

Snowsill's smile is pure gold.



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AUSTRALIA'S Emma Snowsill won gold in the women's triathlon at the Commonwealth Games today, smiling and hugging spectators before crossing the finish line before paying tribute to family and friends.

The 24-year-old pocket rocket from the Gold Coast, who weighs just 48kg, lost her soulmate and training partner Luke Harrop four years ago when he was killed by a car when they were on a training ride. "I've been through many injuries and had some tough life experiences for a young person that I've drawn on to get me here today, and it's made me what I am," Snowsill said, adding that Loretta, Luke's sister another Australian triathlon star, had been particularly inspirational.

Full of emotion as she approached the finish, Snowsill draped herself in the Australian flag to the cheers of a delighted crowd at Melbourne's St Kilda pier before lifting the finish tape over her head and ending Australia's Games gold hoodoo.

Having added the gold medal to her World Championship success in Japan last September and despite dominating at world events over the years, an Australian had never won gold at Olympic or Commonwealth Games gold until today, something of an anomaly in world sport.

Tiny Snowsill finished the 1.5km swim, 40km cycle and 10km run in a time of 1hr 58min 4sec ahead of New Zealand pair Samantha Warriner (1hr 58min 38sec), who took silver, and Andrea Hewitt (1hr 58min 46sec), who was third.

The Australian broke clear in the running segment with about five kilometres left to go.

Despite already being the current World Champion, a gold medal at a major Games will surely rank as her finest moment, and she paid tribute to the crowd at St Kilda who roared her home.

"I could feel the energy of the crowd and everyone cheering me on," she said.

"It was a unique experience. I hope today I've just done Australia proud."

Competing at her first Commonwealth Games, Snowsill had also won the Noosa Triathlon and Oceania Cup in Tasmania last month plus a third at a World Cup in New Zealand in November, as proof her form was right for Melbourne 2006.

But she admitted she wasn't comfortable for large chunks of the race. "Traditionally I like to run really hard out of the last transition," she said. "but today, I felt too cold to do that. I felt terrible until about six kilometres into the run. "The wind-chill factor was really bad. The first five kilometres, I really struggled and it was the crowd that really got me going".

Being from the Gold Coast, the chilly Melbourne breeze certainly would have been a test for Snowsill, but silver medal winner Warriner described the Aussie's performance as just "awesome".

"I knew (Snowsill) would be strong today. I tried to stay with her as long as I could in the run, but I just couldn't," the Kiwi said. "My goal today was a podium."
