

Athletes 'have all they need' in NZ - Moller

By TONY SMITH - The Press | Saturday, 23 February 2008

Former Olympic marathon medallist Lorraine Moller refuses to "believe this rubbish" that New Zealand sport needs more funding.

The newly inducted member of New Zealand Sport's Hall of Fame gets a little toey when she hears excuses of that ilk.

She has heard it all, including the complaint that "everyone else is on drugs and that somehow we are at a disadvantage".

"If I had bought into any of that, I would never have got what I got. People were saying the same thing 15 years ago."

Moller insists New Zealand athletics - and sport in general - has "everything we need".

"Historically, it's been done before. It can be done again. All it takes is one person who can inspire a whole community."

Memories and methods still remain of one person who is no longer with us.

Moller remains an ardent advocate of the coaching philosophies of Arthur Lydiard, the man behind Sir Murray Halberg's and Peter Snell's rises to the top of the Olympic Games track and field podium.

Lydiard inspired, directly or through his disciples, generations of Kiwi champions, including John Walker, Dick Quax, Rod Dixon, Allison Roe and Moller herself.

But rather than dwell in the golden glow of the past, Moller - bronze medallist at the Barcelona Olympics marathon in 1992 - has her focus firmly on the future.

She co-founded the Lydiard Foundation to keep alive the ethos of the Aucklander who died in 2004 at 87.

She was brought to New Zealand this month by the Lovelock Davies Foundation to run two coaching clinics on Lydiard training methods in Wanganui and Auckland.

Moller came to Christchurch this week to be inducted into the Sports Hall of Fame.

The three-time winner of Japan's Osaka marathon was also guest of honour at a dinner organised by the indefatigable Dick Tayler at the Hornby WMC on Thursday night.

The Moller mantra is the Lydiard "lineage" must be maintained, his message "preserved and not distorted".

"I came from a time when the knowledge was passed from Arthur to John Davies (the Tokyo 1964 Olympic 1500 bronze medallist) to Dick Quax and on to athletes like me.

"There was very good coaching. Coaching is crucial to success. You have to have that mentoring and guidance."

But she says the "lineage was weakened" for a while with the advent of professionalism in track and field, the beginning of triathlon, a drift away from athletics clubs and the "struggles" of New Zealand athletics' governing body.



IAIN MCGREGOR/Waikato Times
SELF DETERMINATION: Lorraine Moller says New Zealand athletes face the same challenges they've always faced and more funding won't change that.

She would like to help facilitate a "revival of Lydiard" - and she believes New Zealand and international audiences are receptive.

"Internationally, Arthur is very respected. We've gone through and contacted many of the great coaches around the world and so many credit Arthur for the foundation of their training methods."

So what is the Lydiard Way? Moller says some people now call it "periodisation", but Lydiard always spoke about "steps up the pyramid". His bottom line was creating a big base. "He always said, 'the bigger the base, the higher the peak'".

Lydiard championed aerobic conditioning. He made his runners rack up massive mileages, followed by strength work, anaerobic training and racing to get them to their peak. "You've got to start with that (aerobic base) because it sets you up for everything else you do," Moller says. "It's fundamental to how well we are able to perform."

But like most great coaches he was "a very practical and intuitive person". His knack was to "tweak someone just right to get them there, on the day" at a major meet.

"There are people who've put new names to it - and they like to think they invented it ... others had the misconception that the Lydiard Way was all about long, slow distance training - 100 miles a week - but that's not necessarily true".

She insists it was Lydiard who "really popularised the methodology when he took a group of athletes and took the world by storm at the 60 and 64 Olympics - our golden era".

Moller - once coached by Davies - says Lydiard was also "the spark that ignited the whole jogging movement". His fitness programme for cardiac patients so impressed visiting Nike founder Bill Bowerman that he took the concept home to the United States and the 1960s jogging boom began.

Lydiard's methods were as applicable for the average jogger "as they were for Olympic aspirants", Moller says.

She says his philosophies also work in any sport. "It doesn't matter if you are a cyclist, a rower or a runner. If you are going to be out there for more than a couple of minutes, the principles still apply."

Moller discovered at the Halberg Awards that Athens Olympic track cycling champion Sarah Ulmer was "a huge fan of Lydiard".

Rusty Robertson, the late, great New Zealand rowing coach who produced Olympic champions in the 1970s, also employed Lydiard's methods.

Swimming coach Duncan Laing was influenced by Lydiard, Moller said. Laing's star pupil, Danyon Loader, the double Atlanta Olympics gold medallist, "used to swim six or eight hours a day ..."

Dick Tayler - now president of the Canterbury Rugby Supporters Club - says Lydiard once gave Crusaders coach Robbie Deans tips about conditioning sportspeople.

Tayler says Lydiard's methods were adopted across the African continent, "and they're still beating us".

He had heard that the coach of Moroccan middle-distance legend Hicham El Guerrouj - who won the 1500m and 5000m gold medals at the Athens Olympics in 2004 - had once sought Lydiard's advice.

American colleges, Moller reports, are moving back to Lydiard methods and away from interval training, which tended to "burn the kids out early".

Moller - whose best time for the marathon was 2hr 28min 17sec when she took the silver medal at the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburgh - now lives in Boulder, Colorado.

She gave up training a big group of American athletes to raise her daughter, Jasmine, now seven.

Moller, 52, is pleased she came from a "perfect" era for women's athletics. "The first women's Olympic marathon (at Los Angeles in 1984), the whole professional movement ... I was there. I wouldn't give that up for anything."

She has watched with interest the progress of New Zealand Olympian Kimberley Smith who looked "absolutely phenomenal" in a recent 3000m indoor race in the United States where she finished second.

Moller says there are New Zealand runners with as much talent as she and her male and female contemporaries had.

"It's just a matter of tapping it. Arthur Lydiard said there are champions everywhere. They just have to be trained right."

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