

SURF SPORTS

Maroochydore ski paddler a dark horse 'favourite'

Pat has a mind to have big dig

By PETER GARDINER

MAROOCHYDORE'S Patrick Purcell is the shoe that does not quite fit in the Ocean Assault men's ski grand final and that might just make him the people's favourite this Sunday.

The 29-year-old from Cotton Tree is not a world champion or Olympic representative, but a qualified podiatrist who never has quite got his foot in the door at these big meets.

His closest brush with heady sports achievement is being mates with, and a former training partner of, lifesaving national gold medal magnet Clint Robinson, who also owns a full set of Olympic kayaking medals.

"It's been pretty slim pickings for me at the Aussie titles – the best I've done is a bronze in the mixed double ski and I've got a silver in the Queensland ski relay."

"It's pretty tough when every race you go in you are usually up against an Olympian or an ex-Olympian."

"But I'll be competing for a long time yet – I just love competing, the training and the mateship."

Last year Purcell had

some minor health issues and did not have a "red hot go" at the series, but this year he has found a new level of consistency against the might of the Gold Coast clubs – including former Kawana ironman great Zane Holmes.

"I've been finishing up there in the finals and my paddling has really come on since I teamed up with (coach) Shane Dalzeil."

Dalzeil said he and four-times Olympian Bo Hanson had been working to build up Purcell's self-belief and the results have impressed.

"I wasn't really convinced with these (positive reinforcement) methods until this year – they've turned me around about this (approach)."

"Patrick is your real Aussie battler who runs his own business and just got married (to club paddler Majella). He trains once a day, maybe twice, and he's not six foot two and 95 kilograms like the others...but he has been really hanging in there and won't go away this year."

"I looked at the field he is up against and there are six Olympians in it – but he is in there with a real shot."



FULL SPEED AHEAD: Maroochydore surf club ski paddler Patrick Purcell is a finalist in the Ocean Assault event at Southport.

PHOTO: BARRY LEDDICOAT

Skilful finale will have Gemma in the money



FOCUSED: Mooloolaba's Gemma Newbiggin.

THE shadow boxing is over as Mooloolaba's Gemma Newbiggin finally tries to land the killer moves out in the Southport surf.

The event can win her a slice of the \$200,000 prize pool at the Ocean Assault grand finals.

And the building Gold Coast sets could be the best back-up Newbiggin has in her corner, as she aims to go one better in the ironwoman showdown and turn last February's Assault runner-up cheque into the top prize.

A win will net her \$1500 with \$750 for second place

and \$350 for third, while her other three finals carry a \$1000, \$500 and \$250 prize pot.

"More than anything this year I've been working on my surf skills," Newbiggin said.

"I feel like my fitness level is up where it needs to be."

"It's something you have to have (the craft skills) because the Southport surf can be quite tricky."

Surf monitor Swellnet was yesterday forecasting the swell to rise from .6m on Friday to 1.2m-plus by the time the 10 final qualifiers

line up tomorrow afternoon. Newbiggin said she probably was getting better early results in the Ocean Assault last year over the longer three-month series, but was satisfied with her overall form.

In most of the lead-up rounds, Newbiggin has come in the top five.

"I definitely think in a one-off race like this anyone of the 10 finalists can win."

She said the power duo of Kristyl Smith of Northcliffe and Kurrawa's Hayley Ba-teup were obvious strong contenders, but rated young-

ger emerging talent like Chloe Jones of Metropolitan Caloundra as major threats.

Two weekends ago, Jones won the Saturday final round at Southport.

Last year both Newbiggin and Jones could not catch Northcliffe's Elizabeth Plumiers and had to settle for second and third respectively in the Assault final.

Newbiggin does not believe the fact she has four final events – the ski, board and taplin relay make up her program – will affect her winning chances.

– PETER GARDINER

SPORT BRIEFS

Dakar Rally begins

THE 2009 Dakar Rally gets under way today, with the gruelling two-week event switched from terror-threatened Africa to South America. Twelve months ago, the Dakar, for so long dogged by security concerns, was cancelled at the last minute after four French tourists were killed by Al-Qaeda-linked terrorists in Mauritania. In response, the race has been switched to Argentina and Chile, a safe 7000km from Senegal, but with the race's character still intact, claim organisers. – AFP

Pietersen angry

ENGLAND'S build-up to its tour of the West Indies and its campaign to reclaim the Ashes have been clouded in controversy. The Daily Telegraph has reported that skipper Kevin Pietersen and coach Peter Moores have fallen out and urgent talks will be held this weekend to resolve the dispute. – AFP

Giteau to stay

WALLABIES five-eighth Matt Giteau has committed to play out the 2009 Super 14 season with the Western Force, ending months of speculation following the collapse of his lucrative third-party sponsorship deal with Firepower. Giteau, who is contracted to the Force until the end this year, reportedly threatened to walk out on the club once his six-figure deal with Firepower fell through. The 26-year-old was rumoured to be keen on a move back to the Brumbies. – AAP

Hiccup for McEwen

TOUR de France stage winner Simon Gerrans won yesterday's opening race of the Bay Cycling Classic in the Melbourne suburb of Williamstown. The start of the elite men's race was delayed by over an hour-and-a-half to allow event drawcard Robbie McEwen to arrive, after the Queenslanders suffered flight cancellations at the Gold Coast and Sydney. Gerrans, riding for the O2 Reflections Group, broke from the field 10 minutes into the 45-minute criterium, with domestically based professionals Dean Windsor, Joel Pearson and reigning Australian criterium champion Bernie Sulzberger. The chasers closed to within a second on the final lap, but Gerrans opened the sprint early and held off Windsor and Pearson for the win. – AAP

Bruton replaced

TALL Blacks guard Michael Fitchett has been called into the New Zealand Breakers basketball squad as an injury replacement for CJ Bruton. Fitchett flew to Australia on Thursday with the Breakers for their NBL double-header against the Wollongong Hawks last night and the Sydney Spirit tonight. Bruton is tipped to miss three weeks with an ankle strain. – NZPA