

Earthquake Effects Reach Wellington

The effects of the Christchurch's earthquake challenges have been seen throughout New Zealand. Even in a marathon in Wellington. Just ask Irena Szalkowski-Hayes.

Almost 4500 runners and walkers from 11 countries lined up for the 26th Armstrong Motor Group Wellington Marathon. Among them were Deputy Prime Minister Bill English and his wife Mary, who took their 'families that play together' all the way to the finish of the classic 42.2k, finishing in 4hrs 58min. But more than an hour ahead, English was upstaged by a Christchurch woman in her first marathon.

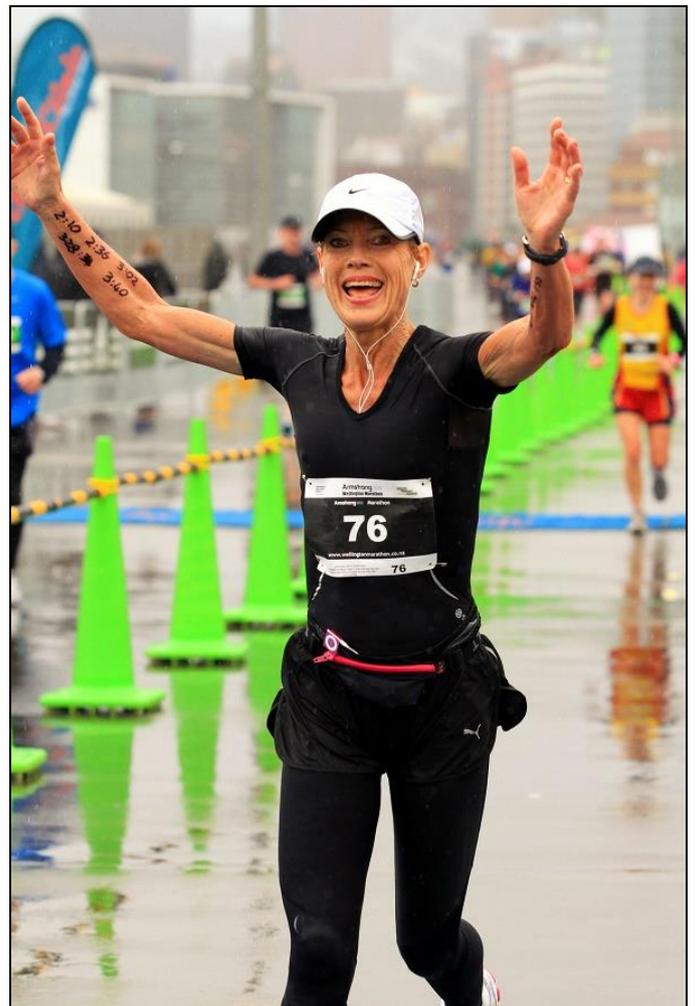
Christchurch's Irena Szalkowski-Hayes had a harder road than most marathon rookies. The 55 year old took up running three years ago and after doing well in several half marathons decided that 2011 was the year to take on the running world's most famous challenge. The devastating February 22 aftershock, which took the life of a close friend, set her back. But she continued preparations, hoping to return to her hometown for the Armstrong Motor Group Wellington Marathon. But the earthquakes tested her resolve right up to race day.

On Monday June 14, just six days before the Armstrong Motor Group Wellington Marathon, Szalkowski-Hayes was at work during a major set of aftershocks. A 5.5 magnitude saw her building evacuated, but when they returned inside a 6.3 magnitude saw the ceiling start to break up. Szalkowski-Hayes thought that might be it, but got out of the building as the quake settled. After making sure husband Geoff was ok she tried to drive home, only to have a section of road give way as her car sunk nose first into a sink hole with liquefaction coming in the door. Luckily a passing person pulled her out and eventually she walked home, leaving the car submerged under the road.

After all that Szalkowski-Hayes could be forgiven for passing up her marathon goals. But the death of her friend in February reminded her that life is to be lived and she booked a flight to Wellington the very next

day. Given everything, simply finishing your first marathon would be a great achievement. But the Hollywood-like story continues... On race day, facing cold wind and rain, the 55 year old romped around the course in 3hrs 40min 42secs to win her 50-59 age group by an incredibly close five seconds.

Irena Szalkowski-Hayes



Veteran Outclasses Youth

Napier's Ross McIntyre has been one of New Zealand's best-performed veteran marathoners in recent years. But in Wellington the 46 year old Hawke's Bay house dad took a shot at overall honours.

McIntyre came into the race as co-favourite with Christchurch's Glynn Hadley. In 2010 Hadley had been seventh in the Armstrong Motor Group Half Marathon

distance and had the previous marathon in the field of 2hrs 32min. Hadley tried to take the race to McIntyre, but the experienced Hawke's Bay runner - who ran his first marathon at age 15 - ran a patient race and eventually came away the winner over the final 5k, crossing the Westpac Stadium finish line 57secs ahead of Hadley in 2hrs 38min 09secs.

Ross McIntyre



Jackson Defends Title

Race day in Wellington dawned wet with a northerly breeze. But both wind and rain increased to make for difficult conditions. That made Victoria Jackson's marathon win even more impressive, because as well as winning by almost 13min she came up just a few minutes shy of the race record.

The 30 year old Wellingtonian was a last minute entrant, but despite conditions missed the race record by just 2min 40secs to win in 3hrs 03min 37secs. Behind her Annabelle Bramwell was another Christchurch runner to shrug off earthquake woes, clocking in at 3hrs 16min 15secs to hold out Auckland's Dominique Hopkinson by 2min for second place.

Closely Fought Half Marathon

In other races Wellingtonians Tim Hodge and Gabrielle O'Rourke dominated the 10k event, with Hodge beating Wellington-based American Cary Chaffee by 31secs in 33min 08secs. O'Rourke, 43, was pressured early on by youngster Sarah Drought but came home with a 19sec advantage in 37min 05secs.

It was the half marathon, however, that produced the day's closest racing as just 1min separated the first three men and first four women.

The woman's race saw Upper Hutt's Sarah Gardener improve from third place in 2010 to the top spot in 2011. Despite tough conditions the 26 year old ran almost exactly the same time as a year ago, winning by 1min 44secs in 1hr 23min 25secs. Behind her less than 90secs separated Lower Hutt's Rebecca Keat and Wellingtonians Sarah Christie and Charlotte Wood.

The men's Half Marathon produced the days closest race when Wellington's Evan Cooper and Canadian visitor James Richardson went head to head until the final few kilometres when Cooper applied pressure win by just 10secs in 1hr 13min 14secs.

Bill English

