



Media Release – “RECORD CROWDS AND RECORD PERFORMANCES AT BIG SHOT & STREET MILE”

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For immediate release

A large and vocal Christchurch crowd were treated to record-breaking performances and thrilling sprint finishes at The Big Shot & Street Mile event in the central city today.

Former World Junior Shot Put champion Jacko Gill took another huge step in his development as an international class senior athlete in The Big Shot, with the big Aucklander throwing a personal best of 20.83m, a New Zealand Resident record (the furthest ever thrown by a New Zealander in New Zealand), and comfortably a qualifying mark for both the World Indoor Championships next month, as well as the Olympic Games in Rio in August.

Right there with him was the Australian champion Damien Birkinhead, who also threw a personal best and an Olympic qualifier to be just 3cm adrift, living up to pre-event predictions that the event would be both close and exciting despite the absence of hometown favourite Tom Walsh due to injury. Rounding out third and fourth positions were Australia’s Matt Cowie and young Waikato thrower Ryan Ballantyne, who took advantage of the perfect conditions and the roaring crowd to both also post personal bests, of 17.50m and 16.04m respectively. 17-year-old Ballantyne looks like an exciting prospect to follow in the footsteps of Walsh & Gill – by comparison, at the International Track Meet here in 2010, a then 17-year-old Walsh won the shot put with 15.76m.

On the surrounding streets, the route was lined by screaming fans, and they were treated to two very different but equally exciting contests. The Men’s Street Mile was expected to be largely a duel between the two fastest Oceania 1500m runners in history – local favourite Nick Willis, and his Australian rival Ryan Gregson. The field played cat and mouse for the first half, with a slow tactical pace set alight just before halfway by the promise of a \$250 bonus for the leader at that point. Local junior Fergus Eglesfield was first to flash by that point, but before long the big guns stepped up, with Australian 5000m specialist Brett Robinson taking the lead by the time they turned into Victoria Square in an attempt to run the sting out of big two. Swinging into the long final straight down Kilmore Street though, it was Willis to the fore, and he held off Gregson in the dash to the line, winning by just over a second in 4min15.9. Robinson held on for third, from the four-time NZ 800m champion Brad Mathas.

By contrast, the women’s race was a torrid affair, with a gutsy run from the front by local steeplechase specialist and double New Zealand 3000m champion Rosa Flanagan. She led the field out hard, and took the halfway bonus, leading all the way to the final corner before the effort told and she was forced to submit to the speedsters down the final straight. First to the line was Australia’s Genevieve Lacaze, in an excellent time on the tight circuit of 4min35.8, closely followed by compatriot Melissa Duncan, local hero Angie Petty, and Auckland’s Lucy Oliver, with Flanagan finishing a courageous fifth. So it was one win apiece in the Trans-Tasman battle, before the enthusiastic and vociferous crowd headed across to the Big Shot arena to watch the big guns in the tie-breaker.

Full results are now on the event website www.thebigshot.co.nz, with photos and video footage to be posted in the next few days.

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