

BRENDON READING – 2016 OLYMPIAN

2008 Race Walking World Cup	Junior 10km Walk	39/63	39 th	45:24
2011 Universiade	20km Walk	16/25	16 th	1:30:26
2016 Olympic Games	50km Walk	TBA		

When Brendon Reading finished 2nd Australian in the 2016 Olympic 50km selection trial (Dec 2015) in Melbourne and was subsequently announced as the third Australian walker for the Rio Olympics 50km, people might have been justified in asking “Who is Brendon Reading?” After all, this breakthrough performance was only his second 50km race and a 24 minute PB from his first 50km race in December 2014. In many people's minds, he had burst from relative obscurity.

So it is time to put the magnifying glass to Brendon's career and put that perception to rest. When a walker produces a big performance, it is rarely a surprise to those “in the know” and this was certainly the case for Brendon. It has been a long path to the top for him in a walking career which already spans nearly 15 years.

Brendon was born on Australia Day, 26th January 1989, in Canberra. Now aged 26, he stands at 183cm and weighs in at a lean and lanky 62kg.

Like many Australians, his introduction to athletics was early - his first year of Little Athletics was in Darwin in 1995 as a 6 year old, as his family had moved there for a year for his father's work. When the family moved back to Canberra he continued in Little Athletics, with his main event being the high jump. He started to focus more on racewalking than high jump after the U13 Little Athletics Nationals in Adelaide 2002. At that competition he came last in the High Jump and 1500m run, but was 5th in the walk. Then at the end of the year at All Schools he picked up his first national medal in the walk in the U14 boys 1500m in Hobart.



A young Brendon competing in Melbourne in 2007, aged 18

When I asked Brendon about the early influences on his career, he pinpointed a number

My first coach was Dennis Strangman, who was a coach at my Little Athletics Club. He was probably the best coach I have had in terms of junior development and everything that comes with learning the racewalking technique. He would conduct video analysis of my training sessions and post these online for me to study with comments included.

The next coach I had was Kerry Saxby. She helped me transition from being a good 1500m track walker at the Little Athletics age groups, training twice a week, to training 4-5 times a week, with key targeted training sessions. I would do one track session with Kerry (10 x 400m), one 8km steady walk, and one hill session (3 x 1200m hill) with Kerry. Then another few sessions at home or with the AIS group.

Once I started to reach the end of my junior career, I transitioned to training under Brent and the AIS group before Brent handed me over to Chris Erickson in 2010. This was just after I had stepped up to 20km training. As Kerry had a young family, she felt she couldn't put in the time required for me now that I was training full time. It has been great having another athlete as my coach as Chris can pass on his experiences with racing and training to me. I am not one to require constant attention from a coach, which I think works well for both me and Chris as he too juggles his own racewalking career with a young family and job.

Brendon's junior walks career reads impressively - he medalled in All-Schools every year from 2002 (U14) to 2006 (U18) and medalled in most of the Aust underage road and track champs from 2003 (U16) to 2008 (U20), culminating with his 2008 World Cup representation. But he missed out on World Juniors and World Youths – his age group was very competitive and he was just outside the qualifying standards.

I was pretty pleased with my Junior career, being amongst the medals each year. In terms of World Youth or World Juniors, I just wasn't at a level to achieve those standards over 10km. My coach at the time (Kerry Saxby) was very much focused on my long term development in the sport and keeping me interested and enjoying the training. As most of the Australian championships up to U18 were 5000m or below, my training had not been targeted towards walking the 10km standard for world youth. In 2008, I think my PB was around a high 44min, with the World Junior standard being 44.05.

Here's a potted summary of Brendon's underage national level medal placings and times. He was no mug!

Aust All-Schools Medals

2002	U14 1500m	2	7:11.18	Jake Hogan 7:06.79	Brendon Reading 7:11.18	Daniel Coleman 7:15.31
2003	U16 3000m	2	14:03.1	Alan Murray 13:58.42	Brendon Reading 14:03.1	Gregorz Wolszczak 14:09.45
2004	U16 3000m	1	13:28.8		Brendon Reading 13:28.8	Gregorz Wolszczak 13:45.8 David Beach 14:06.5
2004	U18 3000m	3	13:36.06	Matt Harris 13:23.74	Gregorz Wolszczak 13:27.18	Brendon Reading 13:36.06
2004	U20 5000m	2	23:34.08	Matt Harris 23:26.85	Brendon Reading 23:34.08	Alan Murray 23:47.45
2005	U17 3000m	1	13:27.74		Brendon Reading 13:27.74	Daniel Coleman 14:04.26 Cody Attwater 14:17.61
2005	U20 5000m	3	24:43.23	Ian Rayson 22:11.14	Daniel Coleman 24:11.44	Brendon Reading 24:44.23
2006	U18 5000m	3	23:24.53	Daniel Coleman 22:07.83	Kyle Bryant 22:59.25	Brendon Reading 23:24.53

Pacific School Games

2005	U17 3000m	1	13:06.82		Brendon Reading 13:06.82	Brook Keys 13:12.13 Grzegorz Wolszczak 13:21.9
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Australian Underage Medals

2003	Aust U16 5km	3	25:53	Glen Sellen 24.22	Greg Wolszczak 25.46	Brendon Reading 25.53
2004	U16 T&F 3000m	1	14:19.01		Brendon Reading 14:19.01	Daniel Coleman 14.53.91 Greg Wolszczak 15.22.5
2004	U18 T&F 3000m	2	14:04.53	Matt Harris 13.53.00	Brendon Reading 14:04.53	Ian Rayson 14.21.1
2004	U16 5km	1	24:24		Brendon Reading 24:24	Greg Wolszczak 24:57 Daniel Coleman 25:00
2005	U18 8km	3	42:34	Daniel Coleman 39:22	Greg Wolszczak 41:08	Brendon Reading 42:34
2006	U18 8km	3	38:57	Daniel Coleman 36:33	Kyle Bryant 36:45	Brendon Reading 38:57
2006	U20 10km	1	46:45		Brendon Reading 46:45	Brook Keys 50:29 Anson Perin 61:23
2007	U20 10,000m	3	49:16.64	Daniel Coleman 44:55.91	Kyle Bryant 45:12.22	Brendon Reading 49:16.64
2007	U20 10km	1	46:06		Brendon Reading 46:06	Daniel Coleman 46:47 Kyle Bryant 47:57
2008	U20 10,000m	2	45:24.66	Daniel Coleman 44:11.81	Brendon Reading 45:24.66	Sean Fitzsimons 45:29.9
2008	U20 10km	2	46:31	Daniel Coleman 44:19	Brendon Reading 46:31	Daniel Payne 46:50
2009	U23 20km	2	1:30:19	Ian Rayson 1:27:43	Brendon Reading 1:30:19	Rhydian Cowley 1:36:14
2010	U23 20km	2	1:28:08	Ian Rayson 1:27:53	Brendon Reading 1:28:08	Derek Mulhearn 1:33:34
2011	U23 20km	1	1:27:30		Brendon Reading 1:27:30	Rhydian Cowley 1:29:07

The jump from good junior to good senior walker is a big one but it was perhaps helped for Brendon by the presence of the AIS walkers based in Canberra. He first started walking with the group when he was around 16 or 17, which was mainly just joining in for the occasional Wednesday or Saturday walk. At the time he was still being coached by Kerry, but as Canberra didn't have too many walkers around she was more than happy for him to join in with the AIS group.

Further, AIS walks coach Brent Vallance was always supportive of his racewalking career and provided him access to parts of the AIS including the gym and recovery. So whilst he never had a scholarship, he was able to have access to one of the

best training groups in the world, and some of the best facilities. Like so many young athletes, he was also very lucky that his family were able to support his racewalking career, with his mum and dad paying for most of his trips up until he finished university and started working.



Brendon training with Chris Erickson in Arizona, USA, in 1009 – a self funded his trip to USA to train with the AIS walkers.

His two previous international vests were the result of lots of hard training. The first was in 2008 when he was part of the Race Walking World Cup team which went to Cheboksary in Russia. On that occasion he came 39th in the Junior 10km in 45:24. He then had to wait until 2011 for his next vest, which was to the University Games in Shenzhen in China, when he came 16th in the 20km walk in 1:30:26.



2011 – World University Games in Shenzhen

Overall he has medalled in 4 senior Australian Championships, the first 2 over 20km and the next two over 50km.

2012W	Aust 20km	3	1:24:34	Dane Bird-Smith 1:23:28	Rhydian Cowley 1:24:34	Brendon Reading 1:30:42
2013W	Aust 20km	2	1:27:51	Dane Bird-Smith 1:25:43	Brendon Reading 1:27:51	Rhydian Cowley 1:29:31

2014	Aust 50km	2	4:19:30	Chris Erickson 3:56:38	Brendon Reading 4:19:30
2015	Aust 50km	2	3:55:03	Chris Erickson 3:54:10	Brendon Reading 3:55:03 Ian Rayson 3:55:17

Fast forward to December 2015 when Brendon stamped his international credentials with his 50km time of 3:55:03. I asked him whether he was surprised at the huge improvement over the previous year.

I have always thought that if I put together some solid training without interruption by injury or sickness, that something around 3.55 would be achievable by the end of 2016. Maybe not during the trial in December though. As I train with Ian (Rayson), I knew that he had been training well, so whilst the Olympic standard was 4.06, I thought it would take something around 3.57 or quicker to beat him and gain Olympic qualification. During my training in November, my long 40kms walks were spent for the majority on my own. I found that during these walks I felt most comfortable settling into my own rhythm rather than trying to walk with others. So in the 50km trial, I had a target pace (9.30 laps or 3.57.30 for 50km) which is what the group held for the first 8km. After that, I could feel the group picking the pace up, so after my experience from the year before (hitting the wall with 10km to go), I was happy to let the group get ahead. From 10km onwards, I had settled in to my own pace which I was able to gradually increase as the race went on. It was around the 30km mark that I knew I was on track for a fast time, and I was still feeling really good, so when I hit the 35km mark I started to really put in the effort to increase the pace. By 42km, I could see that the guys ahead were beginning to look more tired than I felt, so I continued to push the pace. Luckily for me, I had a bit more energy over the closing stages to be able to pass Ian with around 1500m to go. I definitely feel like there could be a bit more there for my next 50km, as its one of those distances/races that you learn so much from each one you do.



Left: 3rd in the 2014 Australian 50km in 4:19:30



Right: 3rd in the 2015 Australian 50km in 3:55:03

The next obvious question: What are your plans for 2016?

I am currently apart of the AIS Supernova nutrition study for the 2nd go around with a large group of international athletes all gunning for RIO selection. My focus at this stage is to put in a performance at the 20km nationals in Adelaide that will see me selected for the World Racewalking Team Championships in Rome (where I would look to do the 20km). If I make the 20km for world cup my year would look a bit like this:

Travel to Flagstaff USA in early April for a month of altitude training before heading to the ETC in Italy a week before world cup.

After world cup I would travel with the Canadians back to Vancouver where I would train with them until the 20th June. We would then all go to Barcelona, Spain, for a week of heat training before going on to St.Moritz, Switzerland, for another stint of altitude training leading into the Olympics.

Around the 30th July, the Australian walkers will head to Florida, USA, for the Athletics Australia Olympics staging

camp where from here we head to RIO.

Brendon works at the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in Plant Biosecurity in Canberra but I can see some serious extended leave coming up in 2016!

His PBs read pretty well for a young walker at the beginning of his international career. I have no doubt that I shall be revisiting these stats sooner rather than later.

1500m	5:47	14/10/2010	Interclub, AIS Track, Canberra
3000m	11:56	18/11/2011	Interclub, AIS Track, Canberra
5000m	20:19	19/03/2011	AA Tour Meet, SOPAC, Sydney
10km	41:31	26/11/2015	AIS Track, Canberra
20km	1:24:51	22/04/2011	IAAF Challenge Series Meet, Taicang, China
30km	2:18:49	10/08/2014	International Race, Richmond, Canada
20 mile	2:31:10	120/6/2011	LBG Carnival, Canberra
50km	3:55:03	13/12/2015	Australian 50km Champs, Melbourne

The final words are reserved for Brendon:

My family has always been really supportive of my racewalking. I think dad has only missed one or two of my national races since I started. Since he has retired from work, dad now comes out on the bike to do my drinks each morning and some afternoons. I think this is another aspect that helps with Chris being my coach via correspondence. Dad can keep a close eye on my technique in training (he is a qualified judge), and keep me motivated on those days when I am feeling tired or not in the mood to train.

Well done to team Reading and our best wishes to Brendon for what is shaping up to be an exciting year.

Tim Erickson
Tuesday 12 January 2016