

FOCUS ON NICOLE FAGAN

I have been watching the progress of NSW walker Nicole Fagan for some years now, ever since she represented Australia in the 2008 World Racewalking Cup. With her recent fine form, I thought it time to zoom in and have a chat with her. But first some stats:

Nicole, born 24 July 1989, is currently 21 years of age and has had her best year ever in our sport, recording PBs over all distances and hopefully cementing a place in the 2011 World University Games with her 3rd place in the Australian 20km championships last month. Some of the highlights of her career thus far include

30 Sep 2006	NSW All Schools U18 3000m Walk	14:32.74	1
07 Dec 2006	Australian All Schools U18 5000m Walk	25:35.01	2
26 Jan 2008	Canberra Classic U20 10000m Walk	52:34.00	1
14 Mar 2008	Australian All Schools U20 10000m Walk	50:44.01	3
10 May 2008	IAAF World Cup U20 10000m Walk	49:37	25
30 Aug 2009	Australian Open 20km Championship (Winter)	1:50:40	2
26 Sept 2009	Aust University Games 5000m Walk	24:05	1
30 Jan 2010	Australia Cup Open 5000m Walk	23:49.70	6
13 Feb 2010	Australian U23 20km Championship	1:41:35	1
18 April 2010	Hong Kong MTR Elite 10km Walk	51:21	2
25 Sept 2010	Oceania Championships 10,000m Walk	52:40	1
8 Jan 2011	NSW Open 10,000m Championship	50:39	1
3 Feb 2011	NSW All Comers Meet Open 5000m Walk	22:40	1
19 Feb 2011	Australian Open 20km Championship	1:35:55	3 rd , 1st U23



Left: Nicole on the dias after taking third place in this year's Australian 20km championship behind Claire Tallent and Regan Lamble.

Right: NSW Number One wreath to Nicole, an honour rare to walkers

And now onto some questions that I put to Nicole over the weekend.

When did you start racewalking?

I started walking at Little A's in the U11's and made my first State team in the U13's with Little Athletics (this was also the first-and-only-time I've beaten Jess Rothwell). I competed at a few All-Schools over the years (where Jess beat me at all of them) and usually ended up with silver medal. My first State Title was at Little A's in the U12 and first National Title was of course in the U13's. I played many other sports whilst at school and guess I only really started taking walking seriously when I finished school at the end of 2007 when I had set my sights on the 2008 World Cup team.



Competing at my first State Championship in U11 (I think we should bring back the leotard to walking to enhance the “coolness” of the sport)

Coaches and Influences

My biggest influence without a doubt has been my coach Bill Nappin (or Mr Nappin as referred to by all his athletes). I began training with him when I was 10, just by coincidence when we came across a walks squad at the park around the corner from our house. My parents try to tell me that the 300m walk from home to training would be a good warm up, but I'm lazy and always ask for a lift.

I have also been extremely fortunate to have had some coaching from Brent Vallance (at the AIS camps), Simon Baker, Tim Erickson (at Falls Creek last year) and Dave Smith (at the end of last year in Brisbane). Having seen and experienced how other athletes train had a huge influence on how Mr Nappin and I have developed my programs over the past two years.

My parents, sister and brother have also had a huge influence on me in terms of the support they give (both financial and emotional). I think the training squad (both past and present) have also helped me by making training so enjoyable and fun as well providing encouragement and praise.

In terms of sporting role models, I think the greatest role model to me has been Jess Rothwell. To have raced her throughout school and then to see how much she has achieved in her walking is something I aspire to. Having her as such a good friend has allowed me to see her qualities of dedication, tenacity and commitment as well as her amazing training ethic which has set a precedence for me to follow.

What are your current PBs?

5km	22.40	3/02/11	Homebush
10km	46.38	24/07/10	Tempe
20km	1.35.55	19/02/11	Hobart

Tell me about your training squad.

The training squad is made up of both walkers and middle distance runners from the age of 8 through to 26. Our training sessions are always very entertaining and enjoyable. We usually have one cake every two weeks to celebrate one of the many birthdays of the year. Everyone works really hard, and the variety of ability means that everyone has someone to chase, including the walkers chasing some of the runners. (I also like to hang out with people my own height).

I have also coaching for about 3 years now at Kuringgai Little Athletics. I am very fortunate to have Mr Nappin as my coach as he is very flexible in allowing the athletes I coach to train with the main squad as well as the sessions that I run. I don't understand how anyone could coach an Olympic athlete as I find I get far more nervous watching the athletes I coach than I ever do when competing myself.



Back row: Bethany (runner U17), Em (walker/runner U18), Tash (runner U16), Amy (walker U17), Matt (runner U17), Mr Nappin (coach)
Middle row: Sam (walker/runner U13), Eliza (runner U16), Sophie (walker U11-I co-coach), Sophia (walker/runner U9), myself, Lucy (walker U12-I co-coach), Adam (runner U13)
Front row: Morgan (walker U9), Hayden (walker U11), Harry (walker/runner U10), Josh (runner U10)

What are your career highlights?

Races and events:

U13 LA State Team: This was my first Nationals and I loved being part of the team environment.

World Cup 2008: My first Australian team as part of the Junior 10km with good friends Jess and Regan.



Left to right: Duane Cousins, Regan Lamble, Jess Rothwell, Daniel (Freddy) Coleman, Claire Tallent, me

Hong Kong 2010: This event was so great! The only way I can explain it is the race walking equivalent of the City to Surf or Bridge to Bridge. I have never seen so many people race walking (from children, to business people to grandparents) and cheering on a race walking event.



Brendon Reading and me in Hong Kong

NSW Race Walkers club event July 2010: After a somewhat disappointing nationals last year, Mr Nappin and I decided to chase a qualifier for the Oceania Championships team (48.00 10km). Despite not being a popular choice for walkers, this gave me something to aim and train for throughout the Winter season. I managed a 46.38 on my 21st birthday!

Oceania Athletics Championships 2010: This event was so much fun and definitely something I would recommend other walkers to aim for.



At the Oceania Champs with Chelsea Dartnell (800m runner)

Hobart 2011: Finally a good 20km! Nationals this year has been a long time coming. I feel I've finally managed to put together a good 20km. Now I just have to wait until May for the announcement of the World Uni team as well as the NSWIS scholarships. To get a NSWIS scholarship would be a dream come true for me.

Camps:

AIS: I particularly enjoyed the first camp in 2009. It was great to be able to train with Australia's elite athletes and loved the friendships I made.

Falls Creek, Easter 2010: Highlight of this camp was beating all the 6 year olds in the Cadbury Easter Egg hunt. Everyone's true competitive side showed when we ended up with about 95% of the eggs on offer.



Hilary, me, Steph, Paige, Sarah, Beth and Amy with our egg collection

Brisbane, December 2010: I spent about 2 weeks training with the squad up in Brisbane. This was so much fun and really benefitted me in terms of gaining self confidence and enjoyment in the sport which I had lost at the end of last year. The time I spent in Brissy had a huge influence on my results over the 5km in Sydney and 20km in Hobart this year.

NSW State Relay Championships: As a walker in NSW, I can't go past the NSW State Relay Championships each year. The 4x1500m walk relay is the reason I walk. It is the best event of the year.



From Left to right: James, Harry, Sam, Katherine, Lucy, me, Mr Nappin, Amy, Grace, Caitlin, Ella, Sophie, Aidan at the 2010 State Relay Championships (Sydney Pacific: 1st Open women, 3rd U14 Men, 4th U14 women).

What else are you up to this year?

I'm nearing the end of my uni degree (for now at least) as I'm into my final year of a double degree in psychology and health. This year I get to undertake a health placement which I'm looking forward to. Hopefully I will then be able to make a decision as to whether I pursue a career in health or whether I continue at uni in an psychology honours course and become a qualified psychologist. I've been extremely fortunate to have to have chosen to go to Macquarie University as they are so helpful in supporting "student athletes" and allowing me to achieve high levels academically whilst still participating in sport. I'm also working at Rebel Sport (mainly to get the great discounts).

Describe a typical training week

My training week varies throughout the year. This would be a typical week leading up to a competition:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
AM	5:30-7:30 Swim Squad 6km	Medium Walk ~8km	5:30-7:30 Swim Squad 6km	Medium Walk ~8km	Rest Day! (and fatty Friday where I eat whatever I want)	Long walk ~20km	Hills session with squad ~10km
		Core	Gym			Gym	Core
PM	Long Walk ~15km	Track Session with squad	Medium Walk ~12km	Track Session with squad	(Coaching)	Recover y Swim	Cycle ~30km

Tim Erickson
14 March 2011