

## THE INTERVIEW

with Ann Wason Moore

## Forrest Gump of the Coast

How I went from 'fun runner' to GC Marathon winner

**M**ove over, Taylor Swift. It seems the hottest ticket in town is the Gold Coast Marathon, with spare entries sparking bidding wars on social media as residents race to win the right to run.

After this year's main 42.2km event sold out in record time with record numbers, with the waitlist still growing, entrants who can no longer participate have at least found a silver lining in the pot of gold being offered for their unused ticket.

For superstar runner Pat Carroll OAM, who has the ultimate VIP access as Gold Coast Marathon ambassador, it's just another sign that we are officially in our running era.

But the four-time winner of the event and former Australian marathon champion said even he can barely believe how popular his beloved sport has become ... but he's loving every minute.

As a marathon and running mentor with Pat Carroll Running Group, he said any spare Gold Coast Marathon entry that became available within the club, whether through injury, illness or change of plans, was quickly snapped up, but without any mark-up.

"It's incredible, isn't it? Maybe we should auction them off with excess proceeds going to charity?" he said.

That line of thinking is exactly why this marathon man was awarded an Order of Australia Medal this year for his contributions to the community and athletics.

He's helped raise almost half a million dollars for charitable groups and individuals but has also dedicated his life to fostering a love of running in others.

In his own athletic career he's won dozens of medals and set multiple records, but Carroll said nothing was more meaningful than his OAM.

"It brought me to tears, it was so incredible to be recognised like that for what I've done in running and beyond," he said.

"As an athlete, as time passes you watch your achievements slide down the scale, and that's how it should be – but it feels a lot better watching that now that I have this!

"I might go down the ladder, but try to get one of these ... it's a lot harder."

However, Carroll said he did not believe any of his



Gold Coast Marathon ambassador Pat Carroll ran his first Gold Coast event in 1982 and this year will be a pace runner in the 10km race. Picture: Mike Batterham

achievements would have been possible without the Gold Coast Marathon.

It was his very first marathon back in 1982 and while he's long retired from competitive running – and thanks to a chronic injury now must limit his runs – he will be a pace runner in the 10km race this year, and also organised all pace runners for the event.

But when it came to his own career as a runner, it was a slow start.

While he made the school cross country team as a junior, that was basically it until he returned to the sport at the age of 20.

"I saw a friend go through a very serious illness, they had chemotherapy at a young age and it was tough. That was a wake-up call that you better do what you can, while you can.

"At the same time, Rob de Castella was running really well and the combination of those two factors really ignited the desire to be the best I could be while I was still young enough to do it.

"I was a tradie, a cabinet maker, and I just used to run kind of aimlessly around Brisbane.

"I'd run from my mother's house, over the Story Bridge, through Brisbane City, out to Moorooka, have a cup of tea with my grandmother while I was there and then run back to Norman Park. I was like Forrest Gump, I just kept running.

"I started doing some fun runs with some guys in a run club and after a while I was running faster than they were, so I thought I'd give the Gold Coast Marathon a go. But I was still just a fun runner.

"I finished in two hours 48 minutes, and two years later I won that event. I won it four times and it has always been the event that fired me on to the next big thing. I would not be where I am now if it wasn't for the Gold Coast Marathon.

"It would be in the top five most integral events of my life."

When it comes to the question of whether this city should host the 2032 Olympic marathon, Carroll said he was a fan ... with one caveat.

He said the Olympic marathon has always finished at the host city's stadium, but he believed the Coast could still be a natural fit.

"On the masterplan it's

**“I was a tradie, a cabinet maker, and I just used to run kind of aimlessly around Brisbane**

listed as the Sunshine Coast, which doesn't really make sense," he said.

"The Gold Coast is the flattest course in Australia so it would be great to see some records set and there is no more stunning course.

"As far as tradition goes, it should probably be in Brisbane ... but at this stage, who knows? The whole Olympics could end up on the Gold Coast."

Regardless of where the 2032 event was held, Carroll said he hoped the run of popularity continued for the sport.

He said he loved seeing so many young people embracing running, with whole families enjoying events together.

"There is no doubt that running is good for you physically and mentally, so the more people who do it – the better we all are," he said.

"As I get further away from

my running career, I question whether I ran because it gave me peace and that's why I was a good runner.

"I certainly wanted to do well in running and be the best I could be, but still to this day I have to exercise in some way to have that peace of mind.

"I think that's part of what's made running go crazy, especially during Covid. Plus it's a cheap way to exercise.

"I just love seeing so many people in that 25-year-old age bracket loving it, I've never seen anything like that before. It's fantastic.

"Who would have thought the Gold Coast Marathon would be the hottest ticket in town? That people are falling over themselves for the chance to run 42 km? It's always been popular, and rightly so, but now it's just nuts. In a good way.

"It's the kind of event that

just works so well, it's in a beautiful city so it's easy to get your friends and family out there supporting it, and the organising team do it so well.

"They could have had even more entries this year and still sold out, but they're making sure it stays safe and that the experience is enjoyable, you don't want to overcrowd it."

Having been involved with the event for more than 40 years, and at most missing only a handful, Carroll said he was determined to keep showing up far into the future.

In fact, he's already got it all mapped out.

While his own children prefer the gym to the pavement, Carroll said he has his eye on the next generation.

"I look after my grandkids every Friday and we always do races down the hallway," he said. "They think we're just having fun, but this is foundational stuff. I'm building a base.

"I'll admit, I have visualised myself being down there in 15 years' time and seeing my granddaughter cross that finish line."

For Carroll, that would be the perfect encore performance.