

BOB CRUISE



Bob Cruise was playing football at Macdonald Reserve in Coburg on a Sunday afternoon in 1952 with some friends when he was approached by a man asking if he would be interested in playing with the Paramount Football Club, based at Merylstown (North Coburg). The man was Neville Sillitoe. Neville was touring the football grounds around Coburg looking for recruits for his football team.

Bob joined the club (going on to win the Northern Districts Under 14 Best and Fairest) and it was during this time that Neville suggested he take up athletics. This he did, joining Coburg Harriers for the 1953-54 season where he was initially coached by well known club identity George Price. Bob remembers him as tough and it is probably fair to say he did not always do as instructed.

Coincidentally, it was also Neville Sillitoe who, in 1945, had approached a young Ray Smith and invited him to try out for Coburg Harriers. In a happy twist of fate, Ray became an international judge once he retired as a racewalker and he then guided Bob Cruise into the world of racewalk judging many years later.

The 1954 Annual Report of Coburg Harriers said:

'ROBERT CRUISE'. 14 Years: 3rd in Victoria Under 17 Hop Step and Jump. Finalist in Under 17 220 yards championship. Robert has been one of the most consistent of our junior athletes and was able to compete in nearly all events on the programme. He often scored the best performance of the day in the broad jump, discus, hop step and jump and the 100 yards. As Robert has years to run in the Under 17 division he has a headlong start over the other lads. Third in the Under 17 Broad Jump.

Bob was a multi-talented youngster. While attending Coburg Technical School, he won the Technical Schools Interschool Athletics Carnival Under 14 75 yard sprint and came equal first in the High Jump. He was also involved with some success in competitive football and cricket.

Coburg Technical School was not sufficiently developed to provide a third form (year 9) so Bob enrolled at Preston Technical School. The Preston Technical School Magazine of 1955 has him listed as a School Prefect, as well as a member of the school football, cricket, swimming and athletics teams. He was also a member of the Airforce training Corp (the Airforce cadets).

His athletics performances as a 15 year old were pretty good: 100 yards in 10.6 secs, Long Jump approximately 6.40m and 220 yards in 24.2 secs. These may not mean much by today's standards but they were more significant then when running on grass tracks and jumping on poorly maintained run ups.

In the mid 1950's, he began playing cricket with Coburg Cricket Club and continued, albeit spasmodically, for many years

playing at all levels. The 1972 Annual General Report of the Coburg Cricket Club lists him as winner of the Third Eleven Batting average and in 1974/75 winning the Club XI batting average. Bob always regarded himself as a better bowler.

Returning to Melbourne in the early 1970's after a stint teaching mathematics in Victorian country technical schools, he became increasingly involved in Little Athletics due to his children's involvement. His eldest son Dean began competing around 1970 when 8 years old so Bob joined the Coburg Little Athletics Club.

He hoped that Dean would develop as a sprinter but Dean wanted to try race walking. After a lacklustre first few efforts, it clicked and Dean won the Centre 800m walk championship. It was then that Bob decided he needed to find out more about racewalking if he was to be able to help him in the future. With a budding future 'star', he was hooked.

I remember Dean well as a young lean red haired walker with a very good turn of speed. He still holds a number of Coburg Harriers club records: U16 3000m walk (14:19 1977), U17 1500m walk (6:31 1979), U18 1500m walk (6:25.3 1980), U19/U20/Open 1500m walk (6:05 1981) and U19/U20/Open 3000m walk (12:44.8 1981). Alas, like so many talented young athletes, he went to work post-school and found it just too hard to juggle his many commitments. Walking was the one that suffered as he left our sport.

Throughout the seventies, Bob was prominent as an administrator in the Victorian Little Athletics scene. In 1974-1976 and again in 1979-1980, he was President of Coburg Little Athletics Centre. He also served terms as Competition Director, Treasurer and Secretary. He also served as Chairman of the Northern Metropolitan Little Athletics Region (2 years) and Chairman of the Victorian Little Athletics Race Walking Committee (6 years). Fittingly, he was eventually awarded a Life Membership of Coburg Little Athletics Centre in 1977.

As Dean moved from Little Athletics to Seniors (Little Athletics ceased after U12 at that stage) Bob became involved as a judge at seniors (Ray Smith was his mentor) and, following the walks, he usually sat on the surrounds of the track watching his son participate in other events. Watching the competitors in the throwing events, he decided to have a go himself. He quickly became a good thrower and still holds the Coburg Harriers M35 records for javelin, discus, shot put and hammer throw (1976/1977).

He began coaching and judging whilst with Coburg Little Athletics Centre and continued both later when with Coburg Harriers.

In the early 1980s Bob moved to Alice Springs and was immediately engulfed in coaching and administration. He also coached any event where a child had an interest, including race walking. Whilst in Alice Springs, he became coach of the Territory Team for the National Little Athletics Championships in Melbourne in 1987, where NT walkers won three of the six walking medals on offer.

A career move to Mildura in Victoria in 1987 saw Bob once again involved with the local athletic community. It was here that his training group became 20 or more and where he was able to 'produce' numerous underage Victorian champions in events ranging from horizontal jumps to throws to walks. Whilst in Mildura he was awarded the Northern Mallee Sports Coach of the Year on three occasions, in 1995, 1997 and 1998.

Following retirement from his position as Chief Executive Officer/Director of Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, he moved to Adelaide where he has since resided.

From the late seventies, Bob was prominent on the Australian circuit as a racewalking judge, travelling to all the major national championships, normally at his own cost, and gaining valuable experience and knowledge. His efforts were rewarded in 1982 when he gained a place on the IAAF International Panel of Walk Judges. He maintained his spot in this elite group until his eventual retirement in 2014.

As an international race walking judge, he officiated at 2 Olympic Games (2000 and 2004), five Commonwealth Games (1982, 1990, 1998, 2002 and 2006), two World Race Walking Cups (1999 and 2006), one World Junior Championships (1994) and one World Youth Championship (2003). And of course he got guernseys in many other international meets around the world.

He went one step further in 1996 when he became a member of the IAAF Race Walking Committee, a position he held until 2004.

Bob has been active as a coach for over 50 years, an amazing feat! Starting with Little Athletics, he has coached many State and National underage champions as well as a number of athletes who have represented Australia at World Youth Olympics, World Juniors and World Race Walking Cup competitions. Additionally he has acted as a technique advisor to a number of senior Australian representatives.



Bob takes some of his walkers through a video analysis (via ipad) of their performances, following a club event



Bob with medal winners at South Australian Little Athletics Championships Circa 2013

He has also been heavily involved in coach and judge education and remains the 'go-to man' for the many Australian and Oceania racewalk judging seminars. A member of the Australian Track and Field Coaches Association for over 30 years and a Level 4 Athletics Australian Accredited Coach, he is still in high demand in his 'retirement'.

As if this level of contribution was not enough, Bob has done stints as a National and State Selector and as a member of the Athletics Australia Racewalking Committee.

While many of us might dream of a quiet retirement, Bob has continued his active involvement on many fronts since his move to Adelaide. He even put in a stint as Chief Executive Officer of Athletics SA. In recent years, as his judging career has come to a close, he has increased the size of his coaching squad and now looks after a large group of young South Australian walkers.

From a professional perspective, Bob has done it all, with stints as a successful senior manager, a lecturer, a Chief Executive and a Principal in the higher education sector, an engineer, a small business owner, a business consultant, the manager of a theatre restaurant, a Child Care Centre, a motel and restaurant and even an automotive business. His experience embraces both large and small business, profit and non-profit, government and non-government.

Bob's awards are many and varied

- Life Member, Coburg Little Athletics Centre (1976/77)
- Coach of the Year, Mallee Sports Assembly (1995,1997 & 1998)
- Reconciliation Award, On behalf of Sunraysia Institute of TAFE (circa 1992)
- Member, Who's Who in American Universities and Colleges (1991)
- Australian Sports Medal (2000)
- Life Member, Athletics Australia (2008)
- Merit Award, Oceania Athletic Association (2014)
- Civic Award, City of West Torrens (2015)
- Life Member, Athletics SA (2016)

His academic qualifications are enough to make the eyes water: Ph.D. (1992), M.Ed. (1987), B.Ed. (1976), B.Sc. (1972), Diploma of Mech. Eng. (1963) and a Trained Technical Teachers Certificate (1963). They show a life spent learning.

Most of us are pleased if we gain prominence in one field. Bob's contribution on so many fronts, in widely varying sporting, academic and professional fields, mark him as a prolific high achiever. And he's also a racewalk supporter and enthusiast. What more can you ask.

Thanks Bob for your many years contributing to our sport of racewalking. May you have many more!