

## FROM THE ARCHIVES – THE 1992 OLYMPIC SELECTIONS

The 1992 Australian Olympic Games racewalk selections are remembered as the most controversial ever and are well worth a revisit.

### The 50km Saga

Simon Baker had been preselected for the 1992 Olympic 50 km event after his wonderful 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish in the 1991 Racewalking World Cup (3:46:36) in Barcelona. Thus two places remained for the other Australian contenders. With Andrew Jachno recovering from glandular fever (see below), the opening was there for the next group of walkers led by Victorians Dariusz Wojcik, Craig Brill and Michael Harvey.

There was no stated time to beat to make the team although 3:58:00 was a time being given some importance. The selection requirement was that athletes had to demonstrate that they could finish in the top 16 at the Olympics. It was all rather vague. Walkers were expected to race an international event against quality opposition and Dudince in Czechoslovakia was the race nominated by Athletics Australia.

In the leadup to the Dudince race, there were a number of 50km times put on the board. Dariusz Wojcik and Craig Brill recorded times of 4:00:38 and 4:02:45 in taking gold and silver in the Australian 50km championship in August 1991. They were the first two again in a January 1992 50km race in Melbourne, Dariusz recording 3:58:30 and Craig improving to 4:00:21. They certainly appeared the front runners for an Olympic berth but 3:58:00 had not yet been breached. To further complicate things, this latter event was besmirched with false accusations that Andrew Jachno had paced his clubmate Dariusz early in the event. Since they were both official entrants and were simply walking together, such an allegation was ridiculous and it left a bad taste in the mouth for many.

And so to the race in Czechoslovakia on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1992 where, although conditions were reasonable, the Australians all fared badly. Dariusz was DQ'd at the 40 km mark while on sub 4 hour pace. Michael Harvey went through the halfway mark in 1:59 but then struggled to eventually finish 15<sup>th</sup> in 4:13:58. Ricky Cook of Queensland and Craig both failed to finish.

Three weeks later, Dariusz and Michael both started another 50km on the track in Bergen, Norway, and again Michael was the only Australian to finish but, alas, not fast enough. After going through 40km in 3 hr 9 min, he faded badly and struggled to walk the last 10km in 65 minutes.

The next week was the Australian 50km championship in May at Knox. Once again Michael was a starter but pulled out at 40km with a hip injury sustained the week before. Willi Sawall was the eventual winner with a time of 4:12:57. It was on this day that Gabrielle Blythe recorded her great 10km time (see below).

Thus time ran out for the other Australian 50km walkers and Simon was our only 1992 50km Olympian. Dariusz has the rather dubious honour of being the only Australian to have broken 4 Hours for the 50km and yet to never have gained an Australian vest.

### The Men's 20 km

The top 20km walkers on paper were Simon Baker, Andrew Jachno and Nick A'Hern and the trial had been set for March 1992, in conjunction with the Australian Track and Field Titles in Sydney. The 20km trial would be held on the Thursday and the 5000m track championship would be held on the Sunday.

But things were not good in the Jachno camp as Andrew had contracted glandular fever in the 1991 winter season and been forced to withdraw from the 1991 IAAF World Championship team as the illness lingered. As 1992 started, he seemed to have overcome his illness when a critical nerve problem put his athletic career on hold again. Applying ice to a sore knee, he froze one of the key nerves in the knee and electrical impulses to the shin were impaired. The diagnosis – wait for it to repair naturally – the timeframe 3 to 6 months.

With his preparation in tatters, he looked like missing the Olympic 20 km trial. AIS physio Peter Stanton came to the rescue and devised a contraption using a bicycle inner – the tube was attached to the shoelaces and taped under the kneecap. The result – the toes were held firm at 90° to the shin and he had the necessary control to pull the foot forward. Some people questioned the legality of the device but it was ruled by Athletics Australia to be within the rules.

The trial went as expected. After trailing Dave Smith and Nick early, Simon stormed home to win by nearly a minute in 82:16. Nick was second in 83:13 and Andrew took 3<sup>rd</sup> place in 83:36. All three were under the A standard and Simon now had the option of both events for the Olympics. Predictably, he chose to concentrate on the 50km event and forgo the 20km. This left Nick and Andrew as the likely Olympic 20km representatives.

A few days later the Australian 5000m track title saw an unforgettable three way tussle between Andrew, Dave Smith and Simon. Dave eventually won in 19:23 with Andrew crossing the line in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, only a couple of seconds behind, only to find that referee Jill Huxley had ruled his support strap illegal and disqualified him.

This raised a whole new controversy as to whether his 20km place should be reviewed. But common sense prevailed and the 20km result was ratified. He was named in the Olympic B squad and, with the shin responding to treatment, he was off to Europe to chase further performances to confirm his selection. In May he had a series of races that showed he was regaining form. First he placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in the German Olympic Games 20 km trial in 1:21:37, then followed this up with 38:49 for 2<sup>nd</sup> place in a road 10 km event in Copenhagen and a week later finished 4<sup>th</sup> in a track 20 km in Bergen, recording 1:21:34.1 for a new Victorian record. This confirmed his selection and he joined Nick A'Hern in the Olympic 20km team.



**Athletics Essendon team mates – Dariusz did 3:58:30 but missed out on Olympic 50km selection while Andrew had to make use of an experimental lower leg splint to get his 20km berth**

### **The Women's 10km Walk**

It was not easy for Australians to be selected for this first Olympic walk for women. Although the I.O.C. had set a B standard of 48:00 and an A standard of 46:30, Australia had set its own standard of 45:30. The womens walk was the only event which warranted such special treatment.

Kerry Saxby-Junna was expected to be a shoe-in and Lorraine Jachno was expected to be the next most likely for Olympic selection. Lorraine had been gradually improving over the previous few years, including fourth place in the 1990 Commonwealth Games 10km in Auckland. Then on 19<sup>th</sup> May 1991 she recorded a road time of 45:25 in Melbourne on her way through to 15 km. This bettered her previous PB of 46:02, set in May 1989, and gave her that all important Olympic qualifier. She decided to postpone her family plans and try for one final big competition.

The trial was held in Sydney in March 1992 in Sydney. Kerry gave a great exhibition to win in 43:03 and was an obvious selection. Second place went to NZ walker Anne Judkins with Lorraine third in 46:56, Gabrielle Blythe fourth in 47:49, Sue Cook fifth in 47:51 and Nat Camplin sixth in 48:00. With Lorraine as the second Australian in the official trial and with an Australian Olympic qualifier already under her belt, we expected to see her name announced in the official lists. It was with some astonishment that we read that Lorraine had only been given a B grade selection, meaning that she had to confirm her place with other qualifying performances. She did this twice, firstly in Melbourne on the road (45:24) and then in Bergen in Norway on May 16 on the track (45:26). Her Bergen time was a new Victorian record and she beat the Chinese girl who went on to win the 1992 Olympic walk. Surely this was enough to satisfy the selectors!

The situation changed radically while Lorraine was in Europe. Fellow Victorian Gabrielle Blythe, who had been convincingly beaten by Lorraine in the trial, won the Australian 20 km title in Melbourne on May 24 in 1:40:02. In this race, her first 10 km split had been 44:21. She then backed this up with 44:27 in La Coruna in Europe.

The selectors were faced with the choice – which one of Lorraine and Gabrielle to select. The answer seemed obvious to us – both girls had repeatedly beaten the tough Australian standard and both deserved selection. There was consternation when Lorraine was left out of the team in favour of Gabrielle. Was the decision political (Gabrielle was at the AIS and Lorraine was not) or did they choose a younger walker instead of an older walker (Lorraine was 32). In any case, much discussion occurred behind closed doors. Lorraine had been led to believe that

a time under 45:30 would gain her selection and she had met this criteria on 3 separate occasions. Her subsequent omission from the 1992 Olympic team rates as one of the blackest moments in Australian walking history.

By way of comparison, 3 women athletes were selected to compete in the 200m and in the 400m so it was not as if 3 selections in one event was not possible.



**Gabrielle Blythe (left) and Kerry Saxby-Junna (middle) made the inaugural women's Olympic 10km walk but Lorraine Jachno (right) was controversially left out**

**Postscript**

Following such turmoil, it was perhaps not surprising that the Australian 1992 Olympic walk performances were mediocre. Andrew Jachno and Gabrielle Blythe had been forced to chase times in Europe in the leadup to the Games and not surprisingly both subsequently walked personally disappointing Olympic races in what turned out to be their last international appearances. Nick A'Hern was diagnosed with a hyper-active thyroid gland soon after his Olympic trial performance in April (explaining why he had been so tired for some time) and an operation was required in April to remove a tumour from his neck. He bounced back but again his Olympic performance was below his usual high standard. Only Simon Baker and Kerry Saxby-Junna could break into the top twenty with Olympic placings of 19<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> respectively.

Nicholas A'HERN (NSW)	20 km Walk	22/42	1:31:39.0
Andrew JACHNO (VIC)	20 km Walk	31/42	1:36:49.0
Simon BAKER (VIC)	50 km Walk	19/43	4:08:11.0
Gabrielle BLYTHE (VIC)	10 km Walk	31/44	50:13.0
Kerry SAXBY-JUNNA (NSW)	10 km Walk	15/44	46:01.0



**Left – Simon Baker collapses on crossing the finish line in the 1992 Olympic 50km walk  
Right – Lorraine Jachno and Simon Baker spectating at the 2006 Commonwealth Games 50km walk in Melbourne**