

## World University Games (Universiade)

And so the time has come to head to China for the World University Games (Universiade) on my first Australian team.

2011 has provided many opportunities which have resulted in a very long competition season that commenced with the Victorian Championships in February, six months later and onto my 6<sup>th</sup> Decathlon for the year!!

With a good preparation, hampered only by a few small injuries, I was definitely excited and expectant of a great performance and new personal best. There was no reason why I couldn't and shouldn't come close to or even increase every individual event's PB's.

With my bags packed and the poles safely on a connecting flight to Sydney, I was ready to travel to Shenzhen for a competition I knew little about and part of a team I knew few people in. I was excited to make the most of every opportunity this trip was to provide and keen to get a few short and sharp training sessions done once I arrived. Whilst the poles didn't fit on our International flight, everything else arrived safely and a midnight bus trip through the Hong Kong – China border found the team tired and ready for a good night sleep, after a visit to the dining hall of course!

The athletes Village was awesome, with a 24/7 food hall and countless volunteers ready to help you with anything you could possibly need (other than cereal, so when you go to China – take your own!). I shared a room with two gymnasts who were great, despite taking the long ground floor beds which left me a ladder to the shorter top bunk! A few hot and sweaty training sessions and a day of rest before the comp was more than enough to realise that this was going to be a very long and very hot competition. An average of 30 degrees and humidity up to 85-90% made drinking copious amounts of water to stay hydrated a challenge.

I attended the opening ceremony which was an absolute spectacle with thousands of performers and many millions of dollars spent on production etc. I quickly realised that the Universiade was a much bigger event than I had ever imagined, with over 10,000 athletes from over 150 countries!!

Everything that had anything to do with the Universiade was immaculate and first class. All the stadiums were breathtaking, from the training facilities, to the competition arena with automated sand pit levellers, as well as automated pole vault stands... if there was a way to make something better they had already done it! Prior to the competition we also found time to watch some of the Basketball and Swimming, and after 4 days in China my poles finally arrived, just in time for one final training session.

And on to the competition itself, with three events in the morning session and two at night on each day, I was excited to see how I would perform with a different format.

### **DAY 1.**

After a good warm-up in the humid heat, through an air conditioned Call Room One, another hike down and up stairs to the reasonably cool Call Room Two for another warm-up, all was set for the 9.30am first event... back out in the hot sun!

**100m:** With confidence on my start and first half of the race I was keen to finally finish off strong and produce a great time to start a Decath. Unfortunately this time it was my start that wasn't up to scratch, and whilst finishing off strong I was disappointed though somewhat content with a season's best time of 11.36sec (+0.1).

After the post race formalities we collected our bags and belongings and commenced the 400+ metre walk back to the athletes' room, which was more tiring than the race itself and signs of much more walking between events to come.

**Long Jump:** After a great LJ session a few days earlier I was feeling great, though with that same spring hard to find in competition, we struggled to put together a decent jump with the best being 6.74m (+0.4). Needless to say this wasn't the dream start to the competition I'd hoped for.

**Shot Put:** On the back of a PB in my last comp and a couple of 14+ competitions in Europe, another 14+ throw was expected here. Similar to my pre comp training session, the shot puts came in two sizes... very small and very big (120mm and 129mm) and I would always use the large shot put though on this occasion they were brand new and very slippery. I dropped a couple of shots during training as I couldn't get any grip and can't recall what shots I used in comp, though only managed one out of three throws where I had any purchase on the shot. Unfortunately this throw at 13.50m was far from ideal and was annoyed that I had dropped back 70+ centimetres since my last comp.

Following the shot put and another long walk, we had 3-4 hours before High Jump and utilised this time to head back to the village for lunch and a quick sleep.

Back on the bus to the track for another quick warm-up and full call room procedure again (which most of us were used to by now) we eventually returned to the track to find the High Jump area of the stadium was full of spectators.

**High Jump:** As day turned into night my body didn't seem to match my mental state which was ready for some great jumping. I can't recall on what attempt I cleared my opening height of 1.80m nor my next height at 1.86m though neither were amazing jumps. I then went to 1.92m and whilst my second and third attempts were getting better, they weren't enough to keep the bar on and I was left with 1.86m. Thus far we had gone from bad to worse, whilst with optimistic eyes we hadn't had any major disasters (no jumps or no heights).

The highlight of the high jump, as the jumping itself didn't go as planned, was the amazing atmosphere of the stadium and the volume of the crowd, especially when the Chinese athlete was jumping!

**400m:** Even though the previous 4 events were below what I would have hoped for, decathlon is made up of 10 individual events and I was ready to make the most of the 400m scheduled for 9.40pm. A little over 12 hours after the first event of the day, I was feeling ready to go and during the race I felt strong. It was a shame the final time didn't agree with me, and I was surprised at how slow the race was as I definitely didn't feel that slow! Like the high jump, it was another season's worst performance at 51.22sec

Overall Day 1: It goes without saying that I was expecting a far greater result than 3671 points for the first day, the lowest first day total I can recall scoring in recent times. The body and mind were feeling fine; just without a points score to match therefore hopes of a medal and overall PB were far from reach whilst sitting in 13<sup>th</sup> position.

## **DAY 2:**

A new day and 5 new events to have fun with!! Nothing like a 9am first event, and with my new aim of making top 8, there was still much work to be done!

**110m Hurdles:** A great hurdle warm-up with my speed and technique feeling perfect! In my efforts to stay tall while running, I found the brand new springy track gave me a little more bounce than I was able to adjust for, which resulted in a race that felt good but far too much time spent floating over hurdles rather than running!! Once crossing the line, I was keen for a re-run as I was ready to run much faster than my 15.05sec (-0.4).

**Discus:** A reasonably consistent event for me this year held its own with each comp throw further than the previous one, finishing with 41.23m. Down on my last comp and off what I had hoped for, but considering the 6 events that preceded it, this was potentially my best result so far.

Another substantial break allowed time for the 5-10min bus trip back to the village for lunch and another quick nap before heading back to the main stadium.

**Pole Vault:** With so many pole hassles in the lead up, I was ready to make the most of another chance to jump well! With a traditional starting height of 4.40m, and progressing through to 4.60m which took all 3 attempts to clear, it was far from smooth sailing up to 4.80m. Having gone clear at 4.80m I went up to a pole I had never used before and cleared 4.90 on my first attempt. An equal PB clearance at 5m then followed and a third attempt failure at 5.10m by the narrowest of margins meant I had a new best event for this Decathlon!!

**Javelin:** By now the stadium was lit up, inside and out and a close to capacity crowd were making plenty of noise! A conservative warm-up with my questionable elbow in mind was enough to feel ready to throw far. It didn't happen on my first throw, though was a relief to get over 60m on my second throw and with a nearly awesome third throw (just missed the point and went sky high), ended up with a respectable 61.40m.

**1500m:** As always before a 1500m the calculator comes out for varying reasons, and this time I was keen to secure a top 8 finish which was looking a good chance after being in 13<sup>th</sup> at the start of the day. If I could beat my Swiss friend and rival by more than a few seconds I might even scrape into 7<sup>th</sup> and with a great run after a super long two days I managed to do just that. Working hard for the 3  $\frac{3}{4}$  laps with a sprint finish to try cross the line in front of the overall winner (got him by 0.05sec!!) rewarded me a time of 3:38.83 which was 6 seconds slower than my last decathlon though very pleased with the time and effort in the hot Chinese conditions.

**Overall Day 2:** Once again it was a day far from what I had hoped and with no reason to suggest a PB in all events wasn't possible, I expected a little more. On the positive side, it was a much better day than the first and I was happy that I could bounce back after the disappointment of Day 1 with a few good events and finish with a day 2 total of 3890 points (a day 2 total only surpassed by the two Russian medallists).

**Shenzhen Summary:** Everything about the competition was amazing, other than most of my event results. The officials were usually very helpful, the facilities (mats, track, sandpits, uprights, javelins, discus' etc) were first class, the group of Decathletes were great as always and the standard of competition was also very good with the winner well out in front with a score of 8166 points and second 7857 points. Looking back I think I was happy to embrace the opportunity, the atmosphere and take in the surroundings just as much as I was eager to perform well. I also recognise that 6 Decathlons in a year is more than ideal, and the body and mind is definitely overdue for a rest!!!

It was an amazing trip and experience, and a big thanks must go to the onsite support team lead by Tudor, Dolph and Thea who were an awesome help, and to my coach Efim who also made the journey over to help and support! Also a big thanks to the best support crew in China, with millions of supporters at the games it was great to have my own Aussie cheer squad at every event, led by the amazing Danielle along with Michelle, Mum and Dad!!!

Thank you to all that have helped me in my preparation for this comp and continue to train and motivate me post comp: Larisa for all the throws work, Julian for all the massages and Pole Vault work, Aidan and Stuart for the physio, Bruce at Bodyworld for all the hard rehab and strength work, Diz at Aqualink for the yoga, Russel and the

boys at training, Athletics Victoria, St Cecilia's, St Kevin's and the SKAAC, all of which have played a vital part in my development as an athlete and as a person!

Apologies for the delayed report, as we have now enjoyed a couple of weeks off training and are back into some hard and heavy strength training. No jogging as yet in an attempt to get my Achilles right once and for all!!!!

Looking forward to seeing many of you in the weeks ahead!

All the best!

Steve Cain