

## **World Junior championships 2010 –A Coaches Reflections**

The 43 member Australian Team assembled and flew out from Australia on 8<sup>th</sup> July in good spirits and with hopes high in anticipation of what was to come. Amongst those leaving was Amy Pejkoivic who I have coached since she was 10 years old. As current World Youth Silver medallist, not surprisingly, as with the others, she left excited about what could follow.

Her last formal training was a NSWIS prepared weights session conducted at home on 6<sup>th</sup> July, supervised by her mother and co-coach Leanne. After this I had time to reflect on her season and training in preparation for these Championships and to assess her chances.

One thing was clear, Amy had certainly become a stronger and more consistent jumper at higher heights in the year since World Youth. This was due in part to the commencement of a formal weight programme under the guidance of David Young at NSWIS in addition to the plyometric and other resistance work she had been doing at increasing levels of intensity over the last few years. This was reflected in two Commonwealth B Qualifiers of 1.86m and other jumps of 1.84m and 1.83m during the Summer season.

Whilst there were ups and downs, especially a poor performance at the Sydney Track Classic, when more was expected, she quickly bounced back and ended the season on a high with a winning double at the Australian Junior Championships, cementing her place on the team and also gaining a victory over Liz Lamb from NZ who was also competing in Moncton.

From March to leaving from the coach's perspective, training went to schedule however, during the pre-departure period it was clear Amy was not satisfied where she was technically. This change in dynamics between coach and athlete as they mature is at times daunting but if managed properly ultimately very rewarding. Despite her doubts she jumped consistently, though not spectacularly in the pre-departures clearing 1.80m on 1 of 4 occasions.

First stop for the Team was Vancouver, where they were to compete at the Kayjaks Classic the day after arriving, in the evening. I had expected Amy would probably jump 1.75-80 here but I admit I felt sick for 2 hours when I received a text from Leanne saying she jumped 1.65. As her normal starting height was 1.70m I could not understand what could have gone wrong. A text from Sandro Bisetto only confused me further. Later in the day AA reported the results which showed she jumped 1.75m. It transpired Amy could not send an accurate text message. "did I really type 1.65, sorry". The nerves soon calmed.

Two days later she jumped 1.83m in a minor meet, so all seemed on track when coach and mum/coach flew out late on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> for Canada, knowing her training programme was being managed under the expert guidance of Team coach and friend Sandro Bisetto.

We flew V Australia who were very friendly and after a 12 hour flight watching movies, playing Doom and familiarising myself repeatedly with Wolfmother's great new album Cosmic Egg and other old Rock Classic's we landed LAX. A few hour wait ensued, with little happening except an introduction to some dodgy Crab cakes and a shandy like Budweiser. Come on you can do better America! On the plane again this time on V America for a 5 hour trip to the Big Apple. As I had not been to NY since I was 3 yrs my memory was limited.

We had 12 hrs there so after transferring our gear from JFK Airport (my father shook JFK's hand in 1963) to Newark Airport we bussed into town for the day. The first new experience was in

McDonalds for breakfast “ will that be with American or Canadian bacon” huh. We then did New York in a day from mid town to Battery Point- Cheap runners (nice), Starbucks’ every 100m (well nearly), Time Square, Empire State , a myriad of cultures and colours, dodgy shopping in Soho (what a hoot), Wall Street and The Bull, the solemnity of the Twin Towers Site and Memorial, the Statue of Liberty from a distance, Yellow cabs, NYPD, humidity, rain, sun all in the one day and very sore feet at the end.

There was then some stress as we were late back for the bus to Newark but were saved by the inevitable evening flight congestion over New York, resulting in our plane taking off nearly 3 hours late to Moncton. No choice but to spend more time in Starbucks.

We arrived in Moncton at 1.30pm coincidentally at the same time as some of the team arrived from Toronto. After checking in at the impressive looking Chateau Moncton and a quick scout around town, a good rest was warranted before the challenges ahead.

The team lunch was held the next day with all the athletes looking great in their Spark shirts and Aussie kit. Each athlete was introduced by the team coach who was responsible for them with a short Bio. There were lots of photo opportunities for parents and coaches and best wishes for the battle ahead. Amy was in good spirits.

The final two days involved fine tuning for the athletes, and many an Aussie walker or distance runner could be seen on the trails around Moncton University where the track and accommodation could be located. The team stayed in the tall LaFrance building along with lots of other teams and the Aussie flag hung proudly from the fifth floor window. All food was served to the athletes a large canteen area and the athletes were regularly shuttled thereby bus. Sarah Mulkearns the Team Manager, must be congratulated for keep the team at this A level accommodation as there was a move to have them shifted out of town to the B grade stuff but she was not to be moved. Go Sarah!. She always does her utmost to help the Team.

Amy had a light training session at a school track at Shediac about 40 minutes out of town on the Saturday supervised by Sandro. Shediac is reputedly the Lobster Capital of the World and I must say the lobsters are cheap and great to eat. The local way is either to get a Lobster roll or sandwich. We just bought them whole cooked at ate them with bread. Nice!

The Opening ceremony was in the evening of Monday 19<sup>th</sup> July with the contingent of Australian marchers lead by Flag bearers Brooke Stratton and Steve Solomon. Of course they were all cheered on widely by the Australian support crew of parents ,managers and coaches. After the formalities, which dragged on a bit because they were often repeated in French, the IAAF Flag was raised and the Championship’s began with the Women’s 3000 Metres.

This occurred because a Canadian was running and they wanted the crowd of locals to have someone to cheer. Unfortunately she came next to last. To make matters worse, when interviewed, she announced she was not a local New Brunswick an but was a Quebec an. Bad move. The commentator said “but you’re still Canadian aren’t you”. Well maybe not in some circles. There appears to be some mixed feelings between the local Arcadian French and English and the French Quebecan’s. The ladies next to me left in disgust at her Quebec an pronouncement. Very interesting local history and politics.

Anyway the Aussies went into action the next day with most getting through their relevant heats on the track or qualifying in the field events. I also started finishing my reconnoitre of the facilities to make sure no stone was left unturned before Amy competed. This started on the day

before the opening Ceremony. By being very low key I managed to get onto the track to check the prevailing wind conditions at the expected high jump end and feel the spring in the new Mondo surface. The high jump qualifying was at the scoreboard end which had a beautiful green grass bank in front of it. This innocuous looking bank was soon to cause much controversy for the high jump. We soon discovered the meet manager's did not want any coaches in front of it because it would affect the TV pictures. Forget about the athletes needs. It was also very hard to get to a full side on position to the bags which is essential to check the lay out position of the athlete over the bar during warm up. I discovered the only good spot was on the landing of the stairs into the main stand. Signals would be required to let the athlete's and Leanne know if they were in position. I would also relay advice to Leanne by phone and visa versa. By conducting a dry run I soon discovered that security would attempt to move me if I stood on the stairs but at least I was aware of this.

The Final jumps practise was held on Wednesday 21st on the indoor warm up track at the stadium. We did this so Amy could have a few jumps off the Mondo surface which was not available at the school track. She looked very good jumping and after only 3 full jumps Sandro I and I were satisfied and we shut her down. She was very excited and positive about qualifying on Friday. She then had a ice bath and later a massage.

It rained on the Tuesday. We were still not sure which end they would jump as the Men's qualifying was conducted at the opposite end. Also a discus qualifying was rescheduled for the same time as the high jump because of the rain. The bags were set up late Tuesday and the one near the discus cage was out of line and looked very cramped for jumping from Amy's side. When the lists came out we found she was on that side but was able to warn her of the difficulties it posed in advance.

On the Wednesday Amy and Emily Crutcher, who were both jumping for Australia arrived for warm up at 8 am with the call room opening at 9am and competition due to start at 10am There were two pools of 15. Sandro asked me to assist Emily with her warm up and competition as he was also assisting Amanda Bartram in a rescheduled pole vault.

The girls completed their warm ups and after last minute instructions and photos, headed down to the call room with Team coach Jody Lambert, nervous but excited. Leanne and I had agreed that a 1.81 jump in qualifying would be sufficient and probably a clear 1.78 would be ok. Amy was instructed she needed 1.81 to be absolutely certain. Then the fun really began.

The coaches from all nations began to gather behind the high jump apron in front of the nice green grass bank. Leanne stayed at the apron to check the run ups as Amy has a tendency to drift wide at the curve (big no, no) and I headed to the stairs for the long distance side view. As expected it soon started. Security "Sir you can't stay there" I explained why I was there. "you have to move" Time to dig in "If you want me to move then arrest me". That gave me some time and the girls run ups were set after a few hand signals and text messages and adjustments. Now back to the apron. My way was blocked by security. Be calm. "I need to get back around to the apron to coach to the girls" Sir "you can't go back, you'll have to go out of the Stadium and right around to the other side." "Huh! Why don't you just look that way and I'll just zip through". "No!" Time to go. "Stop". Safe back with the all the other now very bemused coaches, especially the non English speaking ones.

The knock out stage then started. Next difficulty. The official decided the athletes could not move from the jump apron to talk to their coaches. Lots of yelling and gestulating then ensued back and forth. Oh the joys of language diversity. Unfortunately Emily, being only 15 years and the

youngest on the team found the process too daunting and after starting well, went out at 1.70m. She'll be back much wiser next time. Amy was jumping well but her run up was out because of the tight location. Still she had first time clearances at 1.70 and 1.74m. The competitors then started to fall quickly, as expected.

Around this time I noticed there seemed to be an every increasing presence of black uniformed security and officials. Something was about to happen. 1.78m loomed and Amy had a good first up clearance. Was that enough? Then security pounced. The Technical Meet Director appeared and said all coaches had to move around to the sides. The pretty grass bank had to be protected at all costs. (not his words). The general reply was that crazy we all need to coach. "I am only acting on instructions" he said. You must all move. The Estonian coach next to me protested "me coach, athlete "pointing at his charge on the track.

This was not a good time to move as we were now at 1.81m and there were about 20 athletes still in the competition. Come on Amy, clear 1.81m first jump and we'll gladly move. She ran in and clipped it with her behind. It became impossible to convey any meaningful instructions because of the general confusion. Many athletes in both pools started missing but some started to clear. Sandro arrived and I told him the good news. The pressure was now on and the coaches were being ushered away. Second jump, off came the bar, still others clearing. A large barrier suddenly went flying somewhere near Sandro's proximity. Just one more jump and we were no longer in a position to assist, a coaches nightmare. No good and the bar came off. Amy came over as close as she could get. I said "do you think 12 will jump 1.81." She said "I don't think so" but was not totally convinced and then slumped on the track awaiting her fate.

We then waited and I slowly crushed a water bottle to death while Leanne tried to keep track of pool A. Brad Carters was keeping track of the other pool. According to Russell Stratton I paced. We were down to Third jumps in both pools. A couple more athletes soared over and waved their arms in delight knowing they were through. The last jumper leapt and the bar wobbled and fell. Was she through?. We think so. A check and re-check of both sheets and yes she was just in equal 11<sup>th</sup> courtesy of the clear round to 1.78m. It was tight as 20<sup>th</sup> place also cleared 1.78m with misses. She had survived just. What a relief. In fact the best 12 jumpers all got through and as it turned out 8 came from the other pool with only two coming from Amy's side which was clearly the toughest to jump from, so well done Amy. Game on. The first major goal we had set was achieved. She was in the Final. Now for a top 8 and then see what happens.

Sunday loomed very wet but still. The thought this should make things interesting as Amy had jumped well in the rain lots of times and we surmised the very tall European favourites Maria Vukovic and Paltse may struggle in the rain.

There was one final coaching job to do. We didn't know which end the final would be at. After the debacle on the Wednesday would they make us stay at the same end or move us to the other end. I had to know so I drove down to the track at 7 am and managed to get in and have a look. We had been moved to the other end. There was a slight head wind. The athlete's stands were this end so we could coach in the right position but still a long way from the athletes. There would be no opportunities for quiet talk at the fence which was no problem in Bressanone. I worked out where I wanted Leanne and I to sit and line up Amy's run up and went back to the Hotel satisfied I couldn't do anything more. It was now up to Amy.

The Women's High jump Final was the first event at 1pm. Amy warmed up well again, this time on the indoor track which was crowded because of the rain and then headed to the call room. The rain then stopped and it became still. I was the first person in the chosen stand and wiped the seats

down and set up our spot. Security then intervened again. Management had decided to change the rules of ticket access for the closing ceremony day and Leanne was blocked off at the stand exit and couldn't get around to the athlete stands. This would not have been an issue on any other day. She did however have a side on view to check Amy's layout, which was vital. She then set up her video on the landing next to the stand to record the proceedings. Sandro stood in the stand next to me, so we did have the angles covered. Having said this, during the competition security even tried to remove her from this spot and she was still being unreasonably hassled to move, when Amy was in trouble at 1.82m. Sandro earlier had been moved from the same area because he did not have a ticket to the stand area. On any other day there was no issue. The rules seemed to change at a whim.

Anyway, the coaches arrived and I found myself wiping the seat down next to me for the Italian coach who had two of the favourites ( we later had a long discussion through an interpreter about the competition at the airport, a very interesting guy). I also wished the USA coach all the best. I shook their hands and battle was joined.

It was not to be Amy's day. After spending time getting her into a good take off position, she started well enough at 1.70m and cleared 1.78 first jump again. A very big wind then came up which shattered the field. One Italian favourite went out at 1.73m as well as the Polish girl. Both had no problem jumping 1.81 in qualifying. 1.82m was the killer height with the increasing wind. Suddenly nearly the whole field was in jeopardy. Amy just couldn't get her run up right in the increasing wind. Her first jump was close just shifting it with her behind. She was hit by wind in her second jump and ran out of time to try again and was timed out. What a waste. Her final jump, despite giving it everything was not great and suddenly her campaign and a years work was over.

I left the stands with the Italian coach desperate, because her No.1 jumper was also on her last attempt at 1.82. He was mumbling about how bad the wind was. I wished him all the best and saw she snuck over. So did the American on her third jump and Ariane Palytse from Lithuania. The wind abated a bit and the remains of the field got a second wind.

I quickly spoke to Leanne. We calculated she had finished 8<sup>th</sup>. Amy was the only 17 year old in the field and she had fought to the end. We had to be satisfied.

Knowing Amy she was clearly not going to be happy so I ran around to the exit area with Jodie when she was lead off the track collect her from the departure lounge. The competition continued. She soon appeared out of the back of the Stadium with her mate Ella Nelson and it was clear she was in a very bad way. Because she had only jumped 1.78 in her mind she had decided she had failed. She was distraught and wanted to throw up. She had told Ella she wanted to jump 1.90m. Jodie and I literally had to carry her from the venue. I told her she had finished top 8 and to walk tall and that the conditions were very tough. Lots of Aussie support was provide but all she wanted was her mum most of all. When Leanne arrived, with coach's hat off, all was soon ok again. She soon realised that in the conditions, in a Championship environment she had done well. She was the best performed 17 year old in the World. Her response to her own perceived failure shows how hungry she is to succeed and will not be forgotten by me.

Incidentally Marija Vukovic eventually won the first Gold medal and medal of any kind for Montenegro jumping a 1.91m PB .. Airine Palsyte from Lithuania finished second with 1.89 ahead of Elena Vallortigara on the same height from Italy. All of these girls were in there 4th International Championships.

Sandro Bisetto asked Vukovic what had changed from last year at World Youth's where Amy had beat her comfortably. She had been to 3 Championships and failed each time before this one. Her response was telling. **"I have trained myself into the ground every day for the last year"** After three attempts she had finally realised what is required to succeed on the World Stage.

And how should Amy's performance be assessed. In truth she did not do quite as well as we would have hoped. A medal was probably beyond her this time but perhaps not a top 5 position. Both Amy and her coaches learnt a lot from these championships, more so than from Bressanone. This can only be good. But put in context over her first 2 Championships she is in an excellent position to succeed into the future.

Since the Junior and Youth Championships commenced in 1998 only 3 athletes have medalled in both their first two Championships. Also based on the average of the performances in their first two Championships Amy currently stands 9<sup>th</sup> in the overall all time standings out of well over 300 International Competitors putting her in the top 3% at this stage of their careers. She now had a great base for a long career in jumping.

Amy will now have a short rest and then get back into hard training as she intends to keep turning out for Australia for many years to come and to continue to challenge for high Honours again and again for her Country. You can't ask any more from an Athlete.

#### **Rankings. (World Youth and Juniors since 1998)**

##### **Average Competition Placing after Athlete's First Two Championships.**

1. <b>Iryna Kovalenko</b> UKR 1 <sup>st</sup> 2003 YChamps, 1 <sup>st</sup> 2004 J Champs	1 <sup>st</sup>
2. <b>Svetlana Shkolina</b> RUS 2 <sup>nd</sup> 2003 Y, 2 <sup>nd</sup> 2004 J	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3.= <b>Annette Engel</b> GER 2 <sup>nd</sup> 2003 Y, 4 <sup>th</sup> 2004 J	3 <sup>rd</sup>
3= <b>Yekaterina Yevseyeva</b> KAZ 3 <sup>rd</sup> 2005 Y, 3 <sup>rd</sup> 2006 J.	3 <sup>rd</sup>
5. <b>Mamlina Natalya</b> 2007 Y 1 <sup>st</sup> 2008 J 7 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>
6.= <b>Blanka Vlasic</b> CRO 99Y 8 <sup>th</sup> 2000 J 1 <sup>st</sup>	4.5 <sup>th</sup>
6=. <b>Petrina Price</b> AUS 2000 J 7 <sup>th</sup> , 2001 Y 2 <sup>nd</sup>	4.5 <sup>th</sup>
6= <b>Kimberely Jess</b> GER 2007 Y 8 <sup>th</sup> , 2008 J 1 <sup>st</sup>	4.5 <sup>th</sup>
9 <b>Amy Pejovic</b> AUS 2009 Y =2 <sup>nd</sup> , 2010 J 8 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>

#### **Other memories of Australian Performances from Moncton.**

1. For me my No1 highlight was seeing Mitch Tysoe come of age as an athlete. He went into his 110m Hurdles qualifier as a boy thinking he wouldn't go further and came out starting to believe. He ran a great semi and finished the Final 6<sup>th</sup> in the World with two broken fingers and a man as an athlete. Great stuff.

2. The professionalism of Sam Baines 4<sup>th</sup> 110 Hurdles, Julian Wruck 3<sup>rd</sup> Discus, and Kimberly Mulhall 4<sup>th</sup> in the discus. These three were great role models for the younger athletes.
3. All of the athletes draped in their Aussie flags climbing into the stands to support Amy in her final and the boys with Go Amy painted on their bare torsos. Emotional stuff.
4. The heroic efforts of Tom Gamble to get himself fit to help his fellow 4x100m team mates only to succumb to a cruel injury and his positive response to this new and daunting challenge.
5. Jake Hammond pointing to the Aussie Flag on his Uniform at the start of his 200m semi. This showed me the Aussies had lots of fight in us. Well done Jake.
6. The great support shown to all the athletes by the parents and personal coaches who attended and quickly bonded together as part of the tight nit Aussie Team.
7. Sarah Mulkearns looking tired and drained at the end of the Championships after again giving everything to ensure the Athlete's experience was a rewarding and positive one.
8. Emily Crutcher 15 years of age from Grenfell NSW population 2,000 being overwhelmed in the high jump qualifying and then sitting down and resolving to show everyone she can make it. I have no doubt that she will.
9. The Australian Athlete's themselves and the way they bonded and supported each other in the way only Aussies can do. And the Athletes from the other Nations loved and respected them for this. One American (female) Athlete said to me later on the plane that she loved hanging with the Aussies the most because "they're so natural, they're not worried about creating an particular image" (my interpretation). At NY Airport another American Athlete was proud to be wearing the Aussie Hoodee, she swapped for at competitions end, when her team mates were all in their American Kit, and hassling her about it. She said she got it for a spray jacket. I said you got the best deal and she smiled knowing it was true.

### **Memories of the Place (Moncton and the surrounds)**

Unlike Bressanone last year where the surroundings made the place, Moncton is clearly made by the people. The place slowly grows on you. Its slowness gradually relaxes you. The generosity of the people to Australian especially is moving. A parking official I was talking to summed it up when he said to me that Moncton is a "mellow place." Nuf said.

And now a burst of memories, Moosehead Beer, Cars without number plates, Fried food, more Fried food, Root Beer, Poutine, pedestrians with right of way over cars, tattoos on everybody, part time work, 1 acre of prime beachfront land for \$100,000., biggest tides in the World, lighthouses in the yards but no real ones anywhere, dirt beaches, pheasants, forests, the Chocolate River, beautiful sunsets, Arcadians, Quebecies, Wally mart, empty space everywhere, lobsters and more fried food.

### **To Parents and Personal Coaches**

Parents don't miss out on seeing your children compete and the camaraderie of being with likeminded Aussies. To all the personal coaches out there, go to the Championships if at all possible. Make it possible. You owe it to yourselves and your athletes. You will learn a lot by

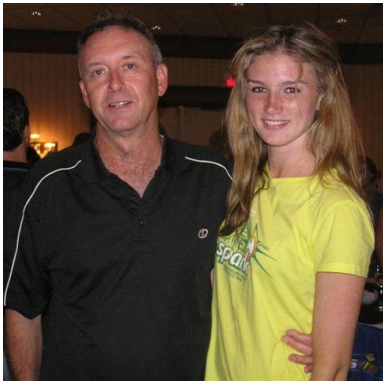
being part of the process. You will make contacts vital for the future development of you as coaches and your athletes. You will help make athletics stronger in Australia.

I didn't expect to leave with an open invitation to Trinidad but I have.

You deserve to see the final results of your hard work. Some coaches in Australia suggest the young athletes should be left to fend for themselves and are proud to announce they consciously have decided not to travel with them. If you are happy with then fine, follow this approach. I could not disagree more. Few athletes medal on the World stage without their full support team there to back them home. **Be in no doubt, it's a war out there and a tough one** which can quickly destroy the hearts of many young competitors. That's when they need your support and guidance the most, in the heat of the toughest battles they will face in the athletic arena. Would Wayne Bennett say to the St George Team on Grand Final day, "today boys you on your own ,man up"). Of course never. Did Napoleon leave his troops to fight on their own, no never.

Be assured the Team coaches are highly experienced and do a fantastic job but they have lots to do and cannot know your athlete like you do. By being there you can only make their job easy and more enjoyable. So get involved and enjoy victory if it comes your athlete's way and suffer with them when it doesn't. You're a team. That's what coaching is all about.

**John Sharpe signing off from the 2010 World Junior Championships Moncton Canada. (Moose rule)**



Top row: with coach at team dinner; It can be lonely out there; Visualising the next jump  
Bottom row: Final preparations before the Qualifiers; Ready to rock and roll