

# Running through hell and back

JOEL RITCHIE

FORMER Shellharbour resident Becky Oliver is preparing to take on the world's toughest footrace.

Becky, 26 will compete in the seven-day, six stages Marathon des Sables in Southern Morocco from March 30 to April 5.

The event is recognised as the world's toughest because of its distance – approximately 254km in six days, or a Marathon per day – and conditions.

Runners will have to battle temperatures of up to 50 degrees Celsius as they traverse sand dunes, rocky outcrops and dry creek beds in the heart of the Sahara Desert.

They will also have to carry all their provisions – sleeping bag, food, flare, antivenom, first aid kit, clothes and daily rations of water.

Becky is confident of going the distance in Morocco despite the challenge she's facing.

"This is my ultimate challenge – it's a test of mind, body and spirit," she said.

"It's said that when you cross the finish line, you become a different person.

"I will be strong enough to do it if I am sensible about how I run and my nutrition."

Becky's confidence is justified – she is the reigning Australian women's 24-hour track race champion.

What's more, Becky is getting to the sharp end of a punishing six-month training regimen to prepare for the Marathon of the Sands.

Becky, who lives in Sydney due to work commitments, has run between 100km and 140km every week for the past six months.

That included back-to-back 30km runs, two intense hill runs and strength training – about 25 hours per week.

So, what inspires a former Albion Park High dux and University of



• Becky Oliver is preparing herself for the world's toughest foot race.

Wollongong graduate to tackle ultra-marathon running?

"I just love them because I am not only challenging my body but my mind and emotions – they are a real test of character," Becky said.

"Running through the bush or wilderness is much more interesting than running through the streets of Sydney or around a track."

Becky has personal motivation for taking on the Marathon of the Sands; she wants to raise \$10,000 for

the Butterfly Foundation, a charity dedicated to helping people with eating disorders.

The 26-year-old has experienced eating disorders herself and said that it was only thanks to treatment by the Illawarra Area Health Service (one of the few government-funded programs for helping people with eating disorders in Australia) that she was able to strong enough to take on such a big challenge.

"They are a great charity – there

are a lot of gaps in the health system and it can cost up to \$100,000 to treat a patient," she said.

All money donated will go to the Butterfly Foundation, while Becky will pay the estimated \$15,000-\$20,000 needed for entry fee, flights and equipment.

Donations can be made by visiting either [www.beckyoliver.wordpress.com](http://www.beckyoliver.wordpress.com) or <http://tiny.cc/2QcLQ> or by sending an e-mail to [becky.oliver@yahoo.com.au](mailto:becky.oliver@yahoo.com.au).