your weaker core and back problems?

L.R. Yes, definitely. During my rehabilitation from the operation I was a bit slack in rebuilding strength in my stomach and I'm only now starting to catch up in this area.

N.M. You also had a nasty kidney stone problem earlier this year but that came when you were having a break after the track season. I hope you have the top medical cover?

L.R. I had the kidney stone for a while and it was only painful when it moved. The operation for that was a pretty basic one where they just smash the stone. I was sore for about a week after the operation, but then I was fine.

N.M. One last question, Louis – a hypothetical. You have a choice between winning an Olympic medal over 1500 metres or training the winner of the Melbourne Cup. What do you choose?

L.R. Jaime puts this question to me all the time and I always jokingly say, 'train the winner of the Melbourne Cup!' because to hold that Cup aloft would be an unbelievable feeling and a sensational achievement. However, right now, I'd have to say I'd easily choose winning an Olympic medal – that would be the ultimate because my goal is to be the best runner I can be. There's plenty of time to train the winner of the Melbourne Cup when I'm older.

N.M. Louis, thanks very much for your time. I hope that the up-coming track season is a beauty for you and that you can get that 1500 metre time down under 3.40.

L.R. Thanks very much, Neil. And the 1500 time under 3.40 will definitely happen. In fact, we have set a goal of 3.36, which I believe is definitely doable.

Thought you might be interested in the type of training Louis did last summer and is doing this winter.

A SAMPLE TRAINING WEEK LAST SUMMER TRACK SEASON.

Mon. am. 30 minutes easy run
pm. 30 minutes easy run

Tues. pm. Track: 5 x 1000 metres @ 2.47 – 2.50 pace (jog lap recovery between)

Wed. am. 30 minutes easy run
pm. 70 minutes easy run

Thurs. pm. Track: 20 x 200 metres @ 28 second pace (1 minute recovery between)

Fri. pm. 30 minutes easy run.

Sat. pm. Race or Track Session (ie. 8 x 400 metres @ 58 seconds - lap jog recovery)

Sun. am. 50 minutes easy run.

A SAMPLE WINTER TRAINING WEEK NOW.

Mon. am. 50 minutes easy run @ 4:30 min./ km. pace
pm. 40 minutes easy run. Core Stability Session.

Tues. pm. Threshold Session: 25 minutes @ 3.20 pace. Total 70 minutes.

Wed. am. 30 minutes easy run
pm. 45 minutes easy run. Weights Session.

Thurs. pm. Hill Reps: 12 x 300 metres or 4 x 2 kms. Surge up and jog down.

Fri. am. 30 minutes easy run.
pm. 30 minutes easy run. Core Stability Session.

Sat. am. Sand dunes at Breamlea: 400 metre loop course. I do 4 sets of 3 of these with 2 minutes
recovery. Finish off with 20 x 20 seconds up a short / steep hill.

Sun. am. 70 minutes run @ 4 min. / km. pace.
pm. Weights Session.