

Herald Scotland

Friday 19 November 2010

Liz McColgan gets back to New York state of mind

Doug Gillon

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30 Oct 2010

Sitting down is literally a pain in the backside for Liz McColgan, so after 14 foot operations, plus surgery to re-attach a hamstring, Scotland's former world 10,000 metres champion is pulling on her running shoes and returning to the scene of one of her greatest triumphs next weekend.

It's 19 years since the Carnoustie woman won the ING New York Marathon, but she will be back there a week tomorrow supporting a charity project, Shoe4Africa.

"They are trying to build a hospital and a school and have got some celebrity runners together," she says. "We're doing this to raise awareness.

"I have been able to get 12 weeks' training in. I'm pretty limited in what I can do after 14 foot operations. I've been very careful, but I think I have done enough to get round it and enjoy it, and run a half-decent time. If I really pushed it I think I could go sub-three hours, but I'm a bit long in the tooth to be worrying about times.

"I got my hamstring re-attached last year, but that hasn't worked. I don't run properly. I struggle a bitty, but I'll get round.

The background of running comes from Kenya and there are a lot of problems there.
The charity is the only reason I'm doing it. I have no desire to run 26 miles

Liz McColgan

"A dog came out of nowhere and I pulled the hamstring off the bone. They hammered three metal pins into my butt and attached all three sections of the hamstring onto the bone with little metal pins. It causes me a lot of bother. If I sit down for any length of time, it just shortens, and it's constant gyp. There's nothing more they can do, so I just have to get on with it."

Her last marathon outing was a charity run in London in 2008 – and the last competitive one was when she was beaten by a second there, in 1998.

"It's simply for the charity. I keep pretty fit all year round, and know I can get round, more so than most. Just because I've got a few problems myself, there's no reason why I can't do it for charity. I think what they're doing is pretty amazing.

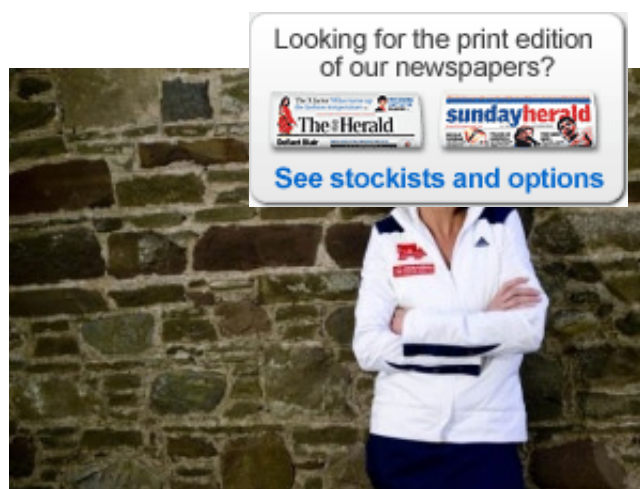
"Toby Tanser, the founder, is quite an inspirational guy. They're building a school, but the boys are already all sitting outside with their uniforms on, watching the builders, waiting for them to finish. I think it's a good charity to be involved with."

Ambassadors include the Mexican marathon runner, German Silva (who twice won in New York), Britain's Mara Yamauchi and actors Cameron Diaz and Anthony Edwards, as well as Cristiano Ronaldo, the Real Madrid attacker.

"Toby has done a lot more for people in his life than most folk would even attempt to do. I think sometimes you've just got to support people like that.

"The background of running comes from Kenya, and there are a lot of problems there. We moan about facilities here – but have a look at what they've got, and what they manage to create as distance runners.

"That's the only reason I'm doing it. I have no desire to run 26 miles again. I've done a couple of 18-mile runs, and know I'm in good nick. It's just a matter of whether I'll hold up on the day. And I am running the Loch Lomond 10k on Saturday."



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McColgan was the first British woman to win a world endurance athletics title, ran what was then the fastest debut marathon to win New York in 1991, and collected the BBC Sports Personality award that year. She also won the Tokyo Marathon, London twice, and Commonwealth 10k gold twice, plus Olympic silver, as well as setting world road bests. Now she's a coach, to whose door in Carnoustie athletes from all over the UK beat a path.

Her group includes nearly a dozen international athletes, including Sarah Kelly and Jenny Tan, respectively No.1 and No.3 under-20 in Britain, and Morag McLarty, who narrowly missed Commonwealth 1500m selection.

She and husband Peter tried to set up a residential training centre, but could not raise sponsorship, or even support from the sport.

"Nobody's interested," she says. "But we have athletes who've moved here, and taken part-time jobs. It's not a commercial enterprise. We've set up something in what is a perfect environment for running. I don't make anything out of it. I don't get paid for coaching. We have some property which athletes live in, but that just covers the mortgage. Frankly, we'd be better getting professional people as tenants. And because it's based in Scotland, you won't get anything from UK Athletics."

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