

Record Times & Repeat Winners

Nelson's Belinda Wimmer isn't a household name on the national scene, but in Wellington she defeated several runners who are.

Wimmer was a late entry for the half marathon race at this year's Shoe Clinic Wellington Marathon event. The race that had been billed as a rare head to head between Wellington's two former world mountain running champions, Kate McIlroy and Melissa Moon. But the two well-performed and popular stars played second fiddle to Wimmer, who despite winning a national 5000m title in 2007 remains almost unknown.

Wimmer led from start to finish, eventually winning by almost five minutes as she smashed the course record in 1hr 17min 49secs. In the end Moon, who has two world titles and countless national titles to her name, had to be more focused on holding on to second place from well-performed veteran Gabrielle O'Rourke, who closed to just 14 seconds at the finish line but was well ahead of a fourth place tie between McIlroy and former New Zealand rep cyclist-turned-runner, Nadene Hawley.

Wimmer's winning time was superb running on a typical Wellington winter day. Conditions proved better than forecast, but rain and strong winds buffeted the 3686 entrants the entire way.

Belinda Wimmer



Entrants in the classic full marathon distance had it the hardest, although defending champion Grant McLean hardly raised a sweat in claiming his fourth straight title in the Shoe Clinic Harbour Capital Marathon.

Leading from start to finish McLean gradually pulled away from a close-knit bunch consisting of Wellingtonians Mark TePunga and Dave Parsons, and New Plymouth's Tony Vaughan to finish more than 10 minutes clear in 2hrs 37min 16secs.

Despite being the favourite to take out his fourth straight win, McLean was slightly bemused. After running the London Marathon in April the 40 year old has struggled to regain form and sounded surprised to come away with another win. "It went really well. It felt good, I'm really pleased," he said after claiming his fourth straight win in the Shoe Clinic-sponsored event.

With strong winds and rain, the Shoe Clinic Harbour Capital Half Marathon for men turned into a tactical battle that saw several runners quite close over the opening stages before Palmerton North's Stephen Smith and Wellington's Stephen Day drew clear approaching half way. In the end Smith appeared to play with his competition as he surged away to a comfortable 30 second lead with 5k to go before easing off to cater for growing toilet urges.

But Smith held on to win 1hrs 13min 28secs, before dashing for the toilet without even a winner's quote. Behind him, Stephen Day held on to second 28 seconds behind and only 14 seconds clear of Wellington's Julian Cook in third.

Conditions, however, didn't appear to affect Wellington's Lotty Turnidge. Defending champion Tania Smellie, formerly of Dunedin but now in New Plymouth, was a late entry and obvious favourite. In 2007 Smellie shook off an injury to set a new course record of 3hrs 12min 54secs. But another injury this year proved more troublesome and while Smellie limped home in fourth place, Turnidge had a great run in tough conditions to break Smellie's record by five minutes with 3hrs 07min 07secs.

In second place Canadian Lynn Dempsey also cracked the old record, with 3:12:32, while Porirua's Jean Beaumont claimed third in 3hrs 17min 31secs.

In the associated 10K event Wellington veteran Vicki Humphries claimed the women's win with 38min 17secs, more than 20 years after winning the Harbour Capital Half Marathon when she was one of the country's top distance running exponents. Humphries finished almost two minutes clear of Dunedin's Erin Whitla, while local lad Daniel Nixon also dominated the men's 10K by almost two minutes to win in 33min 20secs.

Almost 3700 runners and walkers turned out for the annual event.