

1994 Commonwealth Games: Interviewed Paula Schnurr

Mark Van Ooyen & Justin Anjema

March 25, 2004

Dr. John Byl

PED 201

Redeemer University College

1. How did you get started into your particular sport?

“It was just a pure coincidence. When we moved, I come from a family of seven kids, and we moved from the North, we lived in Mosinee and we moved to Burlington and that is where we grew up. When we moved there, a friend that my parents had met suggested joining the Burlington Legion Track Club because it would be a good way for my family to get involved in the community. So that is sort of how it started when I was about 8 years old at the time. It was one of those things that I enjoyed, it was fun, I met a lot of friends, so that kept me involved as it progressed over the years and I continued to do well, of course that kept me more interested.”

2. How did you get selected to compete in the 1994 Commonwealth Games?

“In most of the international competitions like the Olympics, World’s, or the Commonwealth Games, they take three athletes per event. In our trials, our national championships that summer, you would have to place top three but you would also have to run a standard. Every event would have a certain time standard that you would have to meet. Now, I can’t remember if that was the case for the Commonwealth Games. I’m pretty sure the standard wasn’t as difficult as something like the Olympics. So that wasn’t an issue. For me, it was more or less coming in the top three at nationals that put me on the team, and at that time in Canada there were four [women] that could compete

at a world class level that I was competing against, so it could have been any of us. One girl, Angela Chalmers, as you know was probably the most dominant in Canada at that time and then the other three of us were probably around the same level. Robyn Meagher and Leah Pells, we were always sort of flip-flopping. It was Robyn, and Leah, and myself that all ran the 1500 [at the 1994 Commonwealth Games]. Angela chose not to. That year I had come second at nationals against Angela.”

3. How many times did you compete at the Canadian National Track and Field Championships?

“Probably my first national’s that I can remember is 1988. I probably spent ten years on the national team. I quit after ’96.”

4. What was your training regime for the Games?

“With running, it’s divided into seasons, so through the winter you’re doing a lot of your base training, longer running, and longer intervals. I trained in Waterloo [Tri City Track Club], that’s where my coach was and I would drive there three times a week. There was quite a large group of people that I would train with from high school kids that were boys in particular that were at my level, to older guys who were better than me. Between those two groups, that would be my training group. Three times a week I’d be on the track, training.

I was with Hamilton Olympic [Club] from 1982 to 1991. The coach I had there, we sort of went our ways and that's when I hooked up with the Waterloo group in the fall of 1991. Those are probably the only two major coaches other than the ones from the Burlington Legion Track Club."

5. How did you travel to the Games? Time it took...?

"Well, of course I flew and it took 5 hours. So it was quite nice."

6. During the Games, what was your race schedule like? How many races were you required to run throughout the competition?

"The Games covered ten days. Track is always in the second half of any Games and my event is always at the very end of track and field. We didn't have any preliminaries or semifinals. Initially we were supposed to but some of the girls had pulled out for whatever reason, so we went just a straight final. There was fourteen of us so they just condensed it and went to a straight final, which is not really an ideal way to do it. You would like to have something as a warm-up."

7. How did you typically prepare for races on race day?

"Depending on when I'd race, this [the race at the 1994 Games] was an afternoon race, I think it was around one thirty or two o'clock, I'd make sure I was up at a decent

time, eight O'clock, have not a full breakfast but something small, nothing heavy, cereal or a piece of toast and then I wouldn't eat anything else until I ran that particular race. Then for warm-up I would usually start about an hour, an hour warm-up, a twenty minute jog, well actually when you get to competitions like that you always have to check in about fifteen minutes before, or half an hour, they give you two check ins. You're warm-up isn't ideal in that situation because you're being asked to warm-up a lot earlier then you want to. Once you check in you're sitting, you can move around a bit, but you have to have checked in at least 15 minutes before, its the final check in. So my warm-up would probably start about an hour and a half to an hour before."



8. What would you do in the days before your race?

"Some people don't like to run the day before, but I like to do something. In my training schedule, for the most part, I always had a day off. That never changed, but I

would always run the day before I raced no matter what event it was. For sure my last track work out would be four days [before the race]. In the case of the Commonwealth Games, because we didn't have a semifinal, I probably did something light on the track that day, and a bit of a warm-up, some strides or something, nothing strenuous, but just to feel like I've done something. Three days before you're not doing anything really hard, but still running.

Other than that, I enjoyed most of the Games. I got around and watched a lot of the track and some of the other events that were right there at the university, the swimming and stuff, and I'd take in the festivities at night. My parents were there and my boyfriend, my husband now he was there, so there were lots of things to do."

9. What is your best memory of the Games?

"Winning the silver medal, for sure. For me that was, I mean there is a lot of highlights in my career, but that has to be one of them."

10. What is your worst memory of the Games?

"I can't say have any. It was an ideal situation. I was healthy. I was running well. I had family around. It was in Canada. It's comfortable. I was great. Victoria did a great job."

11. What did it mean to you to represent your country?

"As an athlete, it's a dream that we all have. I wouldn't say as a child that it's what I always thought about. Once you start to progress and you realize that you can reach that level, then that's certainly an accomplishment and an honor. I think of my first big international in '92 when I was at the Olympics. The biggest thrill in most of these Games, when you really feel like you're there representing Canada would be the opening ceremonies when you're walking into the stadium and you're there as a larger team. There is a lot of pride and a lot of honor."

12. Were there political or cultural issues that you remember, which surrounded the Games?

"I know leading in to the Commonwealth Games, when Victoria was awarded the Games, things in terms of planning and preparation of the Games hadn't gone well and so they were in some difficult situations where they had to bring in some other people to sort of save the Games. "Hellard" was his last name (who is involved with The Bay and Zellers), he was the one who came in and really made a difference and got the Games finally put together. At the time I didn't know that was going on. That was an issue.

I know there were a few athletes who ended up "staying on", you know, defecting. That was also controversial. I think the wrestler, Igali... that was the Games he came to Canada. I know there have been some different events, like at a World

Junior's a lot of them ended up defecting, I'm pretty sure. I'd be curious to find out to verify that. I know there were athlete's that stayed on after."

13. As an athlete at a major international games, how aware are you of issues surrounding the Games?

"I guess when you're in an athlete's village you're in your own little world. You're pretty much focusing on why your there. Now in Atlanta, when the bomb went off down at the international area where that happened, which was a fair distance from the athlete's village, we didn't really know until later the next day, or I didn't know. You're in the village; you're doing your thing. Unless its something that's really directly effecting you... you kind of zone out for that period."

14. Who paid for what?

"I was pretty lucky at the time because I was a carded athlete and as a carded athlete you get, not a lot of money, I think at the time it was three-fifty to four-fifty a month. Now that has changed. That just subsidized my own living expenses and training expenses. When I went to Victoria and became a part of that team, I didn't have to pay a cent. That was all covered. There was no expense."

15. How do you get carded?

"Your ranking in the world. Its an "A", "B", "C", its been a while so I don't know... You had to be top 8 in the world to be an "A" card, top 16 to be a "B" card, and then a "C" card was, I don't know, top 25. It's a yearly card, so it's based on your summer performance."

16. Were finances a major concern for you?

"I was a teacher, so I was always working part-time. Even that year [1994] I was working part-time. Some athletes, they're just full-time athletes, but I always had a career just because I couldn't see sitting around doing nothing all day waiting to train. And thinking down the road, what am I going to do when I'm done my sport. So I was working part time and had money coming in. I didn't go anywhere to train. Running is not an expensive sport. I was lucky to make a bit of money competing, so that also helped. One winter I ran the world indoor circuit. That for me was very lucrative, so that helped."

17. Were females treated equally at the 1994 Games?

"Yeah, there were no gender differences at that time. No visible anyway. I didn't feel like I was slighted because I was female."

18. What kind of impact did your second place finish at the '94 Games have on your life and career?

"Life didn't change a whole lot. I went home in September and started teaching. For me personally it was a huge confidence boost. At the time I was thirty, thinking how much longer do I want to do this? Do I still enjoy doing this? So in that sense, it sort of propelled me on to the next year."

19. How do the Commonwealth Games compare to other Games you have attended? Olympic Games, Francophone Games?

"To me the Francophone Games were a bit below the Commonwealth Games, it wasn't as big as a Commonwealth Games competition. The level of competition was high."

20. What do/did the Commonwealth Games mean to you as an amateur event?

"Well, they're considered the "Friendly Games" so is it the Olympics? Well as an athlete its one step down. You're not competing against the best runners in the entire world, but you're competing against a good chunk of them. Especially in track and field, some sports are stronger than others. It's still very competitive in track and field in the Commonwealth Games. To me, it's still an opportunity to compete at a world level and

to compete against some of the best runners for the fifteen hundred. I didn't take it lightly even though it was considered the "Friendly Games."

21. What do you know about the history of the Games?

"I was involved with the bid for the 2010 Commonwealth Games, so I learned a lot about...the fact that it would be 80 years if we got the Games in 2010 since we first hosted them in 1930. To know that Hamilton and Bobby Robinson were the instigators is pretty cool. The number of countries that competed at first was not a whole lot. You really realize how many countries are a part of the Commonwealth."

Paula Schnurr – Biographical Information

Paula Schnurr was born on January 15, 1964 in Kirkland Lake, Ontario and now resides in Burlington, Ontario.¹ She attended McMaster University, where she won 28 OWIAA (Ontario Women's Interuniversity Athletic Association) indoor/outdoor championship medals, 18 of them gold. Paula set 2 CIAU (Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Union) indoor records in 1988, and was that year's top athlete at the CIAU Track & Field championships. She holds 2 OWIAA records, and also won a 1987 OWIAA silver medal in cross-country. Paula was a CIAU All-Canadian 5 times and McMaster University's Female Athlete of the Year 4 times.

Schnurr placed 2nd at the 1994 Canadian Championships and 3rd at the 1995 Championships. Her international career includes a 1994 Commonwealth Games silver medal and 2 Olympic appearances.² Schnurr attended the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona where she finished 8th in the 1500-meter race.³ She also was present at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta where she finished the competition ranked 31st in the 1500 meter event.⁴ She also won a bronze medal in the 1500-meter race at the 1989 Francophone Games.

Evidence of her residency in southwestern Ontario includes her first place finish in Hamilton, Ontario's "Around the Bay Road Race" in 1996.⁵ She competed and trained with the Hamilton Olympic Club from 1982 until 1991, where she trained under Peter

¹ "Your Canadian Birthdays for January 15." <http://207.61.100.164/canbirth/01jan/canbirjan15.html>. March 18, 2004.

² "McMaster Marauder Athletics: Hall of Fame." <http://www-athrec.mcmaster.ca/athletics/halloffame/1998/98paula.htm>. March 18, 2004.

³ "Track and Field: Paula Schnurr." www.canoe.ca/TeamCanada/schnurr.html. March 18, 2004.

⁴ "Athletes: Profile Search." <http://www.olympic.ca/EN/athletes/query/query2.php?athleteid=3172.00&lastname=Schnurr&firstname=Paula>. March 18, 2004.

⁵ "5k Road Race: Top 5." <http://www.aroundthebayroadrace.com/stats/top%205k5.htm>. March 18, 2004.

Grinbergs.⁶ Also, Paula was a member of the Tri City Track Club located in Waterloo.⁷

She became a teacher in Milton, Ontario and coached cross-country and track at

McMaster University with her husband, Peter Self.⁸

⁶ “Track and Field: Paula Schnurr.” www.canoe.ca/TeamCanada/schnurr.html. March 18, 2004.

⁷ “Grand Memories.” http://www.tctc.kw.net/grand_memories.htm. March 18, 2004.

⁸ “McMaster Marauder Athletics: Hall of Fame.”

<http://www-athrec.mcmaster.ca/athletics/halloffame/1998/98paula.htm>. March 18, 2004.

Works Cited

“Athletes: Profile Search.”

<http://www.olympic.ca/EN/athletes/query/query2.php?athleteid=3172.00&lastme=Schnurr&firstname=Paula>. March 18, 2004.

“Grand Memories.” http://www.tctc.kw.net/grand_memories.htm. March 18, 2004.

“McMaster Marauder Athletics: Hall of Fame.”

<http://www-athrec.mcmaster.ca/athletics/halloffame/1998/98paula.htm>. March 18, 2004.

“Track and Field: Paula Schnurr.” www.canoe.ca/TeamCanada/schnurr.html. March 18, 2004.

“Your Canadian Birthdays for January 15.”

<http://207.61.100.164/canbirth/01jan/canbirjan15.html>. March 18, 2004.

“5k Road Race: Top 5.” <http://www.aroundthebayroadrace.com/stats/top%205k5.htm>.

March 18, 2004.