

FLASHBACK...FLASHBACK...FLASHBACK...

Professional running is 'going places'

In our continuation of our series on the great Olympian Herb McKenley, today we feature an article carried in an Australian newspaper in the late 1940s.

After three months of competitive running throughout Victoria, I just can't realise why professional running hasn't been promoted in the United States.

The people would really go for it in the States, for it has colour and excitement in ready-made quantities, and with the promotional genius of the American and his press, it would have huge spectacular interest.

One of my first jobs when I get back to New York is to start doing something about filling this public want.

I am planning for the day when the world sprint series will be like the England-Australia Test cricket matches, with the series alternating between two countries — in the case of the sprint titles we would run them in US and Australia alternately for a start.

Believe me, you have the world class professional runners on your doorstep.

No one can tell me that Keith Aiston, the Adelaide sprinter, is not one of the fastest 75-yard runners the world has ever seen. This boy, given top-class competition, has shown that he can produce the results.

I predict that we have not seen the best of Aiston by a long way.

He is still fairly young, and ever ready to learn.

I got the shock of my life when he beat me in the world 75-yard championship at Geelong on February 12. I under-estimated his class — a very serious mistake.

Blonde, with a lightning start and with a strong finish, Aiston would draw crowds anywhere. I think he now has the necessary confidence, which should help him a great deal in the future.

Other Australians who did not figure as prominently as Aiston in the world series were Sam Baldwin, from Broken Hill, and the 21-year-old Victorian Bob Stringer. They have tremendous potential and in my opinion the only thing lacking with them at present is a little harder training.

Stringer, definitely, has everything to make a great champion, and he is a good bet to beat



BY HERB MCKENLEY

21 seconds for 220 yards in the near future and get very close to "Barney Ewell's world record of 20.75 seconds.

Baldwin, winner of a Bendigo Thousand like Stringer, is strong with tons of speed, and can produce his best when the chips are down.

From what I have seen of Frank Banner, former national sprint champion, he has the goods, and it was unfortunate that he came up with a bad leg on the eve of the

world series. Perhaps I was lucky he did not make the field.

Give me Aiston, Banner, Stringer and Baldwin and I'll put professional running into American in a big way. And that's no mere talk.

Next year this quartet is going to be a big headache for me when I return to defend my world title.

My only criticism so far during my stay is that there are too few backmarkers' handicaps in Victoria.

The backmarkers' handicap helps to encourage the boys with the real talent to stay in the sport.

Apart from Bendigo, Stawell, and Lilydale in Victoria, the backmarker is forced to concede big starts in every race and force himself to the limit of his physical ability every time he puts a shoe on.

This, I believe, is to be rectified next season, and it could bring the top amateurs into professionalism to provide more competition and keener public interest.

Now that professional running is rising in popularity in SA, I suggest that SA officials consider the backmarkers when they plan their future programmes.

I know a lot of Victorian runner — the top men, over there — would come to SA to compete regularly if they had the incentive of a backmarkers' handicap. It's worth thinking about, and there is a lead in "The Advertiser" programme which is one of the most forward steps taken in athletics.

Next year I hope to return to Adelaide where I would be certain of finding professional athletics at or near their peak and seriously threatening the supremacy of Victoria.

And when that happens, professional running can thank "The Advertiser."