

The Legend - a background, with an eye to the future, by Garth Gilmour

“Arthur’s advice was in my mind...when I could run a hard Waiatarua and still feel like going round again – then I would be ready for anything in the world.”

The year was 1958, Arthur was the legendary master-coach, Arthur Lydiard. The words were Peter Snell’s. Two years later, in the 800 metres at the Olympics Games in Rome, Snell took on the world and beat it.

The fabled Waiatarua, leading up three kilometres to join the Scenic Drive, was a critical Sunday-morning training factor that Lydiard’s stable of brilliant athletes could not afford to miss. It measured 35.1km and Snell eventually did run it twice in a weekend. The second time, he cruised home in a fraction over 2 hours 11 minutes, the fastest he had ever done.

The Waiatarua still features in the training schedules of many athletes seeking the ultimate in stamina and, for the past three years, The Legend race has been held over a Waiatarua-Scenic Drive course as closely matching Lydiard’s as modern traffic considerations will allow. The race, the inspiration of a new New Zealander, Ian Winson, in partnership with total sport’s Aaron Carter, has attracted, not surprisingly, fields which are a balance of young, old, men and women. Originally, many, such as former marathoner and international orienteer John Robinson, ran it as a tribute to their old friend, mentor and coach, who died in December, 2004.

This year (2007), The Legend’s challenge as a scenic, interesting and demanding sequence of climbs and falls, some seriously long and steep, led it to become more a race but it still represented an energetic slice of nostalgia.

Not any more. The Legend of 2008 will be extended to the full marathon distance – and it will out-tough Rotorua as New Zealand’s hardest. And it will run on September 20, perfect timing for runners with an eye on the November 2 Auckland marathon over the Harbour Bridge.

In harness with The Legend will be Arthur’s half-marathon, inaugurated this year, which follows a different route up to Scenic Drive but enables both races to finish together back at the Shadbolt Park starting point. A great rehearsal for the half over the bridge.

The Lydiard element was strong this year. A squad entered by Barry Magee, one of Arthur’s three Rome medal-winners and now a successful coach, won first, second and third in both the men’s and women’s runs. Melanie Burke, already the national marathon champion, finished third overall and knocked two minutes from the 2006 record set by that other fine marathoner Nyla Carroll.

So the stage has slowly but steadily been set for the emergence of Auckland’s second marathon and it is destined to become a classic which will do full justice to Arthur Lydiard, the amazing man who tested and proved Waiatarua’s value more than

<http://www.totalsport.co.nz/events/legend/index.php>

half a century ago, using it to case-harden his exciting runners and launch them to world domination from the half-mile to the marathon for more than a decade.

Stretching The Legend out to a marathon was simple. Ian Winson mentally pictured the extra loop he would need – he's a regular runner in the area – went out and measured it and found its 7.1km added exactly what was wanted. Which was what you might expect from a man who had a dream about an event like this, talked to Arthur not long before his death, won his approval and launched the idea into reality only a year later.