

Mark Tucker - Competitive Edge Interview Number 10

Competitive Edge Biographical Information

Your full name?

Mark Andrew Tucker

Date of Birth?

15/08/1979

Place of Birth?

Geelong

Sponsors?

None at the moment but some in the pipeline. Currently on scholarship with the Victorian Institute of Sport

Currently Living?

Geelong

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

Single

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

Relief teacher (high school)

Height?

186cm?

Weight?

73kg

Shoe Size?

13

Hair colour?

Dark Blonde

Favourite shoe colour?

Black

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

I never form much of an attachment to my shoes.

Favourite Race?

Have quite a few that stand out. However, NCAA cross-country would be right up there

Your top 3 running experiences/performances?

As a combination of performance, overall experience and significance I rate the following three as very high up in my career so far:

- 4th in the 2002 NCAA cross-country championships
- breaking 4 minutes in the mile for the first time (2004, Ireland) with Sir Roger Bannister in attendance and presenting the awards
- more recently, winning the open mens mile race in Auckland at the John Walker night of miles in a new pb of 3.58.37 (also meeting John Walker who presented the awards)

Personal Bests for your favourite distances?

800m - 1.51.6	3000m- 7.55.45
1500m- 3.41.67	5000m- 13.33.03
1 mile- 3.58.37	10,000m- 28.44.52
3km steeplechase- 8.41.75	



Photos: Mark Tucker winning the Rip to River Race (left) and the Noosa Bolt (right)

Competitive Edge Interview

CE - The Competitive Edge first noticed your name two years ago and you have really come on strongly since then. How long have you been running at a competitive level and whom do you train with generally?

MT - I first decided to give it a serious go in 1996 as a 17 year old. I was going nowhere in tennis so decided to drop that rather quickly and do something I could be good at; I have always wanted to be an elite level sportsman. In relation to my running, I was ok as a junior, maybe in the top 5 or 6 in my age-group, but nothing special. Anyway, my breakthrough came in 2002 when I was on a scholarship at Butler University in America and I haven't looked back since... I do most of my training on my own, apart from a track session

now and then with guys like Richard Jeremiah, Daniel Quin and Mike Chettle. I don't mind training on my own, as I can get up in the morning anytime I want to run (often too late by most peoples standards!) and run at my own pace. However, I do like to have company when I need to push myself in a hard session.

CE - In 2004, you spent a track season in Europe travelling with Michael Power. Was this an enjoyable experience? What is the level of athletics like in Europe compared to Australia? Was it your attempt at making the Olympic Team for Athens?

MT - Yes, it definitely was an enjoyable experience, apart from getting whipped by the Kenyans in a few of my 5km races! Anyway... I stayed at St Mary's university on the outskirts of London, away from my training group and coach. I was lucky to get a room through a friend of mine, Steve Vernon, whom I lived with in America. It is a high performance centre for up and coming UK distance runners, so I always had plenty of training partners, if I wanted. I mostly did the British Milers club races and found them to be very beneficial; we badly need a similar set-up in Australia. The races are all in the evening/night and paced, all set-up for fast times. I ran my pbs for 800 and 1500, plus a seasons best in the 5000m in these races. The main difference I see between Europe and Australian athletics is basically there is a lot more of everything in Europe (races, depth, support etc).

You are right, my initial purpose of going over was to have a crack at making the Olympic team in the 5000m (even though I knew I was a long shot and my chances were slim). However, I ended up not going as well as I had hoped and was just not good enough.

CE - You have identified that you are going to be more focussed on 1,500m this season. Any reasons for this decision? Given your strong performances over 10km on the road and track, you have shown exceptional endurance, what would you consider to be your best distance?

MT - There are a couple of reasons for my change of focus this track season. Firstly, if I could be good at any event, I would choose the 1500m/mile. I enjoy racing it, you always feel competitive because you are never too far away from the lead (unless you have a freak like El G in your race!) and it has a great tradition.

Secondly, I felt jaded and a bit demoralised after my 5km experience in Europe so I wanted a temporary change of event. I was getting thrashed by Kenyans who would not even be close to making their national team. Thirdly, I wanted to work on my speed for the longer distances and get my 1500m time down. Strangely, my thought process was to either move up to the longer distances, like the marathon, or move down to the 1500m. After being a student of the sport for 8 or so years and watching the recent championships, I just feel that the 5000m and 10,000m events are not suited to us guys (non Africans), for various reasons I will not go into for this interview. Anyway, this will not stop me from having a go, but ultimately I would give myself more chance of a good international showing in an event like the marathon, compared to a 5000m or 10,000m on the track. However, I don't mind if I am proved wrong.

My best distance I'm still looking for, but right now I would say the 5000m. My training right now is geared towards a 1500m/5000m runner, so I am still competitive over the longer distances while being able to run personal best times in the 1500m/mile.

CE - What are your current goals - Commonwealth games, any big road races, x-country? And do you have a current coach?

MT - My coach is Bruce Scriven who I have been coached by for 6 to 7 years... Goals: for the short-term, Nationals this weekend (1500m) and World Cross-Country (long course) are my focus and I want to compete to the best of my ability in both.

Longer term it is all about the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, making that team and then performing well. As usual, there will be many other events that will keep me focused, sane and amused until the Commonwealth games...

CE - It seems a few guys are throwing their hat in the steeplechase ring presently (Abdi and Schmidlechner are both not traditionally steeplechasers). Would you consider this an option in the future? You seem to have both the speed and endurance necessary for the event? Have you ever jumped over barriers?

MT - I started out as a steeplechaser, winning the U/18 national 2km steeplechase in 1997. My last steeple was the national championships in 2003 where I got the bronze medal. I enjoyed my time in the steeplechase and it provided many opportunities, but I have no intention of ever going back to it. Since I have 'retired' from the steeple, I have had no major injuries and I have progressed well enough in the flat events to make it an easy decision to stay away from this event. Anyway, when I was racing the steeple, my technique sucked so I was wasting my time. However, I enjoy watching it and think it is great that the steeple is becoming more competitive again in Australia. It is always interesting to see how guys like Abdi and Schmidlechner go in the event coming from a 1500m/5000m background. There are opportunities in the event if you have the right gifts...

CE - What does a typical training week look like for Mark Tucker?

MT - Right now it looks a bit like this:

Monday: am- 8km run, pm- 10km run

Tuesday: am- 8km run, pm- track session (1500m based more recently)

Wednesday: am- 12-15km run, pm- 8km run

Thursday: am- 8km run, pm- track session or fartlek

Saturday: am- 8km run, pm- threshold run

Sunday: long run 70 to 90 minutes

CE - There have been stories that you have regularly competed in fun run and road races to assist in providing funds to support your running career. Do you enjoy the life of a full time athlete? Do you feel it is an ideal situation?

MT - Ideally, most of us would love to be full time athletes and I am no different. I would have had trouble going over to Europe last year if I hadn't been winning some prize money from fun runs and road races. However, I am not quite a full-time athlete yet as I also do some relief teaching; but I would rather do something I love, such as running, to earn some cash than anything else. In Australia you can't really be a full-time athlete unless you are a big name like Jana Pittman, there are just not enough big money races or sponsorship dollars going around. Some people say that you need to have at least a part-time job (or some study) to keep you occupied during the day, instead of being just a full-time runner but it depends on the person. Just look at the current greats of our sport and it has obviously worked

out well for them being full-time athletes - in relation to running performance. Whatever makes you happy...

CE - In your opinion have you found that road racing has been detrimental to your track aspirations? Or do you (like a certain member of The Competitive Edge) enjoy the road racing experience more than track?

MT - Definitely not, I would argue that it has helped my track aspirations. If all I did was race on the track, I would get bored and jaded, road racing enhances my enjoyment of our great sport. I love all racing, whatever surface it is on.

CE - Is there anything you would like to say to those cynics who suggest you are ruining your potential by competing in so many fun runs and road races? And, on average, how many races would you run in a year?

MT - I enjoy racing in fun runs and road races and it is as simple as that. For all of my decisions in life (including what I'm going to race) I weigh up the positives and negatives. If I think that by doing a race there are more benefits in me doing it than not doing it, I will race. These benefits, or positives, might include: enjoyment; seeing a new place; experiencing something unique (such as running in the famous Cinque Mulini race in Italy); prize money; exposure; tradition of race; and supporting an event, etc. If I think a race will be detrimental in the short or long term for my running career, I will not do it. A lot of the time I don't need to give an all-out effort and can use these races as training, as well as pick up some prize money. Unless it's something like the Burnie Ten or Noosa Bolt, I will not back off my training either.

To be honest, I just wouldn't enjoy the sport as much if I didn't do things such as fun runs and road races. If I just ran track, I'm not sure how motivated I would be to stay in the sport; there would be no running 'potential' being ruined then if I decided to pursue something else. Other runners will always say that I'm racing too much and as soon as I perform badly they will point to over racing as being the reason.

However, over racing, or doing fun runs, has never been the reason why I have performed badly at times. If you do something different from the 'norm', you will almost always be criticised. "I don't race that much, so Tucker is wrong and he will never make it" (getting into third person here!) is a simplification of how some people think about the issue. It is against the elite distance running culture to race that much, to race in 'unimportant' events such as fun runs, and thus it is frowned upon. At the end of the day it's my life and I will live it how I want. I'm only one person and I'm not that important in the whole scheme of things...

Races per year, about 40 to 50 (close to one per week) but not totally sure on that.

CE - Are you any relation to Corey Tucker?

MT - Maybe he's my long lost brother... Nah, no relation but he sure can run and it's great to see that he's making big breakthroughs. However, it means that I'm not the fastest Tucker over 1500m anymore :-)

CE - Do you enjoy training in Melbourne? How does it compare to being based in the UK?

MT - Having done some travelling, I think I'm lucky to be able to train in Geelong and Melbourne. I can run along the river, along the coast or make a little drive to a place such as the You Yangs where there are plenty of good trails to run on. I never get bored of the scenery and there are plenty of people to run with if I need someone else's company. The big plus is that we are on the coast and my favourite training runs are when I'm running beside the coast or on the beach. Obviously, the UK doesn't have that many beaches but they do have some great parks, such as Bushy and Richmond Park, to train in. These are massive parks compared to what we have and are places where you could do all your weeks training in, if you wanted. The main difference between the two is that I have more support in Australia, such as getting massage, physio and transport compared to when I was based in the UK. The cost of living is also a lot higher in the UK, which can make things difficult (if you're not earning money in the UK).

CE - And one final one, always a bit of a curve ball, will we see you at the Australian Mountain Running Championships this year?

MT - I wouldn't rule it out! However, my coach, 'Scrivo', might have something to say about that...

CE - Thanks so much for your time

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