

THE ALL ROUNDERS

The Victorian Racewalking championships have traditionally been fiercely contested affairs with the State consistently boasting many of the top male walkers in the country. There have been few occasions when a walker has been able to dominate proceedings for the year and clean up all the available championships. In fact the old saying used to be that it was harder to win a Victorian championship than to win an Australian.

So has anyone been able to win all the titles on offer in a particular year? Read on...

In the early 1900's, there were only 2 Victorian championships - the 1 mile and 3 mile track walks. It was common practice to win the double given the similar nature of the two walks. These are excluded from this article.

It was not until 1929 that the championship mix spread far enough to warrant further investigation. By that stage, the championships included 1 Mile, 3 Mile, 5 Mile, 10 Mile and 50 km. This combination continued throughout the 1930s but no one walker dominated. Year after year, the honours were spread amongst a variety of competitors – Joe Mulcahy, Joe O'Farrell, Bert Gardiner, Jack Cummins, Jack Coffey, William Marsden, Jim Gaylor, Alan Reid and George Knott.

George Knott seemed ready to attempt the clean sweep when War broke out in 1939. It was not until 1946 that walking championships reappeared with 5 titles being contested over 1 Mile, 3 Miles, 10000m, 10 Miles and 50 km. George was never a long distance walker so the best he could do was 3 golds and 1 silver in 1946 and 3 golds in 1948. It was the best overall effort so far.

1946	1 Mile Track	1 st	6:35.2
	3 Mile Track	1 st	22:06.3
	10000m Track	2 nd	48:43
	10 Mile	1 st	1:23:08
	50 km		DNS
1946	1 Mile Track	1 st	6:23.2
	3 Mile Track	1 st	21:32.6
	10000m Track	1 st	42:51.7 (unofficial world record)
	10 Mile		DNS
	50 km		DNS

The 1950's saw one man dominate the Victorian championships like no one before or after him. Between 1951 and 1958, Williamstown walker Ted Allsopp won 26 of the 32 titles on offer. At this time, there were 4 titles on offer each year – 2 Miles, 10000m, 10 Miles and 50 km. Ted's record over these years stands as follows

1951	2 Mile Track	1 st	14:55.6
	10000m Track	1 st	45:56.8
	10 Mile	1 st	1:17:06.8
	50 km		DNS
1952	2 Mile Track	1 st	13.54.0
	10000m Track	1 st	45.38.8
	10 Mile	1 st	1.18.38.6
	50 km		DNS
1953	2 Mile Track	1 st	14.19.0
	10000m Track	1 st	47.17.0
	10 Mile	1 st	1.14.37.0
	50 km		DNS
1954	2 Mile Track	1 st	13.58.6
	10000m Track	1 st	44.42.2
	10 Mile	1 st	1.11.09.8
	50 km		DNS
1955	2 Mile Track	1 st	14.24.8
	10000m Track	1 st	47.13.0
	10 Mile	1 st	1.15.55.0
	50 km		DNS

1956	2 Mile Track	2 nd	13:58.8
	10000m Track	1 st	46.54.8
	10 Mile	1 st	1.12.44.0
	50 km	1 st	4.24.24
1957	2 Mile Track	1 st	14.19.0
	10000m Track	1 st	46.34.8
	10 Mile	1 st	1.15.08.2
	50 km	1 st	4.23.38
1958	2 Mile Track	1 st	13.56.9
	10000m Track	1 st	46.58.4
	10 Mile	1 st	1.14.33.8
50 km	1 st	4.26.14	

During this same period, he won all 8 Australian titles on offer (in those days, there was only 1 Australian title each year, over the 10000m distance).

As the 1960's dawned, new walkers started to make their marks. People like Noel Freeman, Bob Gardiner, Peter McCullagh and then Ross Haywood all took titles but none could emulate Ted's feat of all the titles on offer in a single year.

Noel Freeman nearly did it in 1960 – only his selection in the 1960 Olympics prevented him from starting (and winning) the 50 km event. He won all the other Victorian titles that year – as a 21 year old.

1960	2 Mile Track	1 st	13:58.6
	10000m Track	1 st	43:41.4
	10 Mile	1 st	1:16:07.8
	20 km	1 st	1:31:05
	50 km	DNS	

Bob Gardiner had a chance in 1965 but, like Noel, he could only take 4 of the 5 titles on offer.

1965	2 Mile Track	1 st	13:58.6
	10000m Track	1 st	47.40.2
	10 Mile	1 st	1.17.57.4
	20 km	1 st	1.34.24
	50 km	2 nd	5:04:38

By 1973, the titles on offer had grown to 6 and it was even harder to take the clean sweep. Ross Haywood took 3 in 1973, 4 in 1974 and 3 in 1975 but he was never going to win all 6 as he was not a distance walker. The 50 km and 30 km medals were always going to elude him.

In 1975, an unknown walker from Ballarat entered the fray and started to rewrite the record books. Willi Sawall, already in his thirties, swapped from running to walking and quickly set about amassing gold medals in the same vein as Ted Allsopp. From 1976 to 1979, he won 18 of the 24 Victorian medals on offer as well as all the Australian and Federation titles. He was undefeated in Australia over any distance and the only times he did not win were when he was overseas competing in Australian teams.

1976	3000m Track	?	
	10 km	1 st	43:35.8
	15 km	1 st	1:07:52
	20 km	1 st	1.29.12
	30 km	1 st	2.23.30
	50 km	DNS	
1977	3000m Track	1 st	12.22.6
	10 km	1 st	44.30.6
	15 km	1 st	1.06.36
	20 km	1 st	1.31.35
	30 km	1 st	2.22.13
	50 km	1 st	4.05.54

1978	3000m Track	1 st	12.13.4
	10 km	1 st	44:20.8
	15 km	1 st	1.08.18
	20 km	DNS	
	30 km	1 st	2.21.40
	50 km	DNS	
1979	3000m Track	1 st	12.02.3
	10 km	1 st	42.25.8
	15 km	2 nd	1.06.43
	20 km	1 st	1.28.14
	30 km	2 nd	2.24.00
	50 km	1 st	3.54.07

It was not until he was finally defeated by David Smith in the 1979 Victorian 15 km and 30 km events that light appeared at the end of the tunnel for the other walkers of that era.

David Smith, like Ross Haywood, was unbeatable over the shorter distances (he still holds the Australian record for 5000m) but he did not contest the 50 km distance so was never going to win all 6 titles. Added to that, his subsequent move to the AIS meant that from the early 1980's onward, he did not contest many Victorian titles.

His best effort was 4 golds in 1981, all in amazingly fast times.

1981	3000m Track	1 st	11:49.0
	10000m Track	1 st	Not sure of time but under 41 mins
	15 km	1 st	1:01:43
	20,000m Track	1 st	1:26:09
	30 km	DNS	
	50 km	DNS	

The 1980's saw the greatest pool of talent ever in Australian walking and most of it was Victorian based. The likes of Simon Baker, David Smith, Willi Sawall, Andrew Jachno Michael Harvey led from the front and many others snapped at their heels. It was obvious that no one was ever going to win all 6 Victorian titles during this era.

The 1990's produced more of the same. Simon Baker, Michael Harvey and Andrew Jachno were still firing and Stephen Beecroft, Paul Copeland, Dion Russell, Duane Cousins, Dominic McGrath and Nathan Deakes appeared one after the other, each staking his claim on Victorian gold.

And so we progress to 2005 when finally someone has been able to break clear from the pack. Chris Erickson follows in a great tradition. His 5 golds and 1 silver place him in elite company. Many have tried but few have succeeded.

2005	3000m Track	1 st	20:56.0
	10 km	1 st	47:24
	15 km	1 st	1:09:16
	20 km	1 st	1:28:22
	30 km	1 st	2:20:14
	50 km	2 nd	4:03:42

Tim Erickson
September 2005