

## 5th World Masters Athletics Indoor Track and Field Championships Jyväskylä, Finland, 3-8 April 2012

By Janet Naylor

Oceania has been represented at each of the five editions of the WMA Indoor Track and Field Championships. This time there were two New Zealanders and 27 Australians at the 5th World Masters Indoor Track and Field Championships, which were held in Jyväskylä, Finland from 3-8 April 2012.

Led by 2011 IAAF Female Masters Athlete of the Year, Lyn Ventris (two world records – 3000m walk, 10km road walk and a sprint relay bronze) and 2010 IAAF Female Masters Athlete of the Year, Marie Kay (three gold, two silver, two bronze), Australia finished in 10th place on the medal tally with 38 medals (17 gold, 14 silver, 7 bronze), while New Zealand finished with 1 gold, 2 silver and 1 bronze medal and 32nd place from 57 competing countries.

So just where is this un-pronounceable town? Jyväskylä is in the western part of the Finnish Lakeland. It is the largest city in central Finland and 270 kilometres north of Helsinki.

When speaking with one of the Finnish athletes two years earlier in Kamloops, I asked about the weather at Easter – the response was *“ahhh, it is beautiful and warm – it is spring time”*.

Nothing could have been further from the truth. We experienced 20-30cm of snow the night before competition started and a little bit more the next night. The opening ceremony included a parade through the pedestrian mall in the snow! Most days were around 0 degrees with the coldest night, minus 9. Admittedly the weather was unseasonal with locals describing it as a second winter.

It was a novelty to see so much snow and for some it was the first time. Many of us skidded on the black ice and we still haven't come to terms with how the locals could ride bikes and wear high heels on the ice!

What was most impressive though was that the university town did not grind to a halt because of the snow – buses ran to time, students still rode their bikes across the lake and the LOC worked overtime to groom the cross country trails in time for the first races on day one of the competition.

One of the things that continues to amaze me on trips such as this, is the excellent multi-use facilities that exist in regional centres. Hippos Hall was part of a sporting complex that included ice hockey facilities, football fields and a baseball field. This venue was not only multi-use; it was multi-level. The Hall had a synthetic 4-lane 200m track, which could be flat or raised at any height up to 72cm. Below the track were warm up areas, gymnastics facilities, a weights room, Karate mats, two additional ice hockey rinks and a half size indoor astro turf football field!

Indoor field event sites (shot put, horizontal and vertical jumps) were within the main hall which allowed for good spectator viewing, especially the horizontal jumps while the indoor weight throw was conducted in a marquee on the nearby baseball field.

Yes it was an indoor meet but the WMA World Indoor Championships have some outdoor events – the long throws, cross country, 10km road walk and a half marathon. The long throws were conducted at Harju Stadium which was also the start/finish for the cross country. The cross country trails were groomed and gritted to create a soft slushy surface though it was still icy in places and while the organisers were suggesting racing flats, Aussie Peter Sandery opted for spikes and this paid off with a win in the M70 event.

The road walks were held on a 1km loop at the shore of Lake Jyväsjärvi while the Half Marathon took in one and a half laps of the lake; the LOC did a terrific job of clearing the courses of snow, ice and grit, and went to great lengths to point out that no short cuts across the frozen lake were allowed. Our road walkers were dominant with a team gold in the M40 (Stuart Kollmorgen, Mark Donahoo and David Smyth), and medals to Lyn Ventris (gold, WR), Heather Carr (gold), Andrew Jamieson (gold), Stuart Kollmorgen (silver) and Mark Donahoo (silver).

Relay day is always a good day for Australian teams and in Jyväskylä it was a case of everyone still there being in a team, including the walkers. The W60 team claimed a silver medal while the W45 team collected bronze. Without the gutsy efforts of Heather Carr and Lyn Ventris these teams would not have been able to compete. This really highlights the fantastic camaraderie, which exists within a small Aussie team.

For those looking for something a bit different or a new challenge in track and field, why not consider an indoor meet? The atmosphere is a bit like being at a basketball match – it is very loud and the competition is very close to the spectators. While the dry air can be challenge with 800m cough even after a sprint, and the constant putting on and taking off layers gets a bit tiresome, it is actually a lot of fun.

The next WMA Indoor Track and Field Championships are in Budapest, late March 2014 when apparently the city awakens from winter!

Detailed results can be found at [http://www.fidalservizi.it/wma\\_2012/Index.htm](http://www.fidalservizi.it/wma_2012/Index.htm)



One of the AUS Team Managers on the raised bend in Hippos Hall



Australian Team assembled for the Opening Ceremony



Australian walkers next to Lake Jyväsjärvi



Australian Team Dinner