



QUEANBEYAN CITY 175th BIRTHDAY GIFT CARNIVAL

Saturday 23rd & Sunday 24th November

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RM2009388

Thompson to defy injury to compete in Gift

By Andrew Johnston

■ QUEANBEYAN GIFT

QUEANBEYAN'S only local hope in this year's Women's Gift will defy injury to line up in the \$16,000 race.

15-year-old Andrea Thompson will be Queanbeyan Athletics' sole representative in the city's marquee track event this weekend.

And the Carwoola teenager will run despite already being booked in for surgery to repair torn meniscus in her knee next month; the result of a horse riding accident earlier this year.

"My mum and my coach didn't want me to run but we talked about it and it didn't seem very likely that I'd do a lot more damage [to the knee]," she said.

"If they thought I was going to hurt myself more I don't think they've have let me run. I'm not going to be able to run for a while [after the surgery] though so I thought I might as well

give it a shot; you don't know what might happen."

Despite her tender years, Thompson has already made a name for herself in junior athletics circles, winning two gold medals at last year's Australian Little Athletics Championships in Hobart.

She was also the winner of the 2012 Queanbeyan Senior Girls Gift, a race she will be re-entering this year alongside the novice handicap and the Running of the Codes where she will be representing Queanbeyan Netball.

But Thompson is under no illusions that stepping up to take on the likes of two-time national 100m champion Melissa Breen and London Olympian Lauren Wells (nee Boden) will mark an entirely new challenge.

"Lauren's such a high level athlete, I think I'd rather just watch her run than try to run against her," Thompson said of her fellow Gift entrant and Australia's reigning 400m hurdles champion.



Teenager Andrea Thompson will be Queanbeyan's sole entrant in this year's \$16,000 Women's Gift.

Photo: Andrew Johnston

Setting the benchmark: Weston's record run

By Andrew Johnston

■ QUEANBEYAN GIFT

AS NSW Athletics' official handicapper, Phil Weston admits his work can be contentious at times.

But as the longest serving handicapper in the history of Australian professional running, Weston has long been at ease with the criticism his role can occasionally bring.

"I have a philosophy that I've used since the day I started," Weston said. "If someone wins a race and I come home afterward and lose sleep over the result, I won't be handicapping the next day. That hasn't happened yet."

"I've copped some flak over the years but I must be thick skinned I suppose. The runners

Handicapping explained: How the system works

UNLIKE the World Championships, Olympics or Commonwealth Games, when it comes to professional sprinting handicaps come into play.

The idea of the handicap system is that all runners would theoretically cross the line at about the same time.

It also gives local athletes a chance to race against national and international stars of the

sport.

While the full length of the Queanbeyan Gift is 120m, the least favoured sprinters will start from a handicap of 15m while the fastest runners will get little to no handicap at all.

The handicapper works out what mark or handicap the runner will have according to previous performances in sprint events. Each metre in handicap

denotes about a tenth of a second in time.

Race winners are often those that are able to "beat the handicapper".

They can do this by performing well enough to qualify for the event and the finals, but below what they are truly capable of.

This results in a handicap that gives them the best chance of a victory.

are never going to think the handicap you've given them is enough, they're always going to want a bit more which is only natural."

Handicapping, the process whereby runners are assessed on their personal best time and form before being given a mark, has long been associated with

pro running events such as this Saturday's Queanbeyan Gift.

The system is designed to level the playing field with slower runners given a head start, theoretically allowing athletes of varying ability to race against each other with an equal chance of victory.

That's where Weston comes into the equation. As the NSW Athletics' handicapper, it's his job to set each runner's mark in what can be a hugely consequential decision for the athlete in question.

"We start with a runner's PB and then work off that," Weston

said. "Often though you just need to look at a runner to be able to say, 'this bloke's going to be good'. I get it wrong a few times but not too often."

It's a system that's part science, part art as runners do their best to 'beat the handicapper' in the lead up to major meets in an attempt and

receive the greatest possible advantage.

Weston has handicapped every Queanbeyan Gift since it was reborn in 2000. His history with the event goes back all the way to 1973 when he finished fourth as a competitor in Queanbeyan's marquee running race.

And despite having now spent more than four decades involved in the sport, first as a runner and then as a handicapper, Weston said he had no plans to step away from his all-important role any time soon.

"If I didn't enjoy the work, I wouldn't still be doing it," he said. "I like watching the rugby league and I don't mind a bit of cricket but running is what I am passionate about."



2013 Queanbeyan Family Fun Day

A Free Day Out For All The Family
In Queanbeyan Park

Sunday 24th November 10am-5pm

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