

Would you go and watch a Masters Athletics Event ?

- Hans Barnard

– **If you were not competing/officiating, Honestly would you bother to go?**

Only one “negative” column in a local Sydney newspaper caught my eye and the female journo Ms Rebecca Wilson argued that it is a sport for “crap athletes” that could not make it when they were young.

“Masters Games an absolute joke By Rebecca Wilson From: [The Daily Telegraph](#) October 17, 2009 12:00AM ([53 comments](#))



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This was using a quote from British Decathlon great Daley Thompson who was asked once if he would compete in a masters because he appeared to be very fit in his 40s.

Thompson replied that “these Games were made for people who were really crap athletes when they were young. He is, of course, mostly right.

Serious athletes spend their lives training their guts out to take part in a major event. “ and so forth.

She further argued that:

- She entered (on a “dare” from the editorial staff at her Radio station) the Discus W45 at the World Masters Games to have a laugh (she was a field athlete in this event as a junior) about it afterwards (she confessed that cold feet kept her from turning up at the event, rather hiding behind the chalice pen..)
- Who in their right mind would want to watch... “Does it come any better than seeing a 70-year-old woman in purple Lycra trying to pole vault half her own height (and miss)? The bloke who looked like Santa Claus provided a News Limited snapper with an award-winning shot.”
- “Why waste money on no qualification standards required – Masters events when young sports people around NSW are busting their guts to make a good fist of it for their local clubs? (none of which can break into the “elite” group but are still hoping) with hardly any spectators.”

And so forth..

Yes we all have very valid counter arguments and I will get to this shortly, we have to though admit that we never will get a huge spectator number at our sport. Would you go if not competing, seriously? NO we do not even think of going to watch if not competing / officiating. Ms Wilson clearly never attend any Masters events during the standard sporting year. But never mind how much we might be in disagreement with her, lots of it is true.

This then begs us to define the Masters sporting movement being in general as;

- Almost exclusively for the actual competitor and not for any unaligned spectator
- Might now be defined as “Forever – Fun/Activity/Fitness Tourism”
- Still infinitely better than couching it
- Way tougher than just Coaching it
- Better than taking the kids to the club and joining the “When we...” Sideline Chorus
- The real amateur sporting code??

The Sydney World Masters Games logo of Fun, Fit – forever.

The Sydney experience augers well for the future of Masters Sport in general. This was officially accepted the biggest by far and overall the best organized Games thus far. It set a new standard for Masters sport (using +/- 5,000 volunteers). More than 28,000 competitors took part (near on 30,000 registered).

Sydney 2009 World Masters Games key facts

The Sydney 2009 World Masters Games attracted 28,292 competitors from 95 countries, making it the world’s largest multi-sport event ever.

Of the 28,292 Games competitors, 11,635 came from New South Wales, 8,094 came from elsewhere in Australia and 8,563 came from overseas, including 2,272 Canadians, 1,404 Kiwis and 832 Americans.

Games competitors contested 28 sports at 72 venues, as far north as Mona Vale, as far south as Mt Keira and as far west as Clandulla State Forest.

Football was the most popular Games sport attracting 2,909 competitors.

There were 16,533 male and 11,739 female competitors, while the average age of a Games competitor was 50 years, with most aged 40-59.

Nine of the Games ambassadors competed and eight of them – Jennifer Bourne (gold), Sarah Fitz-Gerald (gold), Jenny Holliday (gold), Daniel Kowalski (gold), Russell Mark (gold), Shelley Oates-Wilding (gold), Andy Harper (silver) and Mark Geyer (bronze) won medals.

The youngest Games competitor was 24 year-old Canadian swimmer Facundo Chernikoff, while there were two Australian centenarians – 101 year-old lawn bowler Reg Trewin and 100 year-old athlete Ruth Frith (Ruth won six gold medals in this year's competition).

There were 8,549 gold, 7,777 silver and 7,111 bronze medals awarded during the nine days of Games competition.

The Ideal Sporting World

In the ideal world parents will bring their kids to athletic club nights so that they can put in their own training time. Coaches, ruing the fact that they are missing out on valuable personal training time.

What will this give us?

1. Huge participation numbers
2. Large crowds because of it
3. Much larger registration numbers gives more money for the sports' development
4. Larger involvement (constituency) makes Government take more notice
5. The true "participation is more important than winning" situation
6. How can we not in this scenario get taxpayers funding for Masters sport in general
7. Way less ex-Internationals giving far out comments via not so hard working journalists (mostly because they're all still competing).

The Television network infused/controlled world of excellence / Elitism above all have changed us as the general public into sports "raters" and are threatening the very existence of the sports lover. Personally I do not watch sport in general anymore; I really vet beforehand what I watch. The sporting entertainment window is only as wide as it is and cannot be "wasted" on watching the traditional National – games. One only have time for your own personally rated top sports. The POMS and YANKS typically have it worked out with fully forward booked games (Grid Iron and EPL) which carries a lot of undying, unwavering club loyalty. This is what must be added into our various Masters sporting codes, HOW exactly is the unanswered question for now.

To compare any Masters event with the Televised Elite sporting event(s) is and will always be ludicrous, *so don't*. Lets enjoy what we have, "Fit, Fun – Forever" and let the critics enjoy their couching. The non participating crowd have been such when we were all young and will always be such forever. The Sydney Games was a great success in general for all concerned and an experience to behold for me personally.

Masters Sport is the true Amateur Sporting code:

How can we claim this as being so? Easy, we after all do not get any taxpayer funds although we probably paid way more than any Elite sportsperson (after all the "SPARC" type sponsorship/funding have been added on for them, they probably do not pay any tax ever?). So everything we do is on our own time and at our own cost. Do not get me wrong, I believe that the top sports person deserves the pay/accolades they get as they invariably have got huge talent and they do work extremely hard at it.

All top performers may it be sport, academy or business deserves the top pay if they perform at peak. But does that then not irrevocably make the Masters competitor(s) the only or true

amateur sports person/code, no? Conversely we can go and sit on the verandah watching the world go by in reminiscence as our predecessors did so well.

We as a spread out competitive generation have the destiny of Masters sport in our hands at this time, we need to push as hard as we can to get to the “ideal Masters world”.

What do we know about our sport:

1. The top 10 – 40% of competitors are top class
2. The bottom 5 - 10% are dreadful (although I've seen such grow into much fitter and able competitors in the past)
3. The middle 40% are the true spirit and its numbers must be grown and nurtured as the true competitive sport lovers.

We may need to create a new environment and time slot for it. Let us investigate having Masters Events immediately after OR in conjunction with Sub-Junior events as it will involve the family as a whole (first Dad supports Junior and then vice-a-versa). Junior Athletics participation numbers and levels are way down, not only in New Zealand. We have

Why Masters Sport is Important (being fit, fun and forever young)

In defence of our sport we recall an episode from the (hallowed) Olympic Games:-

The true Olympic spirit was embodied somewhat by the swimmer from a small Principality that exercised their right to one entry per country (at the Sydney Games of 2000). If I recall correctly he struggled to finish his heat and there was a moment of worry that he would not be able to do so. Now Ms Rebecca Wilson, politically incorrect critical of Masters Games, journalist... That... was lauded by all and sundry and it was fully sponsored and paid for by someone else, right? It was beamed world wide by huge TV networks. So why then bother with criticizing Masters Games/Sport? Does she then suggest that all sporting persons over the age of 30 OR maybe even 35 be banished to the verandahs and couches? *No thank you, we say.*

“Vive le Masters Sport” and all those who participates in it and will participate in it in future, **“FIT, FUN – FOREVER YOUNG”** thank you.

Of course you can enjoy your next holiday at the beach/mountain and sit on the verandah and do absolutely nothing, nada, zilch (Boring)? OR spend that time and (probably less) money going to Dunedin and competing in the next NZ Masters Games OR Oceania OR the Aussie Masters Games. See new places and meet so many new and interesting people. Start saving now for Torino, rally for Government sponsorship, lets say 20 or 30% of total standard cost borne by a Masters Competitor. Better still lets Rally for the 2017 World Masters Games to be in Auckland.