



This time she's in it for the long run

May 23, 2008

ATHLETICS: Gritty middle/long distance runner Benita Johnson is on track for her third Olympic Games after the Mackay product was nominated for Australia's Beijing squad this week.

The widely anticipated nomination comes after the 29-year-old's stirring victory at the 10,000m Great Edinburgh Run in Scotland.

But unlike in previous Olympic campaigns, it is the marathon that Johnson will contest at Beijing.

Johnson, who is a three-time Australian 5000m champion, made her debut in the gruelling 42.2km event in 2004.

In 2006, she ran third in the Chicago Marathon with a time of 2 hours and 22 minutes, which broke the record for the fastest time by an Australian.

She then finished seventh in last year's London Marathon. But the former World Cross Country champion had a disrupted start to 2008 after suffering a knee injury late last year.

Johnson was unavailable for comment while at a training base in Arizona but her mother, Merrilyn Willis, said the injury had restricted her training for several months.

Johnson's first major race this year was the 8km World Cross Country in Edinburgh, where she finished in eleventh place.

"She seems to have recovered well (from the injury)," Willis said.

Next for Johnson is a few races in the USA, including the 5000m Freihofer Run For Women at New York on May 31 an event she has won for the last two years.

Willis said her daughter was content with her current preparations.

"She said her training has been going really well," Willis said.

Johnson grew up in Mackay and was a talented hockey player before she focused her attention on athletics.

She competed in her first Olympics at Sydney in 2000.

At Athens in 2004, she was disappointed to finish 24th in the 10,000m race.

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