

## **Benita Johnson – Competitive Edge Interview Number 2**

### **Competitive Edge Biographical Information**

**Your full name?**

Benita Jaye Johnson

**Date of Birth?**

06.05.79

**Place of Birth?**

Mackay, Queensland

**Currently Living?**

Melbourne / London

**Sponsors (if any)?**

Nike

**Marital Status (name of your partner if you have one)?**

Married to Cameron Johnson - 2.2.02

**Occupation (if you are unlucky enough to have one)?**

Athlete. Completed a Bach Sec Ed (PE), Post Grad Sports Nutrition

**Height?**

167cm

**Weight?**

49kg

**Shoe Size?**

US 9

**Hair colour (if you are bald, what colour was it when you had some)?**

Blonde

**Favourite shoe colour?**

Brown leather for good shoes, blue and white for trainers

**Most loved pair of runners you have ever had (brand and style)?**

Nike Althea trainers (us 9), Nike FREE (US 9)

**Favourite Race?**

World Cross Country. This is because it is always fast from the start and I think it is the hardest race (for the whole way) I do each year. I love the start, you really feel like you're a horse getting out of the gates in the Melbourne Cup. I also love the 'team' thing too. As a distance runner, you rarely get to do a race as an individual and part of a team. I am thrilled to have won this event once and would love to win it again. Also the

conditions are always tough weatherwise and course-wise. The crowd out on the course really get into it and I love running in this sort of atmosphere.

**Your top 3 running experiences/performances?**

- 1) Winning WCX (World Cross Country) 2004.
- 2) World Half marathon 2003 (came from about 12th place with 3km to go to get the bronze).
- 3) 6th at World Indoors 3km, 2001 in Lisbon. It was after this championship that I thought I could really be a world-class runner.

**Personal Bests for your favourite distances?**

3km- 8.37, 5km-14.47, 10km- 30.37, Half- 67.55



**Competitive Edge Interview**

**CE - The first question has to be about your first world title that you managed to win last year. Can you very quickly talk us through what you remember of the race? How were you feeling before the start? When did you manage to take control? Did you get away from the others easily, or did it take all of your reserves to make a break on them? At what point in the race did you realise that you were going to be the 2004 World Cross Country (WXC) Champion?**

BJ- I was feeling pretty nervous before the start, but in a relaxed way. Although it was raining and cold, I was really looking forward to racing. I took control early in the 4th lap (with 2km to go) as we went up this big muddy hill. In previous laps, I sensed the Ethiopians were hurting up this hill so decided to make my move on this section, as I was feeling very strong. Until then I was just running relaxed in the pack trying to use as little energy as possible, just getting the kms done. I got away from the others relatively easily, had a few meters on them at the top of that hill. I was hurting with 1500m to go.....and knew I had it won with about 1 km to go but ran strongly right thru to the line. In the WXC 2003, I tensed up just metres from the finish and was passed by two Kenyans right on the line subsequently missed the bronze medal (that image of them passing me comes back to haunt me sometimes). Here, I was determined that this wasn't going to happen.

**CE - For the past few years you have spent a lot of time in London, so much so that you now have a residence over there. What are your thoughts on England?**

BJ - I really love where we live in London and I am happy there. We have a great training group there and the parks in the area - Bushy Park, Richmond Park as well as the other running areas, Hampton Court Palace and the river Thames are great places to train. We are also very close to Heathrow Airport so can fly out to races each weekend quickly and easily. I also find the weather is fine most of the time and in fact, in summer, it is rarely windy which is nice for those track sessions! Also plenty of good coffee shops around too!

**CE - You now would have a huge profile around the world and in England in particular. Do you get stopped on the street for your autograph, or is it only at races you are being mobbed?**

BJ - I don't get stopped on the street in England but have appeared on the front cover of their running magazine, Athletics Weekly a few times as well as doing many interviews for various media over here. People recognise me in Bushy Park from winning races such as WXC or the Great Nth Run as many of these races are televised live on TV - athletics has a great following in the UK. At races - mainly XC ones, I am recognised across the world and have a big following.

**CE - How would you describe the running opportunities that exist in Europe and the UK compared to Australia?**

BJ - There are endless running opportunities in Europe and the UK. As an athlete I find it very motivating competing over there, as the fields are always fantastic and crowds massive. I always get the best out of myself under these conditions and enjoy competing immensely. I love seeing people as passionate as myself about the sport. There is such mass participation in road races over here, which is fantastic and a real buzz for me to see so many people out there participating and enjoying themselves. I also love racing in Australia when I can as I think it is important to promote the sport as much as possible. However it is hard to race all year round in Australia as in order to be the best in the world, I need to compete against the best and fit in with the European seasons. There are still plenty of running opportunities in Australia though, especially on the roads.

**CE - You have married a physiotherapist, who also happens to be a great bloke and a bit of a looker (except for the fact he is balding, sorry Cam had to say it)!! Did you marry him for other reasons beside him being a physio? For example, what is he like in the kitchen and does he know how to operate the washing machine?**

BJ - When Cam and I started going out, I wasn't much of a runner and we definitely didn't think we'd be travelling the world like this at the time! He wasn't a physio at that stage but did do a fair bit of restaurant

quality cooking - we probably ate a bit too much in those days (I was about 7kgs heavier than I am now). We were just in love and wanted to spend the rest of our lives together - all this athletics stuff is secondary to our relationship. However, apart from getting a generic last name, the last three years of marriage have been great, his cooking skills are exceptional (as are his physio skills) and yes, he can operate a washing machine, clean etc. A great husband and also support to my athletics career - we are a team, I couldn't do this alone.

**CE - You have had a tremendous build up for your defence of your World Cross Country Title winning all but one of your cross-country races in Europe (one very narrow defeat). How are you feeling about the upcoming race and do you think there will now be a lot of the field keeping a very close eye on you?**

BJ - Yes, I have had a great 6 weeks over here in Europe - winning 5 from 6 races. I am getting fitter and fitter over here as I've been able to get through 160+ kms/week with racing each weekend. I was disappointed to lose to Tirenesh Dibaba in Edinburgh but I know she is in great shape (given her recent 5km indoor world record). I am really looking forward to getting over to France and racing the WXC (World Cross Country) again this year. I think a lot of the girls will have an eye on me, some may fear me (given my recent wins here in Europe) which is a good thing. The Ethiopians are the ones to beat.

**CE - You are returning to Australia to compete in the Melbourne Grand Prix, with all of the international travel, do you typically have a routine that you follow after a long flight? Also what type of things will you do on the plane to keep your body in tip-top shape? And finally do you get to fly first class, business class or are you back with the rest of us in economy?**

BJ - I am having a very easy week, training wise this week due to the travel back to Australia as well as the tough racing schedule I've endured over the last 6 weeks. Although I'm never looking forward to the flight home to Australia, I try to relax as much as possible on the plane and sit back and enjoy the movies (as I rarely watch many movies when at home). I will move around a lot on the plane, have a shower at Singapore airport and sleep from Singapore - Sydney. I usually fly economy but can go into the Qantas Clubs so I guess that compensates for it a little. I am looking forward to Melbourne GP - I won't be in my best 5km track shape then but really want to run in Australia when I can. I think we have an exciting time in Australia with the Commonwealth Games coming up - Melbourne will do a great job.

**CE -You have shown such great promise over the half marathon distance (including medalling at the World Half Marathon Champs) and you are down to compete in the London marathon. Will London be an after thought once you have gotten your cross-country season out of the way? Would you say that your training is currently more focussed on running an 8km race or a marathon?**

BJ - World XC is definitely my priority at the moment - that is what I'm working towards and thinking about right now. I am definitely doing some training for London at the moment but it is a long way off and I will focus more on that after I run at WX (World Cross). I like to focus on one big even at a time - not look too far ahead of myself. I know I'll be in great shape for WX, this is all that matters for the time being.

**CE - Finally a series of questions, in one question to finish the interview. Are you planning on running the World Champs marathon this year?**

**What event are you targeting at the Commonwealth Games? Olympic marathon medals are very very rare for Australia, do you have any ambition to contribute to our current tally (which I believe is one silver medal for Lisa Ondieki)?**

BJ -

I'm planning to run the 10km at Helsinki (World Champs) and at Commonwealth Games targeting the track. I do one day have an ambition to run the marathon at the Olympics but have plenty of years ahead of me to think about this and probably not in Beijing in 2008.

**Thank you so much for your contribution and best of luck to you with the upcoming races, we will all be cheering hard for you from back home as always.**

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