

2010 Australian Combined Events Championships

Domain Athletics Centre, Hobart

February 13-14, 2010

U20 MEN

In the absence of last year's U20 winner, Western Australian Courtney Heinze (through injury), the stage appeared set for last year's runner up, Tasmanian Chris McConnell, to assume the mantle. However, in the intervening 12 months, a new name had appeared on the U20 scene in the Combined Events – Victorian Joshua Pickthall.

Pickthall had won the Athletics Bendigo Combined Events in late December with a score of 6115 points. McConnell had scored 5489 in placing 2nd to Heinze in the Aust U19 Championships in early February, but had to improve to 5829 in placing second to Heinze once again at the Australian U20 Championships in Brisbane in March. Now, almost 12 months later, it would be interesting to see how much improvement he had made on those scores.

McConnell and Pickthall would not have it all their own way, as Benjamen Hall (SA) and Joshua Mason (TAS) had also thrown their hats into the ring. Hall is quite a handy javelin thrower, and Mason brought solid high jump credentials to the mix.

100m

Pickthall drew first blood in the competition, winning the 100m comfortably in 11.34, ahead of McConnell (11.57). Neither Hall (12.06) nor Mason (12.13) could sneak inside twelve seconds for the sprint.



Pictured above from left: Benjamen Hall (lane 6), Chris McConnell (lane 7), Joshua Mason (lane 4), Joshua Pickthall (lane 5)

Long Jump

Pickthall once again used his good speed to advantage in the long jump. He rode a 2.0m/s wind out to 6.39m, and was the only athlete beyond six metres. However, he was a long way behind the 6.75m he had jumped in Bendigo in December. Hall was next best with a 5.79m, followed by Mason (5.59) and McConnell (5.57). McConnell had jumped 5.63m in both of his two previous Australian Championships, and would have been a little disappointed not to have improved in this



Pictured above: Joshua Mason

Joshua Pickthall

Benjamin Hall

After two events:

Pickthall 1459, McConnell 1234, Hall 1181, Mason 1126

Shot Put

McConnell is better known in the combined events for his throwing, and he lived up to this reputation in the shot put. He produced the best put of 13.98m, taking a 113 point chunk out of Pickthall's lead. Again, Pickthall was slightly outside of the form he had shown in Bendigo. His 12.13m effort was 16cm down on his Bendigo throw. Hall managed 10.12m, but the lighter frame of Mason could muster only a 9.70m distance.

After three events:

Pickthall 2073, McConnell 1961, Hall 1674, Mason 1594

High Jump

As expected, Mason was the best in this particular event, but having jumped the previous evening in the Briggs Athletics Series, he found the residual fatigue took the edge off his performance. Hoping for a leap of around two metres or better, he could muster only 1.88m – good enough for a win, but not gaining as many points as he would have liked from his pet event. Still, it was enough to move him from fourth into third spot.

Pickthall was again off form in this event. In Bendigo, he had cleared 1.85m, but here he could muster only 1.73m, the same height as cleared by Hall. The solidly built McConnell was also down a little, with a best of 1.67m.

After four events:

Pickthall 2642, McConnell 2481, Hall 2243, Mason 2290



Pictured right: Chris McConnell

400m

Given his 100m speed, it would be expected that Pickthall would have the wood on his opponents in the 400m. Such proved to be the case. Pickthall was quickest with a time of 50.65. McConnell had managed a sub-52 second run in Brisbane last March, but could manage only 52.50s here. Mason put a little more ground between himself and Hall by running 56.66 to Hall's 58.48.



Final Day One scores:

Pickthall 3427, McConnell 3184, Mason 2824, Hall 2709

DAY TWO

110m hurdles

Despite his bulk, McConnell had been a finalist at National schoolboy level over the sticks, so he brought some reasonable credentials to this event. His 2009 Australian Championships outings in Hobart (U19) and Brisbane (U20) had produced times of 16.17 and 16.16 respectively, so he would be hoping for a time somewhere in this range. By way of contrast, Pickthall had managed only 17.65 in his previous outing in Bendigo. McConnell could be expected to make up some ground here.



Pictured above: Joshua Pickthall (lane 6), Benjamin Hall (lane 4), Joshua Mason (lane 3), Chris McConnell (lane 5)

Once again, McConnell was a little down on form, clocking 16.42, good enough for a comfortable win over Pickthall (18.55), Mason (19.09) and Hall (19.15). Pickthall's lead had been whittled down to only 30 points!

After six events:

Pickthall 3900, McConnell 3870, Mason 3249, Hall 3128

Discus

As he crossed the finish line in the hurdles, McConnell had been noticed flicking his arm, and then holding his forearm as though in pain. I thought that maybe he had been accidentally struck by one of his opponents in the early going. However, when I spoke with him, it turned out that he had been stung by a bee on Friday night. Chris maintained that it hadn't seemed to affect him much on the Saturday, but on Sunday his forearm had swollen markedly. It had begun to resemble Popeye's forearm.

McConnell's hand was also puffy, and he was unsure as to how he would be able to hold onto the discus.

His first throw in the competition did come out of his hand early, generating a right sector foul. He recovered to post a solid distance of 35.66m, but the door had been opened once again for Pickthall, who gained valuable points with his best throw of 39.24m. Mason threw the 1.75kg platter a reasonable 34.94m, almost two metres beyond Hall's best (32.96m).

After seven events:

Pickthall 4549, McConnell 4447, Mason 3811, Hall 3651

Pole Vault

McConnell tried strapping his forearm to help reduce the swelling, but this just seemed to push the fluid down into his hand. He would have to struggle through the next events as best he could.

The pole vault produced nothing outstanding. All boys demonstrated their relative inexperience in this highly technical discipline. Mason managed only 2.20m. Hall reversed positions on the ladder with his nearest rival Mason, when he cleared 3.00m. McConnell could clear only 2.80m, while Pickthall managed the same height as Hall (3.00m).

After eight events:

Pickthall 4906, McConnell 4756, Hall 4008, Mason 3990

Javelin

Pickthall had been gradually putting some ground between himself and McConnell with good performances in the discus and pole vault. It remained to be seen whether McConnell could claw some of this lead back in the javelin.

Pickthall had thrown 44.01m in Bendigo, but here in Hobart he threw almost eight and half metres less than that (35.48). Hall was the best of the throwers with 49.23m, but McConnell was not far behind (48.06). Even the lightly built Mason managed a solid effort of 44.86m.

McConnell's performance managed to lift him into the lead in the competition for the first time in 9 events. Could he hold out Pickthall in the one event remaining?

With one event remaining:

McConnell 5316, Pickthall 5283, Hall 4585, Mason 4503

1500m

1500m – McConnell's best in a decathlon was just under 5:13, while Pickthall had run just under 5:00 in Bendigo. This equates to about 75 points, and McConnell's lead was only 33 points.

From the gun, it was obvious that McConnell was running for a place rather than the win. Whether it was the pain from the swollen arm, or whether it was the unlikelihood that he would match it with Pickthall, McConnell never seriously challenged for the lead.

Pickthall cruised around the three and three-quarter laps in 5:00.26. Benjamin Hall struggled for his 5:41.23, while McConnell's 5:56.27 was even more pedestrian. Joshua Mason was unable to finish, and was later seen hobbling past the grandstand with a large ice pack on each of his hamstrings. The decathlon takes no prisoners!

Final standings:
Pickthall 5841, McConnell 5596, Hall 4931, Mason 4503



Men's U20 Decathlon

Left to right: Chris McConnell (2nd), Joshua Pickthall (1st), Benjamin Hall (3rd), Joshua Mason (4th)

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U20 WOMEN

The women's U20 event was missing quite a number of competitors who had figured amongst the medals over the last several years in age group competitions. For a variety of reasons, athletes such as Zoe Sharplin and Shelley Tuicakau (Qld), Gaby Simpson, Jacqui Fry, Stephanie Langridge and Alison Korotkich (NSW), Jessica Kaufman (VIC), and Kara Walker (TAS) had not entered this year's meet.

Those athletes who did decide to compete for the U20 title on offer were one South Australian, Kirrilee Story, and two Queenslanders, Harriet Lawrence and Demi Magree.

Story had won the South Australian U18 title in January 2009. Magree had placed fourth in the recent Queensland U18 Championships but had opted to contest the U20 competition in Hobart. Lawrence, after a succession of injuries and illnesses over several years, including Barmah Forest virus in late 2009, had won the U20 Queensland title in late January in Brisbane.

DAY ONE

100m hurdles

In the 100 hurdles, Lawrence took the first steps towards adding an Australian U20 title to her medal collection. Her time (16.63) was quicker than she had run in Brisbane a few weeks earlier (17.08). Story (17.43) finished a few metres behind Lawrence. Magree (19.75) found the U20 height (84cm) a more difficult proposition than her usual U18 height (76cm).



Pictured above: Harriet Lawrence (lane 5 – right of picture) shows a clean pair of heels to Kirrilee Story (lane 3) and Demi Magree (lane 4 – left of picture)

After one event:

Lawrence 639, Story 549, Magree 323

High Jump

Harriet Lawrence was a little bit off in her high jump. She had cleared 1.59m in the Queensland Championships, but was one increment short of this in Hobart. However, this was still sufficient to turn back the challenge of Kirrilee Story (1.59m). Demi Magree suffered the frustration of a no-height. While new to the event of heptathlon, she learnt the hard way the importance of posting some score, rather than having zero points recorded beside your name.

Pictured near right: Kirrilee Story
Pictured far right: Harriet Lawrence



After two events:

Lawrence 1328, Story 1170, Magree 323

Shot Put

After the minor hiccup in the high jump, Lawrence continued to show that her coach, Eric Brown, had prepared her well for these championships. Her shot (9.52) was again an improvement on her Queensland form (9.27). Story managed 8.39m, while Magree (7.59) once again had to settle for third spot.

After three events:

Lawrence 1826, Story 1595, Magree 696

200m

Harriet Lawrence carried her good form into the 200m. In winning the Queensland title she had run 27.52. In Hobart she sliced more than half a second from that time, once again crossing the finish line in first place with a clocking of 26.90. The following breeze was only 0.6m/s. Demi Magree (27.15) also improved on her time from her previous heptathlon (27.50). Story's 27.39 was far better than the 28.48 she had run in the 2009 South Australian titles.

Story was now 289 points better than her Day One score from Adelaide. Lawrence was 84 points better than her Queensland titles Day One performance. Magree languished 242 points short of her previous Day One score (with U18 specs) from the Queensland titles, courtesy of her no-height in the high jump.

Lawrence had been unbeaten in each of the four Day One disciplines.

Final Day One scores:

Lawrence 2546, Story 2275, Magree 1395

DAY TWO

Long Jump

If Harriet Lawrence had any thoughts that she just had to turn up for the events on Day Two to post a win, she would have been given a wake up call in the first event. While Lawrence (4.89) managed to win it, she was only 4cm ahead of Story (4.85). Magree also showed that she was in better shape for the Day Two events than she had been at the Queensland titles, jumping 4.52m, 33cm further than her Brisbane effort.

Pictured right:
Kirrilee Story (309),
Demi Magree (308),
Harriet Lawrence
(307)

After five events:
Lawrence 3076,
Story 2794,
Magree 1828



Javelin

On paper it appeared that Lawrence would destroy the other two in the javelin. She had thrown 31.58 at the Queensland Championships. Magree had only thrown 20.53m in the Brisbane meet, and Story, in her SA State Champs in 2009 had thrown only 19.21m.

While Lawrence did indeed take out the event (32.11), Magree improved by eight metres from her previous heptathlon, to 28.61m. Story had also improved, throwing 23.24m.

With one event remaining:

Lawrence 3593, Story 3143, Magree 2278

800m

One of the few questions remaining as the girls prepared for the last event was “Could Harriet Lawrence do a clean sweep of all seven disciplines?”

At the Queensland titles, Magree (2:53.85) had run over four seconds faster than Lawrence (2:58.09), but they had been competing in different age groups. Here they would be competing head to head. Story had run 2:49.55 in heptathlon in Adelaide twelve months ago. How much had she improved?

The girls remained fairly close throughout those last two laps of the competition and at the finish, less than four seconds separated the first from the last. Harriet Lawrence had indeed come to town with serious business in mind. All three girls ran under 2:50! Lawrence held out the other girls with her sub-2:45 effort of 2:44.04. Magree was next to finish in 2:46.22, while Story finished third in 2:47.76.

Harriet Lawrence had managed to win all seven of the disciplines – a great effort in anyone’s books!

Lawrence’s score was 265 points than her Queensland Championship winning performance. Story’s score was 304 points better than her 2009 South Australian U18 title score (but this time with the U20 specs). Even Magree, despite scoring zero points in the high jump, was 70 points better than her Queensland U18 score. Obviously the competition had brought out the best in all three competitors.

Final scores:

Lawrence 4120, Story 3630, Magree 2782

Pictured (from left to right): Kirrilee Story (3rd), Harriet Lawrence (1st), Demi Magree (3rd)

