

PEOPLE OF PRO RUNNING - By [David Griffin](#)

It's Easter Monday and it's all quiet in the small Victorian country town of Stawell.

Easter 2020 isn't what it was supposed to be. Covid-19 took care of that.

Today would have marked the 30th anniversary of a great Australian sporting performance.

Dean Capobianco is Australian sports royalty. Trained by Matt Barber, the Western Australian flyer came from nowhere to win the 1990 [Stawell Gift](#), in a race many say is the best ever.

In the spirit of great pro stories, Capobianco went into the weekend as an underdog. His camp were keen on the juicy odds offered at the Calcutta on Friday night and backed him to the hilt.

In a plunge reminiscent of the early 1900s, the 'Capo' camp cleaned the Bookies out on Easter Monday, after he flew home in the last 30 metres to edge Tim Mason and Todd Ireland in a cracking race.

With a long career in athletics, many remember Capobianco for his magnificent fifth in the 1993 World 200 metre Championships in Stuttgart. Leading into the straight, Capo was beaten by Frankie Fredricks, John Regis and Carl Lewis.

Now 49 years of age, he reflects on a magnificent race and a career that started 30 years ago today, at Central Park Stawell.

#### EPISODE 10: DEAN CAPABIANCO

"Bunbury Gift was my first professional foot race, and my first taste of pro running. I raced the Gift off about 6.5m and thought I'd won but looked across and realised that my training partner Kieran Finn pipped me at the post.

At the 1989 Stawell Gift, I was outrun by David Culbert (the famous French long jumper!) in the final stages of the semi-finals. How does a guy that started in front of me, run me down? That's right, I ran past him early and then he wound me in.

I had aspirations of being a great 200m specialist, but being over-run by a long jumper (with all due respect to DC and all longer jumpers ), I realised that I had some work to do to fulfil my dreams.

Stawell wasn't really on my radar until I started to get serious about running at 17 years of age. Pete O'Dwyer (or POD), who was the WA state 100m champion at that time was instrumental in my decision to get serious.

Two weeks before the Stawell Gift was the 1990 National Championships in Melbourne.

I knew I was thereabouts to challenge for my first senior Australian title. However, Rob Stone who was just off his fourth place over 400m in the Auckland Commonwealth Games, was in blistering form.

Moments before the 200m Final call up, Stoney was nowhere to be seen. Was he injured? Did he warm up somewhere else? Did he sleep in?

He was apparently caught in traffic on his way to the track - so he cranked up the heaters and stretched in the car. He just made the call up and then raced to victory in a swift 20.9 seconds, in very average conditions.

That experience only helped strengthen my mindset. Needless to say, the focus and motivation to win at Central Park a fortnight later, was top of my agenda.

The bookies were paying 66's and 70's on the Friday night before Stawell in 1990. We took most of whatever money we had collectively and placed a bet. We kept some money aside for food! There was carnage in the ring after the Final, but we walked away with our fair share!

Tim Mason was favourite, and Todd Ireland was in great shape too and in the mix as another bookie favourite.

Fortunately for me on the day of the finals, the headwinds started blowing, and on that slight uphill gradient at Stawell, meant that all the runners starting in front of me would be out there (maybe) for 0.1-0.2sec longer - just long enough to catch them if I could find another meter in my legs.

I remember being very calm and focussed. I was in form and feeling good. Matt Barber was always brilliant at keeping things real and not getting too far ahead of the task at hand.

He'd often say, "Just run like you've been running and you're in with a chance". He knew it was up to me to get myself in the situation where I could race and fight for the finish line - that's where instinct and emotion takes over.

When you're running in the red jacket, you have to stay focussed to peg one runner at a time. Steve Hutton in the white was in good shape, so I knew if I got up to him early, I'd have the blue jacket and favourite Tim 'Emu' Mason in my sights.

I was on Steve's shoulder by half way and had full view of the Emu, who was motoring through the middle stages of the race. With each stride I got closer, but I had to keep fighting to stay in touch.

With about 30m to go I felt the momentum change and I knew I could get between Mason and the gates if I held it together, and also hope that it was also enough to catch Todd Ireland in the pink, who was out in front until the last couple of strides.

The victory meant a lot to our squad, and we celebrated accordingly! Part of my prize was also a 'very large' metal esky - made, painted and donated by a local Stawell workshop, that was generously filled with VB and ice. A few of us sat out on the track until late in the night, and gave it a nudge. Very special memories - and I still have the esky!

I've always said that Stawell was a pivotal moment for me, not just as an athlete, but also in life and business.

It was the one moment in time where I drew on all my training, knowledge, experiences, disappointments, dreams and channelled it all into a performance.

Stawell is the most memorable race and was the start of many more great races and special times.

There are many favourite moments overall. Inter-school and club trophy victories, my first state to national titles, state and national records in sprints-relays-hurdles, and of course the international circuit to World Championships and Olympics.

The Stawell Gift was an amazing personal achievement for me, much more than a win and a pay cheque - it was the moment when I really started to believe in myself."

Watch the 1990 Stawell Gift final here: <https://bit.ly/3ek7Y2f>

