

6-Foot Track Marathon 2018 – A Marked Man!

In March 2018, Vlad Shatrov took on the 6 Foot Track Marathon as the defending champion. Below is his race report. Vlad finished the race in 3:18:08 the 4th fastest time recorded for the event, making it back-to-back wins in 2017/18. Full [Results here](#)

The 6 Foot Track Marathon is arguably Australia's toughest off-road races. 900 plus runners take on this iconic journey and it has become one of the most prestigious races to not only gain entry into, but also complete. The Six Foot Track Marathon follows the exact same path as the walking track from The Explorer's Tree, Katoomba to Jenolan Caves and is 45km. The course varies from narrow, rocky track near the start in Nellies Glen (which includes a steep set of uneven stairs 400 metres from the start line), to meadows, sandy gravel track, and dirt fire-trail road, with some large hills. The course climbs a total of 1,528m and drops a total 1,788m.

Damn, what a journey! Congratulations to each and every runner who took on the course and finished, it is a massive effort and commitment. Sacrifices were made and self doubt overcome, no doubt a huge sense of achievement for you if you did race, remember that feeling. The handful that was not able to finish – No doubt you are planning a comeback, good luck with that. I was proud of the many runners whose race I may have had some part in through our training with Runlab over the years and in particular this year as our trail running interval sessions truly became world class at Runlab and we saw our largest contingent take part.

One of the many special things about this race no doubt is the finish area. A steep descent into the Jenolan Caves, the sound of cowbells and cheering spectators is a sense of relief and joy all at once. As the runners finish and the time ticks away, the crowd gets larger and nosier – those right near the race cut-off time no doubt feeling like rock stars as they finish.

This year I had heaps of friends and family at the finish - A special moment I will forever remember.

This is a pretty frank recap of the lead-up to and running of the race this year, so – hold on! There are many things that impact upon an outcome; such can be said for racing too.

I pretty much decided straight after last years race that I would come back and run again this year. Whilst it was tough last year, apart from the very first section, I was able to run at and near the front mainly together with Courtney Atkinson. Looking back I say it was an ideal time trial. In the end I was actually surprised how close I was to the record in my debut running the event (about a minute), so another re-run meant that a record challenge was a real possibility. But, in racing terms, 12 months is a long time. Injuries can happen, fitness can easily depart and that's just the start.

Training, post 6 Foot Track 2017 for me touched on uncharted waters. I had made the decision that I wanted to run longer events in the future. This meant a shift away from a focus on V02 max sessions for my interval training as well as a modified approach to my strength training. Whilst I had a pretty good idea of what I needed to do, putting it into practice was a challenge, as I was heading into uncharted waters as hopefully one of the quicker runners in Australia for distances 50km and over.

In hindsight, whilst I trained very well for Comrades Marathon (June 2017) my body hadn't caught up and adapted to the shifts in demand I had placed on it. Subsequently I had a great 2017 Comrades debut, for half the race. That doesn't mean very much at all. I did however, through the pain and disappointment, continue on and finish the race – swallowing my pride and in the process I think building on that fighting resilience I've carried throughout my career. I wanted to give up so bad at Comrades, my body was shutting down with severe cramping and hip flexor issues, but I regrouped, re-assessed and made a decision to finish no matter the result.

Upon arriving home, I never stopped training all year through, and after a relaxation in the volume and structure of training throughout July and August 2017 post Comrades, by September I was building the platform of training again, able to spring off come the start of December, just as the warmer weather and cicadas returned (my favourite time of the year). This included my first 100km Trail event being the great North Walk 100's in Australia! It was a good race for me in more ways than one. Training for it meant many a run with some of my good friends in Newcastle and I got to share it with friends and family. I was pretty happy with first place, but much more importantly it reminded me that I was far from a perfect runner still and that the longer distances are mentally challenging. The up side was that I truly believed that modifications I'd made in my training were paying dividends.

Like you all though – I'm not immune to the frustrations and challenges of life. My work is also running related; yes I get to actually do something for a living I'm passionate about. The 12 months post the 2017 6 Foot Track were extremely challenging though and it was pretty tough to limit the impact this was having on my training and racing. I guess my reasons for including this in a race report are threefold. Runners and those of any level are also just people; we have our business and life challenges too.

Overall, my work outside training was really rewarding and included being a part of a new event Thunderbolt as Race Director, and an expansion of Runlab. Whilst the negative (things) were there, I took pride in developing our Runstrong and Trail offerings and being the official Trainer of the Blackmore's Sydney running festival again.

Everything happens for a reason! We have all heard that, right? It's never easy at the time though, but I can now look back on the dissolution of my Rozelle running group, as one of those things. Built on countless dark cold mornings and sacrifices, losing this was a kick in the guts dealt by one of Runlab's previous retail partners. Personal sponsors continued to support me too, I had a few challenges, however now I'm now back where I belong and am completely happy and supported well by my current awesome sponsors.

Leading into the event, chatter was increasing, as expected! This year's race was set to have the strongest contingent of elite runners ever. There were at least 10 runners capable of winning the race, I was pretty sure that whoever ran it would also create a new course record time.

The funny thing though is that whilst runners do want to be in the limelight – they are also mainly secretive. I've never understood it but I guess it's all about not showing how fit you are and or if you are racing or not. Everybody new I was, simple. The day before the race I found out that Dave Byrne was out due to injury whilst a couple of the other top runners had just pulled out for reasons I wasn't sure about. Ben St Lawrence was still running though and for me there was no change to how I would approach the race. I honestly didn't know if I'd recovered from that gruelling Tarawera 100km run exactly 4 weeks to the day prior to this race (That wasn't planned when I first decided I was going to come back this year), I was going to run my race and do my best – as to winning, I honestly didn't know if I was going to or not!

In terms of my 2018 goals – 6 Foot was a B race ahead of Comrades and after Tarawera (both a), this meant a shorter taper and fitting it into my overall plan rather than being a sole focus.

Race week, I got super organised. This is exactly what I did! That's just the training lol – I have a few other things I do or like to do, but mainly being organised is crucial for any large race, it means you can focus and not have unwanted distractions, which can all drain you!



Race Shorts! Note internal pocket in lethal design! This became a bit of a talking point – Thank-you to Freya for giving me superpowers!

The week leading into the race, this was my training schedule.

Sunday – 26km easy Road 4:40 Pace

Monday – 12km easy

Tuesday – am Coach Myrungroup + including a 6km easy, PM Coach MRG including 8km of easy running



Wednesday – 20 km easy am. Chiro Adjustment + Aviano Massage. PM Coach Runstrong + Ice Bath,
Thursday – SLEEP IN – 8km PM including MONA Fartlek with the Mytrailgroup (efforts only at Tempo pace)
Friday 5km – Hip Balance Aviano – PM easy run around Katoomba with run-throughs.

Pete Storey and I – short break during our easy Friday afternoon run at Katoomba. He didn't break a sweat!



Whilst I'd happily share also what I did in the 6 months prior too – I probably won't 😊 the formula stays with me for now.

Race Day!

Restless sleep – but not too bad. Not long after 4am I was up moving around getting ready and having Breakfast as early as I could to kick-start my system and allow for adequate digestion and toilet pit stops.

Everything is laid out and ready and at 5:50am we left for the race start. Arriving an hour before the scheduled start allowed me to be pretty relaxed. Good mate Peter Storey drove us to the start line with Chez (aka [Wifey](#) also racing) which was really helpful and allowed me to just remain calm for 20 minutes or so before my warm-up.

Still dark, head torch on, Warm-up started at 7:20 and included approximately 20 minutes of easy running on a relatively flat route near

the start line (well known now due to running camps and course recce) another toilet pit stop too! I returned to the car for a final shoe change and then headed up to the start line area at about 6:45am – Here for the first time I saw all of the competitors and supporters, a hive of activity! I took my Isowhey Ultimate endurance gel at 6:30 and was now sipping Electrolyte and jogging around together with some run throughs. I anticipate in total I covered about 6km in the warm-up post race.

The noise and crowd at the start of this race is pretty hectic! With only a few minutes to go I had to weave and wind my way through the mass of runners and supporters to get to the front ready to start. I don't remember too much honestly. Looking back I was focussed and calm and walked right up to the front line with less than a minute to go – focussed purely on the journey ahead. Countdown and go....



Right near the race start! Concentration to the max.

Race start is hectic, 6 Foot is really hectic. Within 400 metres you hit the stairs and on a morning like this one being heavily overcast, damp and

humid, descending was risky. I went as quickly as I dared, but some of these guys are seriously good and by the bottom of the stairs I was probably back in around 7th or 8th position. As we progressed through the technical single track and onto the more open trails it felt good to be running freely. Quickly I established that Ben St Lawrence was in the lead and going very quickly with Brendan close by – a few more runners were between them and myself. I pushed the pace gradually and moved quickly into 3rd position then second as I pulled up to Brendan, Benny was still pulling away but I did see him take a look back too.



On the single track to the river. I had to make a decision to pick it up!

About 10km in, we are about to hit the single track down towards the river crossing. Ben's orange singlet is disappearing I've no idea how far behind I am. Brendan and I have continued to trade places until now, but I felt in control so decided to increase the work rate, 5 minutes – no sign still, so I ramped it up more, 10 minutes and so on. So I just kept ramping it up – 500metres before the crossing though I was right there. In fact Brendan wasn't that far back either and this was the fastest recorded time to the river, I'd closed the gap and was now side by side with Ben.



Legendary distance runner Ben St Lawrence. We have raced a lot over the years but never this closely. We have also trained together countless times mainly with Sean Williams back in the day on McKay

**Oval! We exchanged words, I told him he went out hard, he agreed!
We were about to hit the hills.**

Within minutes of the river crossing – I was pulling away. I was on the hills and I've developed an ability to be able to run them quick without hurting myself too much. All of a sudden I had a rush of feelings like "I'm in front – I'm going to win" – BUT I literally gave it to myself right at this point. The fact was that it was now my race to loose, and I had to take nothing for granted and try my best. Mini saddle I had about 150 metres, top of the first hill about 300 metres and from there I just kept going.

Was I hurting, hell yeah – remember 100Km 4 weeks before, mini taper, etc etc – I was literally playing an experiment with my body and mind and at the top of the second large hill as it begins to roll, the difficulty of this race was speaking to me in the form of some leg burn. Still though, I was able to run pretty well, keeping momentum through the muddy sections and kicking faster leg turnover on any flats and downhills.

The last 50 minutes was great. I could feel my legs getting heavier but I wasn't slowing down at all, I was holding my own. The last major checkpoint near the road crossing was a good gauge of my lead – I had no idea how close Ben or any other runner in fact was to me, all I could do was look at my watch as I ran past the cow bells and then look at it again when I next heard the bells (indicating the second runner). 1 minute, two minutes, and 3 minutes – I think that's where I heard something – not sure. I was sure I had a good lead though now and made my way down the Mountain home!

On the final descents it's very steep and dangerous, I was fairly close to a good time from what I could tell, but I didn't care for time now, I was overcome by an incredible sense of achievement, I had tears in my eyes – I couldn't explain it! I was so bloody ecstatic, my face says it all. For me this was one of the greatest – Not for the race or the time either for that matter, just an honest sense of achievement and acknowledgement of the ability to perform and backup! I had been the marked man leading into the event, I had harnessed that expectation and delivered. I crossed and the few spectators, family and friends witnessed me literally cross in total joy – Thankyou forever!

So my first B race of the year was a solid result. Clearly elated to win – my joy was evident to all, a result of coming full circle through the last 12 months of life and running.

In summary – [The Fastest Race Splits](#) is a great summary of times throughout certain sections of the race. I am pretty happy with this, it shows that over 2 years and completely different types of races – I have had faster/fastest splits in different sections of the race. Over my last two years I have the fastest times for 5 out of 7 sections of the race and a top 3 in every section – except the KOM!

It's crazy – What I'm best at I've not got the best time in – however I've run the hills at a pace for that years race and then been able to go on and continue strong, better than my competitors.



One of those times you don't care what you look or sound like! Back to back 6 Foot. Oh Yeah baby!

So if I race again, what would I like to achieve? Improvement is always possible and I'll keep aiming higher. I'd like to notch a TOP 3 fastest ever on the KOM and take out the course record too – But as you know, racing is racing and you have to adapt to the circumstances of the event and this

will almost certainly mean that your perfect fastest race wont be run, rather your best position achieved!



Chez (Aka Wifey) and I post 45 minute very light sore run Sunday 7:45am, the day after the race!

Now I'm getting ready for UTA 22, then Comrades. The work is hard, so hard – but it's also extremely enjoyable and made even more so by the completion of this run.

I ran 50km this morning, solo – on road starting at 5am. It was windy and I got wet. Its 13 days post 6 Foot Track and my recovery week was 150km of running and this week will be closer to 180km. A lot of hard work goes into these results.

