

# Fionnuala Britton

WE LOOK AT THE TRAINING THAT TOOK FIONNUALA BRITTON TO THE EUROPEAN CROSS-COUNTY TITLE LAST MONTH

## » Training

WHEN Welshman Chris Jones first started working with Fionnuala Britton 18 months ago, he recognised that she had huge potential, but it was also easy to see that she had some limiting factors which were affecting her performance. Her cadence was too slow, her power per stride was lacking, she trained too much in the middle aerobic development area and her balance of training and recovery was not what it should be.

Jones says: "The aim was to increase her power output per stride and this has been achieved by designing a suitable strength and conditioning programme, with technical work and short hills for her overall power development. Initially, I moved her away from any higher-tempo work that would allow any anaerobic interference while we developed both her aerobic capacity and her anaerobic power. The longer endurance type development was only introduced when this was stable and strong enough.

"The philosophy is simple – build the right aerobic capacity with power and good functional movement, which will transfer it to specific power – something a lot of



"I knew what my race plan was and it worked well for me"

European cross-country champion  
FIONNUALA BRITTON

MARK SHEARMAN

strength and conditioning coaches tend to miss. Once we have developed these areas we can then continue to develop the aerobic capacity while moving into event-specific speed, aiming to challenge the extension of the repetitions, increasing the time spent at this velocity – but not looking to run any faster.

"A lot of easy running is included around the harder sessions and we are constantly looking to maintain the aerobic capacity. We work closely with Dr Brian Moore and his team, Hodgson Moore, checking blood markers regularly and have a team of support staff around her that know exactly what is been asked of her on a daily basis."

## European Cross Country Championships

THE preparation for the race had gone to plan. Her last key workout was 4x(600m, 500m, 400m, 300m, 200m) with two minutes recovery and five minutes between the sets. This indicated that she was in the best shape ever. Jones added: "It was just a case of managing her over the last 10 days before the race. Blood tests showed that she was in the best health possible prior to a championship.

"This is a credit to how she managed herself over the last 10 days before the race. She asked for another workout, but I insisted

that she was ready and that she just needed to look after what she had already worked so hard for."

## Goals for 2012 and beyond

MORE at home on cross country, Britton never considered herself a track runner, but she eventually gravitated towards the steeplechase. Over the summer of 2011, she developed really well and showed a marked improvement and her training indicated that she should be running the 3000m steeplechase much quicker.

Jones' belief and concerns were always based on her size and that her 1500m background might not lend itself to the steeplechase. It was evident that she was training much better than her competition performances of 15:31 for 5000m and that she should have been much faster had she committed to running the event and been doing a few more quality races. Britton commented after going out in her heat at the World Championships last year that perhaps she should have run the 5000m.

The European cross-country race was run at a pace of 3:05 per kilometre, which Jones thinks was an indication that she has the potential to run much faster than her present PB for 10,000m. Another priority for 2012 is to run around 15:00 for 5000m. They have talked a lot about the future

## FACTFILE FIONNUALA BRITTON

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| <b>Born</b>         | September 24, 1984   |
| <b>Club</b>         | Kilcoole AC  |
| <b>Coach</b>        | Chris Jones  |
| <b>PBs</b>          | 3000m 9:00.70i (2011). 5000m 15:21.07 (2011). 3000m steeplechase 9:37.60 (2011)  |
| <b>Achievements</b> |  |
| 2011:               | World cross country 16th. European cross country gold. World steeplechase 6th ht |
| 2010:               | European cross country 4th. European steeplechase 11th                           |
| 2008:               | World cross country 36th. Olympic steeplechase 10th ht.                          |
| 2007:               | World cross country 14th. World steeplechase 12th                                |
| 2006:               | European steeplechase 11th ht.   |
| 2005:               | World cross country (short course) 75th  |
| 2004:               | World cross country (long course) 75th   |
| 2003:               | World junior cross country 33rd  |
| 2001:               | World junior cross country 98th. European junior cross country 98th              |



## » Training (2011 build-up towards European cross country)

After a four-week block of pure aerobic capacity work, Britton began a preparatory phase of training at altitude. The following is the second week when based at Font Romeu.

### Week commencing October 10:

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| Monday    | (am) 30 minutes easy, 20 minutes steady.<br>(pm) 30 minutes easy, 20 minutes steady.  |
| Tuesday   | (am) 25 minutes plus drills activation and technical strides (focusing on the direction of the heel leaving the ground and relaxed fold of the leg). 6x1km with four minutes running recovery (conditioning session done at a lower altitude, this is a continual run with no stopping – 12km in total).<br>(pm) 40 minutes aerobic recovery shuffle – “pace depending how she is feeling”. |
| Wednesday | (am) 80 minutes aerobic capacity run plus gym work (combination, circuit-type work – normally two circuits and one strength stabilisation session).<br>(pm) Rest.   |
| Thursday  | (am) 25 minutes plus drills and technical strides working on heel-lift and leg-speed skill. Hills: 4x40 seconds and 3 sets of 8x200m. Plyo activation done before each individual hill rep for transfer work – glute activation, hopping drill, bounding – then run up the hill. 60 seconds recovery and five minutes between sets.<br>(pm) Recovery run                                    |
| Friday    | (am) 30 minutes easy, 20 minutes steady.<br>(pm) Gym – functional control and core work.  |
| Saturday  | Complete rest day.  |
| Sunday    | (am) 1hr 40 minutes aerobic capacity run.<br>(pm) Hills: 8x40 seconds. Activation drills, skipping drills prior to hills. 25 minutes run after the session.   |

Five weeks after returning from altitude she was then in a very heavy phase of training and didn't taper for an international race in France where she placed third. This was her last competition prior to the European Cross Country Championships.

### Week commencing November 21:

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| Monday    | (am) Rest.<br>(pm) 50 minutes light recovery run with 10x6 seconds strides.  |
| Tuesday   | (am) 25 minutes with drills and activation/skipping drills/heels underneath. 6x1km – all inside 3:00.<br>(pm) 40 minutes recovery jog.   |
| Wednesday | (am) 35 minutes easy plus gym work (circuit session).<br>(pm) 35 minutes easy.   |
| Thursday  | (am) 25 minutes drills, technical drills working on leg speed and skill then 6x60m strides.<br>(pm) 3 sets of 8x150m in 23 seconds with 27 seconds recovery and five minutes between sets. 35 minutes cool-down. |
| Friday    | 40 minutes easy.   |
| Saturday  | 25 minutes easy.   |
| Sunday    | (am) 15 minutes easy.<br>(pm) Cross-country race in France. Travel back that night.  |
| Monday    | 80 minutes very easy jog.  |

and Jones thinks she has the capacity and ability to take on the right workload that would eventually lead to looking at the marathon. Before this though they have agreed that they need to look at the 5000m and 10,000m as a priority over the next few years.

Jones concludes: “The London Olympics this year will be about running the best event for her and her overall development. She has the ‘A’ standard for the steeplechase already,

but the 5000m and 10,000m qualification times are what we will be looking to gain early this year. The marathon will be for the future, but not until we have developed more specific speed-endurance over 10,000m.”

**» THE above sessions are specific to the individual athlete and may not be suitable for other athletes. Fionnuala Britton and Chris Jones were interviewed by David Lowes**

## Britton's background

I JOINED the local athletics club, Kilcoole AC, aged just seven and at that time I didn't have any ambitions to compete for Ireland or run in the Olympics or anything like that.

My older sister was a member of the club and that is why I joined and also because seven was the age you were allowed to join a club. I first went to the Wicklow competitions and then ones at Leinster, but the highlights were more the “craic” (crack) we had on the bus journeys than the actual races!

I played camogie (Irish female game similar to hurling) with Kilcoole GAA club and played badminton with Newcastle and also played hockey, camogie and ran track and cross country at my school, Dominican College in Wicklow.

I was coached by the club coaches – first by John O'Toole, then by Pat Diskin when my training began to get more specific and serious. It was him who brought me from qualifying for the national cross-country champs as a 13-year-old to winning the national junior cross-country three times in a row and then on to winning the senior title, running in the European and world cross-country champs as well as European, Worlds and Olympics in the steeplechase.

I realised that I needed to change things again if I wanted to continue to improve so I started working with Chris (Jones) just over a year ago.

I train in Dublin at Dublin City University where I also studied and had a scholarship for six years. The staff there and the athletics academy have been really supportive to me over the last eight years, which is why I am still based in the area, but I also train at the Morton Stadium in Santry.

Sonia O'Sullivan and Catherina McKiernan are my role models because they were two of the most successful athletes the country has produced. I would say though that, being close to my family, they are my biggest role models. My parents are the people I would like to emulate and who I would most like to make feel proud of me.

I started off really as a cross-country runner as we did most of our training in fields – so that was kind of inevitable and, even though I really enjoy the track season now, I still think I prefer cross country as my favourite surface. I haven't got much time for hobbies although I still consider running as such. I love all sports – watching and participating – but being involved in a team sport when you are away so much is difficult so I generally just watch them now and go cycling or swimming whenever I get the chance.

On her European cross-country victory in Velenje she said: “It was fabulous to cross the line first after the disappointment of the previous year. This is ultimately what I wanted. I knew what my race plan was and it worked well for me. I was a bit anxious leading because you have no idea of what is happening behind you.”