

On behalf of the panel, happy New Year to all athletes, coaches, officials and supporters.

With the recent interstate carnivals now complete the focus shifts clearly to the VAL and the exciting carnivals we have in store over the next 3 months. For both local and interstate athletes in order to give yourself the best chance of success, I encourage you to compete as regularly as possible. Lets really get the season going now by entering and competing.

In terms of **interstate athletes**, there has been much spoken and written on forums about being competitive or otherwise when competing in the VAL. Recent history shows interstate athletes that compete in Victoria will be given an opportunity to be competitive. Again at Maryborough we had two athletes from SA saluting and many other interstate athletes in the mix. Obviously the more often you compete in Victorian the better that opportunity will be, however if you can only make it across once, then you will still be treated fairly. As the great Molly Meldrum would say "Do yourself a favour".

I would like to reiterate that for **Group 3 & 4 Womens sprint events** we take the opportunity to provide discretionary one-off lifts to competitors to provide them with an immediate competitive opportunity based on current form. A good example is the Ringwood Womens 100 where a number of athletes have had their mark for that event only, increased significantly. As the same discretion does not apply to the womens 120 at Rye, many will notice their Rye mark is comparatively less. Both events will still earn ticks etc, and those that haven't received a one off lift for Ringwood will still be competitive if they bring their best form. We have simply attempted to put those currently off the pace, up with the leaders also.

**Novice, Restricted and Youth events** and the Womens Broo 400 series are also discretionary events. For the Novice events athletes will find their Novice marks are often in excess of their open marks. Again this is to provide them with an opportunity to be competitive. Those that compete in the Novice events are also having their open marks reviewed, however movement in the open marks is more conservative.

**The Broo Womens 400 marks** will also often be different from the Womens open 400 marks. Athletes that compete in the Broo series are receiving ticks towards their open marks however will not suffer a penalty to their open mark if they win a Broo series event.

In terms of the **allocation of handicaps**, it is generally done over a week in advance of the event due to printing requirements. As a result credits and resulting handicap lifts will generally take two weeks to filter through. As an example we have allocated Rye marks this week so are able to pick up handicap adjustments following on from Maryborough. Marks for this week's Ringwood carnival was done prior to Maryborough.

Please contact me through the office if you have any questions.

Best wishes and see you out on the track.

Mark O'Brien

Chief Handicapper