

KEN WALTERS (C 26), JACK OF ALL SPORTS AND MASTER OF MANY

It is with sadness that I write of the death of Kenneth Joseph (“Ken”) Walters in Melbourne on Friday 14th September 2018. Born 19th September 1932 in Benalla in country Victoria, Ken passed just 5 days short of his 86th birthday, marking the end to what has been an outstanding life of sporting excellence and service.

Although born in the country, his family soon moved to South Melbourne where his father worked as a baker, and then to Upwey, in April 1940. Ken was to spend the rest of his life living in and around this eastern suburb of Melbourne, nestled in the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges.

Ken’s first love was professional cycling which he took up as a 15 year old in 1947, soon after leaving school. He competed with distinction until 1962, racing in Australia’s most famous professional tour, the Sun Tour, on a number of occasions, at times winning his division of the 1955 Sun Tour and taking honours in a number of the sprints.



Ken leads the peleton in one of the many professional races in which he competed

It was not an easy life by any means as he worked two jobs, toiling early morning as a milkman and then plying his trade as a baker during the day, before getting on the bike in the evening to fit in whatever training he could in what remained of the day

The great photo shown below, published in the Melbourne Herald Sun, was taken during the 1954 Sun Tour and was captioned '*Alone at the Top*'. It shows Ken changing his tyre at the top of Mt Hotham. The support cars had been stopped by a snow drift lower down the mountain and Ken was on his own when he punctured. The really amazing thing is the road surface – not the bitumen we take for granted nowadays – it was shale and loose rock. It is tough enough riding up a mountain over such terrain but imagine going down the other side at speed. They certainly bred them tough in those days.



Ken eventually gave the bikes away in 1962 – he was 30 years of age, had been riding for some 15 years and recently newly married with new responsibilities. He and Judy would go on to raise their four boys Andrew, Matthew, Ken and Stuart and would work as a wonderful team for over 50 years, until Judy was sadly taken by cancer in 2015.

Although Ken had given up cycling, he was not ready to forgo his sporting endeavours and immediately moved onto squash. A year later, as captain of the Ringwood team, he helped them to their first squash pennant.

Within a couple more years, in 1965, he was extending himself even further and 'bluffed his way' into a career as a boundary umpire with the Victorian Football League (VFL). After officiating in two grand finals, he was encouraged to step up to field umpiring and he continued in this role each winter until 2007 when he was forced to retire with *planta fasciatis*. That added up to 41 years – not a bad effort in anyone's books!

As his family grew, Ken and Judy started them in Little Athletics as members of the Sherbrooke Little Athletics Club. As the club grew to 90 members, Ken realised that, rather than compete at the Knox Little Athletics Centre, there was scope to expand to a new centre. After socialising the idea with all the local primary schools in the Sherbrooke area, he founded the Sherbrooke Little Athletics Centre which opened in 1970 with him as the inaugural Secretary. In the first season, the centre boasted 450 participants. As an aside, both Ken and Judy were honoured with life memberships of Sherbrooke Little Athletics Club.

Ken realised that no one at the new centre knew anything about racewalking and that they lacked any qualified walk judges so, in 1971, he attended an inspiring seminar in Marysville given by racewalking coach Frank McGuire. This marked Ken's introduction to walking and he subsequently took on the role of racewalking coach with the Sherbrooke Little Athletics Club.

The club trained at an old grass track in Sherbrooke and Ken soon decided that it was not really good enough for walking, so he took his training group down to the synthetic track at Ringwood. While there, he was approached by local identity Charlie Gorman who asked whether he was willing to expand his training group to take on some Ringwood kids. Ken of course agreed and he soon had a 40 strong training group.

With such a large group of walkers now training in Ringwood, he decided that there was a need to provide something further in the local area and in 1979 he founded Proclamation Park Walkers Club. When interviewing him in 2010, he reminisced that in the early days before the Ringwood track had lights, the walk judges had to use torches to judge the walkers when evening events were scheduled!

This new club gave him the opportunity to take older walkers under his wing and it was in this context that he coached Paul Copeland to a win in the Australian Under 18 Trackwalk Championship in 1983. This was the start of an exciting time for Ken, as he helped Paul develop into one of our best ever walkers, with an international career that stretched from 1986 to 1997. Other international walkers who came under his guiding wing during this period included Lorraine Young and Wendy Muldoon.

Ken was also heavily involved in the Victorian Veteran's Association at this time, both on the track and on the road. In the 1980's he founded the "Bushrangers Classic" 100km team relay run in which teams of 5 runners each ran four 5km legs around the Dandenong Ranges east of Melbourne. In the very first year of this event, 26 teams competed. Judy and Ken used to map out the course each year and they kept running it for 8 years until eventually the increasing traffic spelt the end of what had been a very successful concept.

He was one of the key organisers of the World Veteran Games in Melbourne in 1987 and introduced individualised lapscoreing for all the longer walk and run events. This is still used today in Australian Masters events and has stood the test of time as an efficient way to manage such events.

Ken was never one to forgo a challenge. When holidaying one year in central Victoria, he saw an advertisement for the "4 Peaks" alpine run which challenges the Porepunkah, Hotham, Feathertop and Buffalo mountains. He entered and finished the gruelling run, completing it 7 further times in subsequent years.

In the early 1990's, he joined the Professional Runners Cross Country club to take on yet another challenge. Over the course of his first season with the club, he improved his 10km time by 7m 30s and won 20th anniversary staging of the Murchison 10km Handicap event.

With the interest generated by the Sydney to Melbourne Westfield runs, a golden period ensued for Australian ultra distance running and, with his new found running fitness, Ken decided to test himself over the longer distances. He fronted for the annual Victorian 50 Mile championship and, in his first year, he won the novice section at Princes Park with a very impressive 7h 01m. The next year, he was included in the elite section at the Box Hill track and improved his time to 6h 48m.

His introduction to centurion walking came by accident. While at a walkers club event at Albert Park, he saw a poster advertising the annual 100 mile walk to be held at the Collingwood Harriers Track in Clifton Hill in October 1994 and he expressed an interest. Someone told him that he had no hope and so a \$10 bet was laid and he was committed.

The annual 100 mile walk was a small affair in those days and Ken was one of only 7 walkers who toed the line for the Saturday 1PM start. I remember the weekend well as Melbourne turned on its usual fickle weather. The race started in cool windy conditions which soon turned to rain which then fell intermittently over the afternoon. As night fell and the wind continued unabated, the temperature plummeted and competitors were forced to put on layers of clothing to protect themselves from the bitter conditions. It was not until the early hours of the morning that the wind dropped and we were greeted with a much improved Sunday. At least those remaining had good conditions and even some sunshine for the final morning of the event.

Of the four remaining on the track, all finished the event and the first three reached the elusive 100 mile mark, thus becoming centurions. The first two placings were taken by Queenslanders. Peter Bennett walked an amazing race, never showing any real distress and finishing strongly in an outstanding time of 19:42:54. By way of contrast, Andrew Ludwig had to survive a very torrid second half in which leg problems nearly spelt failure. To his credit he never contemplated pulling out or giving up and he struggled home with a 100 mile time of 22:26:09.

The third walker to complete the hundred was Ken. He had his race well planned and all went according to the script for the first 12 hours. He set off at 3:00 min laps and had a 30 min break at the 5 hour mark. Then back on the track and onto the 50 mile mark in 10:31:40. Another major break of 45 mins and he was off again for the second half. However, it was soon apparent that Ken was quietly suffering and he withdrew into himself as he battled the body in an effort to keep going. Opinion was that he was gone at about 60 miles and would not last much longer. But as the night ended, Ken was still to be seen on the track and looking more in control. A short break at the 20 hour mark and he stormed home with 3 min laps over the last 100 laps. He knew Andrew Ludwig was within striking distance and he got to within one lap as the two reached the 99 mile mark. In what was perhaps the closest finish in any of our 100 milers, Ken finished about 300m behind Andrew to take third place in the fine time of 22:28:31. However, the effort was apparent as he was helped back to his support tent. Like Andrew's performance, it had been a battle of mind and body as the mind had been forced to override the normal limits of endurance.

The fourth walker still on the track when the final gun fired was Carmela Carassi, a complete newcomer to such a demanding discipline. Her final distance of 92 miles 992 yards was the greatest distance walked by any Australian woman and she returned the next year to successfully complete her hundred and become a centurion.



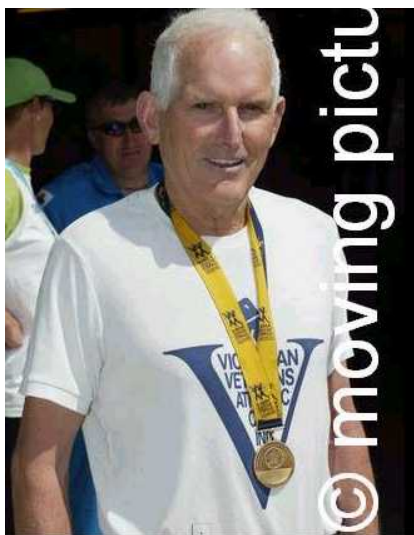
The 4 finishers – Peter Bennett, Carmela Carrassi, Ken and Andrew Ludwig

Around this time, Ken and Judy took on a new challenge – running Strawberrys Cafe in Ferny Creek. A regular post-run breakfast spot for the running fraternity, the venue was always packed on a Sunday morning and, for the next four years, they were kept busy by the demands of running a successful small business.

As mentioned above, Ken has been involved in the Veterans athletics movement since the early 1980s and he competed in a number of World Veterans and World Masters Games, winning medals on numerous occasions.

1983 World Veterans Championships, New Zealand	Competed in Marathon (M50)
1987 World Masters Games, Melbourne	20km walk 2 nd , 5000m walk 3 rd , Teams gold (M55)
1989 Oceania Masters Games, Norfolk	10km walk 1 st (M55)
1999 World Veterans Games, Gateshead	20km walk, 5 th (M65)
2001 World Veterans Games, Brisbane	20km walk 4 th , Teams gold (M65)
2002 World Masters Games, Melbourne	5000m walk 2 nd , 20km walk 1 st (M70)

I have fond memories of our time together at the 2001 World Veterans Games in Brisbane, when we shared a cabin in a local caravan park.



Ken at the World Masters Games in Melbourne in 2002 after winning the M70 20km walk

While Ken retired from active racewalking in the early 2000's, his involvements on his many other fronts did not cease but actually intensified. His cheerful outlook and positive energy belied his age and he remained involved at the Eastwood Golf Bowls Club, still coached (when called upon) in the sport of racewalking, still commentated at the Victorian Masters championships, still helped put out the monthly "Around The Grounds" magazine and was still venue co-manager for the Victorian Masters Croydon venue.

In 2000 Ken took up the sport of Lawn Bowls with Upwey-Tecoma, playing pennant for many years. Always one to be involved, he very quickly became a busy volunteer, organising the Sunday smorgasboard, President of the club, Chairman of Selectors and even the cleaner. His scones were famous and a highlight of the Wednesday afternoon social bowls.

On the racewalk coaching front, his more recent protégées included Rhydian Cowley who went on to earn Australian vests in both World Championship and Olympic level. He was regarded as one of our most knowledgeable and successful coaches and as someone who had an eye for fixing poor walking styles, something that eluded many coaches.

And of course, Ken was always on hand with his old mate Les Clarke at our centurion events, looking after many of our ultra walkers. And of course he always stayed up all night!



Ken hands some refreshments to Peter Bennett in the 2010 100 mile walk at Coburg

His many and varied works were recognised by Life Memberships of the Victorian Masters Athletics Association, the Sherbrooke Little Athletics Club, the Upwey Tecoma Bowls Club and the Eastern Football League.



Ken on the occasion of his Life Membership with the Upwey Tecoma Bowls Club in 2015

Ken died on the morning of Friday 14th September 2018, just a week short of his 86th birthday. For the last 12 months of his life, Ken had resided in the Villa Maria Nursing Home in Berwick.

We pass on our condolences to his boys Andrew, Matthew, Ken and Stuart, along with their families and children.

We remember Ken as a Jack Of Many Sports and a Master of Most.

Tim Erickson
Thursday 19th September 2018