



QUEANBEYAN CITY 175th BIRTHDAY GIFT CARNIVAL

Saturday 23rd & Sunday 24th November

QUEANBEYAN PARK | www.visitqueanbeyan.com.au

RM2009388

Canberran sprint star Melissa Breen is looking forward to getting back on the track at this weekend's Queanbeyan Gift after a miserable 2013 campaign.
Photo: Colleen Petch



Biggest Gift in history

By Andrew Johnston

■ QUEANBEYAN GIFT

ORGANISERS are hopeful this year's Queanbeyan Gift Carnival will be the biggest in the event's history.

A record number of runners have entered this year's \$16,000 Men's Gift, including 2012 champion Dean Scarff who will be looking to go back-to-back.

The Women's Gift will also boast a class field with the likes of backmarker Melissa Breen and Lauren Boden to be challenged by former Stawell Gift winner Melissa Howard and defending champion Emma Yates.

This year marks the first time the Queanbeyan Gift has been held over two days instead of one.

And Queanbeyan City Council's Tracey Lamont said that decision had been more than justified with an increased interest in the event across the country.

"The entries speak for themselves," she said. "I'm absolutely thrilled by it all.

"Whenever you change the format of something, there's always that thought in your head of 'gee, how's this going to go', but the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

"I think the fact that we do have good prize money on offer combined with the fact it's a very well respected event means runners are willing to come from just about everywhere to compete."

All told, runners from every state and territory except the Northern Territory will compete in the marquee Men's and Women's Gift races.

Highly rated Victorian sprinter Jake Hammond will have the honour of starting as the backmarker in the men's event.

The 21-year-old has been given just 1.75m by the handicappers and will have his work cut out for him against a quality field containing no less than three former Queanbeyan Gift champions.

2008 winner Brendan Matthews (6m), 2011 victor Chris Hargreaves (8.5m) and last year's champion Scarff (5.75m) have all returned to recontest the event.

The heats for this year's Queanbeyan Men's and Women's Gifts will kick off from 3pm on Saturday before the semi-finals and finals on Sunday. For a complete Queanbeyan Gift carnival program, see page 14.

Getting back on track

By Andrew Johnston

■ QUEANBEYAN GIFT

SHE'S endured a miserable past 12 months that saw her laid low with injury and illness before losing her financial support from Athletics Australia.

But two-time national 100m and 200m champion Melissa Breen will be out to get her 2014 Commonwealth Games qualifying campaign back on track starting at this weekend's Queanbeyan Gift.

Breen will start from scratch in the event giving

up three metres to her closest rival, training partner Lauren Wells (nee Boden).

It will be the 23-year-old's first meet since the World Championships earlier this year and her first competition since she was delisted from Athletics Australia's National Athlete Support Structure funding list in September.

Breen has vowed to press ahead regardless in a bid to make the Australian team for the 2016 Olympic Games.

But she acknowledged the unexpected setback had proven a blow heading into

the upcoming athletics season.

"Obviously it's affected me but ... I just come back to the reason that I do what I do," Breen said. "The reason I train this hard and commit myself is because I want to be the fastest Australian ever.

"Whether that takes 12 months or four years, that's what I want to do. I don't do it for a pat on the back or to get recognition from [Athletics Australia].

"It's tough to swallow that your own federation doesn't believe in you but it's not going to stop me chasing my dream."

Breen's 2013 campaign was also knocked about by injury after suffering a calf strain before suffering from a liver and kidney infection after an ill-fated trip by the Australian women's sprinting squad to Sri Lanka in May.

But having finally returned to full fitness, Breen said she was excited to be getting back out on the track at an event with which she has been long associated.

The Canberran won the Gift in 2007 and has started off scratch as backmarker in three of the past four years.

"It's obviously tough to

win it [off scratch] but it's the spot you expect when you're ranked number one in the country," she said. "Anything different would be an unfair advantage and I wouldn't expect it to be any different.

"I can't play the [handicapping] game at all. It makes it hard when it comes to pro-running because there are always going to be people out there playing games to get the best mark.

"It happens all the time but I'm proud to say anytime I step out onto the track I'm running to the best of my ability."

A Gift that comes with plenty of memories

By Andrew Johnston

■ QUEANBEYAN GIFT

KEN English is in a better position than most to evaluate just how much the Queanbeyan Gift has grown since re-emerging on the NSW athletics calendar 13 years ago.

As president of the NSW Athletics League, English played a major role along with Simon Kinsmore and Hugh Percy in reviving the Gift in its modern iteration

in 2000.

"When we first started it no one knew what a Gift was, even in Queanbeyan people hadn't heard of holding a professional footrace before," English said.

"Now everyone knows the Queanbeyan Gift, the brand is really recognisable around this area which was never the case before 2000."

English reserved much of the credit for breathing new life into the event to Percy,

the then-Queanbeyan City Council general manager.

"Hugh had come up from Albury where professional running was quite a well-known thing so he was quite keen to get something going up here," he said.

"He was the one who really drove it and since we got that first one up and running [in 2000] it's just kicked on and got bigger and better."

Professional running carnivals have taken place

locally since the 1940s with the Queanbeyan Gift previously serving as a much smaller lead-in event to the Canberra Gift, which is no longer held.

While the Canberra event has faded from the calendar, the Queanbeyan Gift has grown from strength-to-strength after a modern revival at the turn of the century.

With total prize money for the event now topping \$40,000, English said the

Queanbeyan Gift had become one of the premier events in Australian athletics.

"There's absolutely no doubt it's the biggest professional athletic event in NSW and the most well-known event in NSW," he said.

"It's got a fantastic reputation and that's why we've been able to attract top quality runners from across the country here to Queanbeyan."

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