



Lewis has belief

EVERY picture really does tell a story. But very few have done so done more poignantly and revealingly than those which showed Tamsyn Lewis crossing the line ahead of her rivals for the world indoor 800 metres crown in Spain at the weekend.

The sheer open-mouthed incredulity on Tamsyn's always attractive features vividly displayed her own disbelief at a victory nobody considered possible.

After all, this was the woman whom most Australian critics – present company included – have mercilessly belittled for most of what has been considered an entirely unfulfilled career.

One in which celebrity, style and controversy has always seemed paramount and performance a mere sidebar.

To the public at large, Lewis was always either posing in a bikini or heading off to Europe – subsidised by taxpayer funds – to be coached by this luminary or that personality. After which she would inevitably fail to produce anything like the potential she and her dwindling band of supporters claimed she possessed.

That criticism reached a crescendo after the Athens Olympics where – despite

making the semi-finals of the 800 metres in Sydney – she bombed out in the first round.

Yet it peaked even further when she did the same at the world titles in Osaka last year as her supposedly bitter rival, Jana Rawlinson, hauled in a glorious gold.

Seemingly, now, the scorn aimed at her in the aftermath caused a drastic rethink of her priorities and modus operandi.

Perhaps her close, personal relationship with dedicated Redbacks skipper Graham Manou even had something to do with that.

Whatever the reason, it is obvious Tamsyn undertook the drastic changes need to restore her credibility.

One of those was clearly the decision to be coached in future by her brother, Justin.

Another seems to have been to increase her workload – which has never been light – even further.

But although she effortlessly captured the 400 and 800 metres titles at the Olympic trials two weeks ago, few considered she could, pushing 30, improve on her dismal international record.

Fewer still even knew she was in Spain for the world indoors.

And only a handful might have cared.

But when, on Sunday, a gap opened 350 metres from home

in the final she never expected to make, Lewis had a split second to seize it or play safe and hope for a place.

In truth, she didn't have to make that decision. Instinct did it for her. Instinct born of new-found confidence and supreme fitness.

So now Tamsyn Lewis is a ridgy-didge, dinky-di world champion. An indoors one to be sure. But a world champion nonetheless.

All of which means public expectation and scrutiny will intensify even further as the countdown to Beijing diminishes.

Previously, Lewis has wilted under its glare. And maybe she will this time too.

But it at least behoves all of us who have pilloried her in the past to now appropriately recognise her persistence and laud her courage.

To remember, too, that back in Athens, a long-suffering 34-year-old British athlete called Kelly Holmes finally silenced her career critics for good by winning both the 800 and 1500 metres gold medals.

Showing, yet again, how anything is possible when belief is finally added to talent and unbridled industry.