

Motorola Gippsland Gift, Saturday 17th December 2011

The Victorian Athletic League ventured back to Traralgon for the first time since the early 90's and Croc Media, with the assistance of some high profile sponsors, put together a quality program of events. The star attraction was Sally Pearson, recently voted the world's top female athlete. But with a program that included Aaron Rouge-Serret, Liam Gander, Daniel Martin, Charlotte Van Veenendaal and Rueben Kipkosgei, Sally was going to have to run well to grab all the highlights. Clint Hillas has to be commended on the array of athletic talent that he was able to gather for both the VAL events and the national 120 metre championships. The weather was warm but a fluctuating wind made conditions a little difficult for the athletes and officials.

The VAL would like to extend a warm welcome to our newest official, Leo Keating. Leo, a former runner and official, has taken over the video operators role in the finishing tent. Don't be frightened to say hello to Leo, he certainly doesn't mind a chat. Unfortunately Matthew Webster was a late scratching from his starting duties due to the flare up of an old elbow injury. The doctor has advised that the only cure is to keep his elbow straight for the next two weeks. We wish Matthew a speedy recovery.

Runners, please check that you have filled out your VAL registration form. You need to send in a hard copy before the office sends out your competitors pass. Also all runners must be registered with their home states before competing interstate over Christmas/new year.

Latrobe Valley Express 800 metres Open

The final of the 800 metres ended up returning a shock result with Alex Bacalja (54m) making a remarkable improvement on his heat form to hang on to record a narrow win over Dominic Hoskins (34m) and Derek Collinge (38m) in the time of 1.53.15. Alex who has already had a great start to the season with wins at VRTA and Terang scrambled into the final as the slowest qualifier but hit the front before the home turn and held on narrowly. Hoskin, last year's winner when the event was held at Woodside, came with his trade mark finish and just failed to over haul Bacalja. Derek Collinge, having a rare run over the 800 metre distance, ran an even race to run third. The backmarker, Michael Marantelli (30m), couldn't hang onto the back of Hoskins when Hoskins sprinted and never looked a serious threat. Alex has joined the Hipworth stable this year and is showing good improvement over all distances.

70 metres ,State of Victoria,Open

Michael Bolton (4.5m) went one better than his second place at Woodside last year to take out the 70 metres final over Kendra Hubbard (10.25m) and Isaac Dunmall (6m) in the time of 7.59. Michael has been plagued by injury over the last few seasons and finally was able to put together a consistent heat, semi and final to take home the sash. Bolton turned the tables on Kendra Hubbard who had defeated Michael in the quickest of the two semi finals. Michael is trained by his father Paul, a former VAL runner when trained by Ferg Speakman.

McDonald's 70 metres Novice handicap

Newcomer Khan Marr (1.75m) came off a good runners handicap to destroy the field in the final of the novice in the creditable time of 7.67. Khan, trained by Nick Fiedler , won his heat in clearly the fastest time and the final looked a stroll in the park for a runner who has a very bright future in the Victorian Athletic League. He defeated Dean Dobric (5.5m) in both the heat and final, with Travis Pike (7.25m) finishing third.

RACV under 20's handicap

The RACV series for 2011/12 commenced with the first heat at Traralgon and it was taken out by Kate Jones (17m) from Isaac Dunmall (2.25m) and Paddy McDonald (1.m) in the time of 13.37. In her second season with the VAL, it was Kate's first win and she has an excellent chance of making the final, conducted at Stawell. Kate also made the final of the 70 metres novice and is trained by her father Dale.

Mitsubishi 120 metres Womens Gift

The ladies gift, although short in numbers, was high in class with the appearance of some of the country's top female sprinters. Sally Pearson (scr) and Charlotte Van Veenendaal (2.5m) were joined in the final by some of the VAL top ladies including Katie Moore (5.5m) and Stephanis Mollica (7.5m). However the final was a one act affair as Van Veenendaal maintained her fastest heat form to hold a clear lead over Pearson in the final. Pearson tried valiantly to make up the handicap leeway but the start of 2.5 metres was beyond her. Tara Domaschenz (10.75m) after running second to Van Veenendaal in the heat was placed third in the final. Charlotte's final time of 13.59 improved on her fastest heat time of 13.64. She is trained by Adam Larkins.

Motorola 120 metres Gippsland Gift

The scene for the Gippsland Gift was set early when Cam Dunbar (7.75m) handled a class field in the first heat with the fastest time of 12.38. Cam left Australian champion, Aaron Rouge-Serret (.25m) and Frankston gift winner Matthew Wiltshire (6.5m) behind over the concluding stages to set a time that wasn't to be bettered until the semi stage. However in the semi final Alex Carew (5m) threw out a definite challenge by finishing a close second to Dunbar in the fastest semi (12.32). The other semi was won by Matthew Eddy (10m) in the time of 12.45. In the final Carew was able to make valuable ground on Dunbar early and raced away over the last 20 metres. By the time the final was run the weather had become cooler and with the wind swirling the final time was expected to be slower and so it was with a moderate 12.48. The ladies gift winner Charlotte Van Veenedaal (12.5m) qualified for the final and ran a respectable race. The winner is trained by James Karageorgiou, not a name usually associated with the Val but he obviously has the ability to bring out the best at final time. Saturday's win was Carew's second with the VAL, previously winning the 70 metres at Rye earlier this year.

1600 metres Prime TV handicap

In one of the best performances seen on any VAL circuit, Rueben Kosgei off the scratch mark chased hard to get within eight metres of the winner Justin Murphy (100m). Kosgei's time of 4.08.4 was a top grade run on the Traralgon track and shows that the Sydney Olympic gold medallist is still a world class athlete. However nothing can be taken away from the victory of Murphy who realised the task on hand and worked his way through the field to open up a winning lead in the last lap. Murphy's time of 4.06.4 off his handicap mark of 100 metres was in itself an excellent run. Justin has already had a solid start to the 2011/12 season and seems to be adaptable to any race from 550m upwards. After enjoying a good amateur career, Justin has been a late convert to the Victorian Athlete League scene with his wins now reaching double figures.

Latrobe Valley City Council 300m Women's and Veterans

Benny Tancredi (78m) returned to the winners list for the first time since "granny was a girl" with his all the way win in the time of 35.3. Benny, who was swallowed up in the last few metres at Waverley last week held on gamely in the home straight to still have a clear margin on the line. He defeated another front marker in Terry Arundell (73m) with Tara Domaschencz (45m) completing a busy day with her third place. Benny trains himself and looks after a small but very competitive team, including promising sprinter Matthew Mifsud. Cameron Yorke found it difficult to make ground off his very tight backmark of 3 metres. Cameron was disappointed that the woodchoppers were unable to get to Traralgon as he was confident of doing well in the standing block division.

400 metres SportzBiz Novice

Daniel Khobayar (34m), trained by the new kid on the block Eric Sapac, won the SportzBiz final in convincing fashion in the time of 48.46. Daniel, from a boxing background, won his heat in 49.6 and improved to win the final from Travis Pike (36m) and Tim Sayer (38m). The SportzBiz series will be conducted at various venues over the next few months with the final being run at Stawell. Daniel is well on the way to making the final as a weekly win doesn't exclude you from the rest of the novice series.

400 metres XXXX Gold

In clearly the closest finish of the day Doug Greenough(24m) was able to hold out Nick Magree (22m) and Adam Coote (21m) in the time of 47.54. The race was delayed until the rowdy bar crowd adjacent the start area settled, but it made no difference to Greenough as he was always well positioned and hit the front on the turn only to be strongly challenged by Magree. Magree looked sure to win but just missed. With the new VAL circle photo machine results are now settled in seconds with even the closest finishes easily determined. The win continues on the good start to the season enjoyed by Greenough and trainer Todd Ireland.

Coates Hire Invitational Skins 70 metres

Sam Jamieson (scratch) won three races straight to take out the skins series from a gallant Ben Weaver (.75m). The first to drop out of the field of six were Isaac Dunmall (2.5m) and Doug Greenough (2.25).

The second heat saw David Tinney (2m) and Matthew Wiltshire (1.75m) eliminated. In the final Jamieson collared Weaver early in the race and held a clear margin over the last few metres. Jamieson, previously the winner of the Stawell Gift and Don Furness memorial, has quickly found form after his break away from the sport.

Motorola mens and womens 120m national championship

With the scratching of pre post favourite, Sally Pearson, the ladies division was won clearly by Charlotte Van Veenedaal. Charlotte led from the gun and ran out an easy winner. The VAL's own Kendra Hubbard ran well to finish second.

The men's race was more interesting with the race favourite, Aaron Rouge-Serret, opening up a good lead early and looking sure to win. Over the concluding stages Nick Hough powered home to grab the lead and looked most impressive over the final 20 metres.