

## **MARATHON EFFORT BY SYDNEY LADY**

Jim Pollard, The Nation, 22 November 2002

Early on Sunday morning, while the bulk of Bangkok is still fast asleep, a young Australian woman will undertake the most gruelling endeavour in her short and relatively undistinguished sporting career.

Megan Payne, 28, will join up to 10,000 others - including a number of top international distance runners - at the start of one of Thailand's leading athletic events, the Bangkok Marathon.

Like many of the other starters, Payne, who has lived in Bangkok for two years, completed the Pattaya and Kanchanaburi half marathons in recent months. And several recent training runs have topped 30 kilometres.

A sporting fanatic who has played cricket, touch football, basketball and tennis, Payne has completed more than a dozen triathlons back in Sydney.

But even these efforts - completing a 500-metre swim, 20km bike ride and 5-kilometre run, in times under two hours - will be dwarfed by the feat she and the thousands of other running "freaks" line up for at 3am on Sunday. You won't see her thin 52kg frame among the leaders, who are expected to stream home in under two and a half hours. It will be well and truly daylight when the young Aussie staggers across the finish line, near the Grand Palace in Banglamphu.

That's because Sunday's effort is a fund-raising event, and her personal expression of "thanks" to Sister Joan Evans - the Australian nun she was worked with in the Klong Toey slums since early 2001.

"I imagine I'll be sore and sorry. But I hate not completing goals I set myself. The time it takes me is not in the equation - just finishing is my aim," she said this week.

"As with doing a triathlon - you start it, you finish it.

"It doesn't matter how much it hurts."

Megan Payne's goal is actually financial - 500,000 baht - to get a new four-door utility for Sister Joan, who uses the vehicle to transport sick and elderly slum dwellers to hospital.

Half of that money looks to have been raised already, helped by a A\$5000 (Bt110,000) donation from one supporter in Western Australia.

And another of sponsor in Sydney has wagered A\$25 (450 baht) for every kilometre Payne can cover.

"I've had an incredibly good time here and learnt a heck of a lot from Sister. She has this ability to help anyone."

Sister Joan, 71, will be there at the start - and the finish (although she might sneak home for a brief snooze in between). "I think it's just stupendous," she said.