



The Australian Athletics community was saddened to hear of the death in Sydney of Ron Crawford last Tuesday 7th August 2018.

Ron, born 26th March 1936, represented Australia as a racewalker in 3 Olympic Games (1956, 1960 and 1964). Retiring after the Tokyo Olympics, he moved into athletics administration, an involvement that continued until his death this month. His association with our sport spanned more than 60 years, during all of which time he remained a loyal member of Randwick Botany Harriers in Sydney. He worked extensively at local, State and National level and was recognised with many awards and accolades.

But more than that, he is remembered as a gentleman, as someone who was approachable and honest and balanced.

For all of this, he will be sadly missed by the many members of our Australian racewalking community.

First to the bare bones of his Olympic representations. In summary, he competed at the 1956 (Melbourne), 1960 (Rome) and 1964 (Tokyo) Olympics, doubling with 20km and 50km walks in all three. His best performances were 11th in the Rome 20km and 11th in the Tokyo 50km. He was aged only 20 years in 1956 when he gained his first Olympic vest.

1956 Olympic Games	20 km Walk	13/24	13 th	1:39:35.0
	50 km Walk	13/23	13 th	5:22:36.0
1960 Olympic Games	20 km Walk	11/36	11 th	1:39:16.2
	50 km Walk		DQ	
1964 Olympic Games	20 km Walk	22/30	22 nd	1:38:47.0
	50 km Walk	11/34	11 th	4:24:19.6

Ron had a wonderful ability to peak when it counted, and that meant producing his best performances in the Olympic trials. This is discussed for each of his 3 Olympic appearances.

1956 Olympics, Melbourne

Ron was aged only 20 years of age in 1956 and a relatively inexperienced walker. He had walked a number of 20km races in nSW and was the current NSW 20km champion, but only with a relatively slow 99:18. Yet, he fronted for both the 20km and 50km trials, and took third place in both, thus gaining Olympic selection against a swathe of older and more experienced walkers.

The Amateur Athletic Union of Australia chose Saturday 14th July 1956 for the 20km Olympic trial. Since the Games would be held in Melbourne, the venue was obvious – a shortened version of the projected Games course in inner Melbourne, on the bitumen sealed roads and footpaths encircling Olympic Park.

The two top walkers for the past 4 to 5 years had been Ted Allsopp and Don Keane and they did not disappoint, clearing out early and definitively taking the first two places. In fact, Ted's time was a new Australian and Victorian best ever time. But the battle for third place was wide open, with young Victorian rising stars Harry Summers and Bob Gardiner together at the 10 km mark, slightly ahead of Ray Smith and Norm Read and well clear of anyone else. As the others faded slightly, Harry looked to have it sewn up at the 16 km mark but he did not bank on Ron who finished like a steam train, overtaking him in the last 1km and ultimately taking third place, 17 seconds ahead of Harry.

Bob Gardiner remembers it thus

I vividly remember the Melbourne 20km trial, Harry had pushed on ahead of me, and I was excited to think that Harry, my training mate, might make the team. Then Ron stormed by. I yelled out "Look out Harry", but to no avail. Ron was unstoppable.

1. Ted Allsopp VIC 94:26.6
2. Don Keane VIC 95:26.0
3. Ron Crawford NSW 97:52.0
4. Harry Summers VIC 98:09.6
5. Robert Gardiner VIC 98:29.0

The 1956 Australian 50 km Championship and Olympic trial was held on the 1956 Olympic Games course on Sunday 9th September 1956, starting and finishing at Olympic Park rather than the MCG. Walking a wonderful race, Ray Smith finished 2nd to New Zealander Norm Read (who went on to win the 1956 Olympic 50 km race). Ray's time of 4:40:24 broke the Australian and Victorian Residential records and won him the Australian Title. Ron was next in with 4:45:19, also under the old record. In fact, the first 3 Australians all bettered Les Hellyer's Australian record of 4:51:04.4.

Next time you travel by car from the city down St Kilda Rd and then up Dandenong Rd to Oakleigh, take a look at the undulating terrain. The number of hills and rises make this one of the toughest courses ever used for an Olympic 50 km event.

1. Norm Read NZ 4:30:16.2
2. Ray Smith VIC 4:40:24.6 1st Australian Championship
3. Ron Crawford NSW 4:45:19.2 2nd Australian Championship
4. Ken Keogh NSW 4:45:35.6 3rd Australian Championship

The Olympic team was duly named, with 4 walkers

Ted Allsopp	20km and 50km
Ron Crawford	20km and 50km
Don Keane	20km
Ray Smith	50km

Ron walked well in both Olympic walks, finishing 13th in the 20km (1:39:35) and 13th in the 50km (5:22:36) in horrendously hot conditions.



Ted Allsopp (centre), Ron (right) and one of the American walkers in the 1956 Olympic 20km walk in Melbourne

Some trivia at this stage. In 1957, the Dominican Republic issued a set of 8 postage stamps featuring 1956 Olympic Champions. One stamp featured 1956 Olympic 50km winner Norm Read of New Zealand. To his left is seen British

walker Don Thompson and on his right is Ron. This was the first time an Australian walker had featured on a postage stamp.



1960 Olympic Games, Rome

Ron had raced consistently during the intervening 4 years since the Melbourne Games, so entered 1960 as a much more confident and more experienced walker.

The 1960 Olympic 20km trial was held in Centennial Park, Sydney, on 7th May 1960. Interestingly, the course was held on a non-standard road loop with 9 ½ laps for the 20km. This added an extra layer of complexity, the competitors not able to easily judge pace by their lap times. Strong winds also buffeted the walkers, adding an additional layer of difficulty. Noel Freeman went in as favourite and lived up to his reputation, leading from start to finish and winning by over 2 minutes. Ted Allsopp had chased Noel early in the race and paid the penalty, eventually being passed by the faster finishing Ron. Ron's ability to finish fast was now becoming well known.

1. Noel Freeman VIC 92:12.4
2. Ron Crawford NSW 94:22.0
3. Ted Allsopp VIC 94:33.4

The 1960 Olympic 50 km trial was held on 5th June 1960 in Mentone (Melbourne), in conjunction with the Australian 50km championship. The same 3 walkers were in contention, with Ted, Ron and Noel shadowing each other after a slow start. When Noel applied the pressure at the 20km mark, neither Ron nor Ted could respond and Noel gradually drew clear, going on to win by over 6 minutes with 4:32:28. Ted, who had been the favourite, eventually cracked, retiring at the 32 km mark. Ron held on as usual, finishing second with a PB 4:38:51.

1. Noel Freeman VIC 4:32:28
2. Ron Crawford NSW 4:38:51
3. Logan Irwin NSW 4:47:50

He has come third in both trials in 1956. Now he had improved to second in both trials. The Olympic team was duly named, with 2 walkers

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|--------------|---------------|
| Noel Freeman | 20km and 50km |
| Ron Crawford | 20km and 50km |

As for the Melbourne Olympics, the Rome Olympics were held in very hot weather, with the two walks contested in high temperatures. Ron improved two places in the 20km walk, finishing 11th with 1:39:16.2. Noel finished second, meaning Australia had done well on the world stage.

Buoyed by their 20km walks, Noel and Ron started confidently in the Olympic 50km, leading from the start, seemingly unworried by the hot conditions. Controversially, they were both disqualified before the 20km mark while still in front. Given Noel's clean judging sheet in the 20km event, his disqualification in the 50km remains a discussion point, as does Ron's disqualification. Ron was regarded as a very fair walker and there had never been any concerns with his technique previously. And, being a 50km, they were not exactly going fast, compared with how they could walk. In retrospect, it seems clear that this was an element of politics in these disqualifications.



Noel and Ron lead the 1960 Olympic 50km before their disqualifications

1964 Olympic Games, Tokyo

The Australian landscape had changed by 1964, with a number of new walkers like Bob Gardiner, Noel Norris and Frank Clark now pushing the likes of Ted and Noel and Ron. A third Olympics would be a much tougher ask.

The 1964 Olympic 50km trial was held alongside the Australian 50km Championship in Adelaide on 6th June 1964. Bob Gardiner broke clear at the 35km mark, going on to win comfortably with 4:24:19, a time that actually bettered the current Olympic 50km record. The chasing group of Ted Allsopp, Frank Clark and Ron soon fragmented, with Ted taking second with 4:30:55, just ahead of Frank (4:31:21), and a long way ahead of Ron who eventually faded to fifth place with 4:41:20.

1.	Bob Gardiner	VIC	4:24:19
2.	Ted Allsopp	VIC	4:30:56
3.	Frank Clark	NSW	4:31:21
4.	Noel Norris	QLD	4:33:28
5.	Ron Crawford	NSW	4:41:00
6.	Logan Irwin	NSW	4:41:20

The 1964 Olympic 20km trial was held on 18th July 1964 in Centennial Park in Sydney. Noel Freeman won the race with 1:34:20, but it was done the hard way. He raced from the front as usual, passing the first 10 km in 42:30. But then he started to cramp and struggled home to just outlast a fast finishing Ron who crossed the line only 30 seconds in arrears. Ron had walked the entire race on his own in second place, and had made up over 2 minutes in the final 2 miles on a slowing Freeman.

1.	Noel Freeman	VIC	94:20
2.	Ron Crawford	NSW	94:50
3.	Noel Norris	QLD	96:40
4.	Bob Gardiner	VIC	99:07
5.	Frank Clark	NSW	100:35

The trial placings had produced 6 different walkers, all with good times and all in contention. As the trial winners, Bob (50km) and Noel (20km) had to be selected. Ted (50km) and Ron (20km) had come second in the trials so would have to be the next picks. But how would the third spots in each event be decided? Both Frank Clark (20km) and Noel Norris (50km) had walked well, Frank in particular.

When the Tokyo team was to be announced, only Noel and Bob were originally ratified by the Australian Olympic Committee, although other names were proposed by the athletics selectors. Then extra places were made available, and Ted and Ron were squeezed in. It was hard luck for Frank Clark and Noel Norris who had both probably done enough to be selected in an ideal world.

The Olympic team was duly named, with 4 walkers

Bob Gardiner	20km and 50km
Ron Crawford	20km and 50km
Noel Freeman	20km
Ted Allsopp	50km

Frank Clark's time would come, with representations in the 1966 Commonwealth Games and in the 1968 Olympics. For Noel Norris, he had missed his only chance.

Bob Gardiner remembers Ron from this period.

Ron was a tough competitor, who would keep pushing on when others would give up. He had the ability to grit his teeth and go for the final kilometres, ignoring the pain. At the pre-Tokyo training camp in Narrabeen, Noel, Ron and I went out on a 20 mile training walk. After about 15 mile or so, Ron was in big trouble, but wouldn't give in. He would drop off the pace, then struggle back up to us more than once, and by the time we got back he was a wreck and couldn't train for a day or so.

Ron competed well in his two Olympic walks in Tokyo, coming 22nd in the 20km walk (1:38:47) and 11th in the 50km (a PB 4:24:19).



Bob Gardiner, Ron and Ted Allsopp train in the Olympic Village in Tokyo during the 1964 Olympic Games

Soon after this, he retired from racewalking. He was 28 years of age, with a young family and with other commitments that now needed to be addressed.

It is worth commenting at this stage on his standing within the NSW racewalking scene. Ron was pretty much undefeated in NSW during the 9 year period from 1954 to 1964, winning 24 Golds, 2 Silvers and 1 Bronze medal in the various State championships. I don't think I have seen such a dominance over such a long period by any Australian walker before or since.

NSW 2 Miles Championship (7G, 2S)

1956	1	Ron Crawford	14.55	2	Bill Kirby	3	Ken Keogh	14.55	
1957	1	Colin Walker	14.43	2	Ron Crawford	14.53	3	Ken Keogh	14.54
1958	1	Ron Crawford	14.34	2	Ken Keogh	14.47	3	Bill Kirby	14.59
1959	1	Ron Crawford	14.42	2	Ken Keogh	14.54	3	Col Walker	14.56
1960	1	Ron Crawford	14.25	2	Ray Nixon	3	Eugene Cichanowski		
1961	1	Ron Crawford	14.51	2	Peter Waddell	14.56	3	Logan Irwin	
1962	1	Ron Crawford	13.50	2	Logan Irwin	3	Peter Waddell		
1963	1	Ron Crawford	14.02	2	Frank Clark	14.29	3	Bill Kirby	
1964	1	Frank Clark	14.12	2	Ron Crawford	3	Bill Kirby		

NSW 10000m Championship (7G, 1B)

1956	1	Ron Crawford	48.32	2	Bill Kirby	48.34	3	Ken Keogh	48.40
1957	1	Col Walker	48.01	2	Ken Keogh		3	Ray Nixon	
1958	1	Ron Crawford	47.32	2	Ken Keogh	47.41	3	Ray Nixon	
1959	1	Ron Crawford	48.43	2	Col Walker	48.48	3	Ken Keogh	
1960	1	Ron Crawford	51.06	2	Bill Kirby		3	Logan Irwin	
1961	1	Ron Crawford	49.30.	2	Peter Waddell	49.33	3	Logan Irwin	50.19
1962	1	Ron Crawford	47.53	2	Logan Irwin		3	Frank Clark	
1963	1	Ron Crawford	48.35	2	Frank Clark	48.36	3	Logan Irwin	
1964	1	Frank Clark	47.30	2	Logan Irwin	47.57	3	Ron Crawford	

NSW 20km Championship (10G)

1954	1	Ron Crawford	104.11	2	Logan Irwin	104.33	3	Bill Kirby	
1955	1	Ron Crawford	101.43	2	George Kenyan	102.49	3	Logan Irwin PW	
1956	1	Ron Crawford	99.18	2	Col Walker	99.58	3	Norm Read (NZ)	
1957	1	Ron Crawford	97.42	2	Col Walker		3	Ken Keogh	
1958	1	Ron Crawford	99.39	2	Ken Keogh	99.32	3	Bill Kirby	
1959	1	Ron Crawford	105.06	2	Bill Kirby		3	Logan Irwin	
1960	1	Ron Crawford	96.34	2	Ken Keogh	101.56	3	Logan Irwin	102.23
1961	1	Ron Crawford	99.16	2	Logan Irwin	99.26	3	Frank Clarke	99.37
1962	?								
1963	1	Ron Crawford	97.46	2	Frank Clark	98.27	3	Logan Irwin	
1964	1	Ron Crawford	94.08	2	Frank Clark		3	Eddie Dawkings	



Ron and Peter Waddell lead the field at the E. S. Marks Field in Sydney in the early sixties

Apart from his sterling performances in the various Olympic trials discussed above, he also had a good record at National level championships, winning 1 Gold, 2 Silvers and 3 Bronze medals at a time when these championships were few and far between. What stood him apart throughout his career was his ability to produce the goods when it really counted.

1956 Australian 50 km Championship

1 Norm Reid NZ 4:30:16 2 Ray Smith VIC 4:40:24 3 **Ron Crawford** NSW 4:45:19

1957 Australian 10,000m Championship

1 Ted Allsopp VIC 46:12 2 Noel Freeman VIC 46:51 3 **Ron Crawford** NSW 47:19

1958 Australian 2 Miles Championship

1 Don Keane VIC 14.36.4 2 Ted Allsopp VIC 14.42.6 3 **Ron Crawford** NSW 15.02.2

1960 Australian 50 km Championship

1 Noel Freeman VIC 4:32:28 2 **Ron Crawford** NSW 4:38:51 3 Logan Irwin NSW 4:47:50

1961 Australian 10,000m Championship

1 **Ron Crawford** NSW 48:21 2 Bob Gardiner VIC 49:05 3 Logan Irwin NSW 49:38

1962 Australian 2 Miles Championship

1 Noel Freeman VIC 14.22.2 2 **Ron Crawford** NSW 14.26.2 3 Frank Leonard NSW 14.50.8

His victory in the 1961 Australian 10,000m Track Championship deserves additional comment as it was the last Australian championship held over that distance. It was replaced by an Australian 20km Championship in 1963 and it was not until 2014 that a 10,000m Track Championship was re-introduced. Thus Ron could lay claim to be the reigning champion in this event for 53 years!

The 1961 Australian 10,000m Track championship was held on July 22nd and was conducted on the Redcliffe Showgrounds in Brisbane. In warm and fine conditions, Ron won easily in 48:20.4, ahead of Victorian Bob Gardiner (49:05.0), Randwick Botany club mate Logan Irwin (49:37.6) and fellow NSW walker Frank Clark.

When asked about it in 2014, he commented: "I was not in the fittest shape in the leadup to the 1961 national championships as I had got married late in 1960."

Following his career as an athlete, Ron embarked on a long and distinguished administrative career in the sport, culminating in life memberships with Athletics NSW, Athletics Australia and Randwick Botany Harriers, along with a Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM). A brief summary of some of the main highlights follows:

President, NSW RWC	1975-1993
Director, Athletics NSW	1977-1981, 1997-2004
Randwick Botany Harriers Life Membership	1984
President, Randwick Botany Harriers	1991-2008
Athletics Australia Board Director	1996-1999
President, Regal Racewalkers	1996-2016
Athletics NSW Life Membership	?
Medal of the Order of Australia (OAM)	1999
Australian Sports Medal	2000
Athletics Australia Life Membership	2007

We have truly lost one of the legends of Australian racewalking.

Tim Erickson
Thursday 9th August 2018