

Race on to attract Oz athletes to Cooks Gardens meet

13.04.2007

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The Victorian Athletics League will put several temptations in the path of Victorian and Australian athletes to ensure they attend the first Cooks Gardens meeting of the league's just-established New Zealand franchise in Wanganui early next year.

The contract for the VAL franchise was signed by league president George Flack and Cooks Gardens Trust Board chairman Gerald McDouall yesterday.

The first Wanganui meeting has been tentatively set for some time in February, but will be finalised at the VAL board's May 5 meeting.

To enable its success, the VAL has waived the cost of VAL registration to any New Zealander interested, possibly make the events non-penalty to winners – and will chase good air flight deals and probably place its key series race into the programme to ensure Australian interest.

Flack says his board was committed to helping Wanganui succeed.

“We want to ensure as many Victorians and inter-state Australians come across as we can,” Flack said yesterday.

But the success of the franchise rests on Wanganui being able to interest as many Kiwis as possible into having a crack at the handicapped, money-bearing races.

The amount of prizemoney available is entirely up to the Cooks Gardens Trust Board franchise – as are the full costs of running the event.

The league core events are: Sprints 70m, 100m, 200m, 400m. Distance: 800m, 1600m.

There are events specifically for women and veterans over the 1600 metres, but the 800m is for allcomers.

There are high hopes that cycling will join the party, and Cooks Gardens Trust spokesman Mark Stoneman says there will be very quick offers to cycling to join

them around the table to discuss how things can be best done.

“Cycling will be a major key,” Stoneman said.

Cooks carries the burden of the cost, so clearly it has to make sure things work – and this is where the VAL template comes in.

“We provide the ‘how-to’ to run the event,” Flack said.

“The entry fees are split between the VAL and the Cooks Gardens Trust, and the trust will be responsible for the production of programmes, all prize money and looking after and organising the corporate section.”

Flack would not put a ball-park figure on the cost of organising individual meetings, saying it depended on how much prizemoney was raised – and therefore the interest.

“It depends, because prize money is a major component of the cost. The more you’ve got, the greater the impact. You can put a small amount in, or a much larger amount – and that would attract the athletes.”

Stoneman says the scheme retains the interest and support of Wanganui Inc, Sport and Rec Wanganui and other interested bodies.