

NORM READ

1956	Olympic Games	Melbourne	50 km	1 st	4:30:42	(NZ)
1960	Olympic Games	Rome	20 km	5 th	1:36:59	(NZ)
1960	Olympic Games	Rome	50 km	DNF		(NZ)
1966	Commonwealth Games	Jamaica	20 Miles	3 rd	2:46:28	(NZ)

Norm Reid, born in England, won his Olympic Gold medal in 1956 representing New Zealand. Yet at that time, Norm was Victorian based and an active member of the Victorian Amateur Walkers Club so it is in that context that the club regards his 1956 performance as that of a club member.

The following biography was written by P. N. Heidenstrøm and is taken from the IAAF website.

Norman Richard Read was born at Portsmouth, England, on 13 August 1931, the son of Marjorie Ellen Luff and her husband, Richard Frederick Read, a Royal Navy stoker who later became a painter and decorator. He was brought up at Portsmouth and later Steyning, and after leaving school completed an apprenticeship as a carpenter. He emigrated to New Zealand in 1953, and over the following 40 years, was to live in Auckland, Wellington, Hawera, Whangarei and finally New Plymouth. He worked at various times as a carpenter, salesman, grocer and financial agent.

When he arrived in New Zealand, Read was an undistinguished race walker - a reputation amply demonstrated when, in his first two seasons here, his best result on the track was a struggling third in a three-man race. However, when controversies led to track walking being dropped internationally in favour of road walking, the much longer distances proved more favourable. In September 1955 he unofficially walked 50 kilometres in the world-class time of **4:36:41**, and the following year he won New Zealand titles in both the 20-kilometre and 50-kilometre races.

Passed over by New Zealand and Britain for the Olympic Games to be held in Melbourne in November and December 1956, Read crossed the Tasman and in September won the Australian championship in **4:30:17**, only 2 minutes outside the Olympic record. He was hastily added to New Zealand's team.

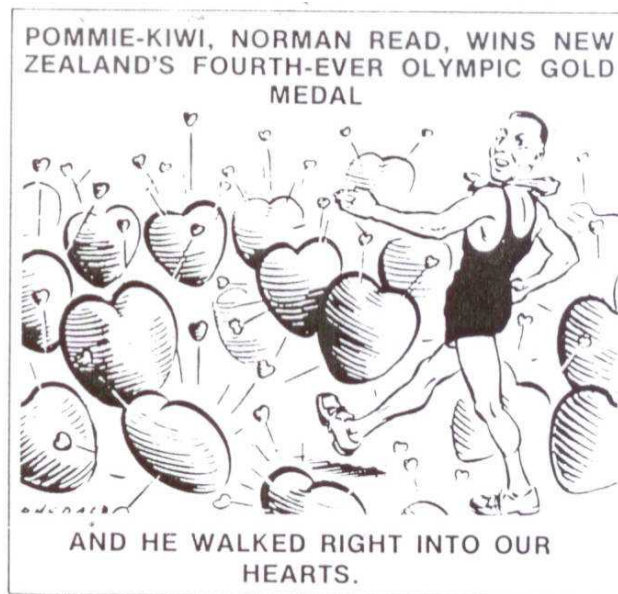


Norm Reid wins the 1956 Olympic 50 km

On the day of the 50-kilometre event he almost missed the start after getting lost in the maze of passages beneath the Melbourne Cricket Ground's grandstand. For most of the race he walked conservatively, letting others make the pace in

temperatures rising above 30° C. He made his challenge over the last 15 kilometres, walking at such a pace that he soon caught the leaders. At the 45-kilometre mark he had a lead of 1 minute 22 seconds, which he continued to increase, eventually winning in **4:30:43**. Only 6 competitors completed the course inside 5 hours, and 6 of the 21 starters did not finish at all, a reflection of the exhausting conditions.

Read was voted New Zealand's Sportsman of the Year, a far cry from his relative obscurity the previous year. The following sketch was published in the Auckland Star and summed up the New Zealand response to his gold medal performance.



Before the 1960 Olympics he lowered his 50-kilometre time twice in a single week, to **4:27:25** and then **4:21:23**, which persuaded him to attempt both walking events at Rome. It was brave but risky. Five days after coming fifth in his second string, the 20-kilometre, he failed to finish in his specialty. His best New Zealand time would have won the race by over four minutes.

Read was unable to gain selection for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics despite recording his second-fastest time ever 50 km (**4:24:46**). The selectors pronounced it to be 'only a oncer', and even when he followed it with his third-fastest time (**4:27:18**), he was still not considered good enough.

Read's international career ended in Jamaica in 1966 when, in the sport's first appearance at the British Empire and Commonwealth Games, he came third in the 20-mile walk. He continued in national competition for another 18 years, finally retiring at the age of 52. In all he won 18 championship gold medals, three silver and four bronze, a feat unmatched by any other New Zealand walker; he also won several Australian and British titles. His only loss in 11 New Zealand championship races over 50 kilometres was his last, in 1981, and his 1965 championship record of **4:26:27** was 10 minutes faster than any other New Zealander could do for a quarter of a century afterwards.

Norm Read was such a fair walker that never in his long career was he disqualified or even cautioned. Once he refused to take credit for a personal record time, insisting (correctly) that the track must be short. Though later admitting that cheats had made walking 'a laugh, a complete mockery', Read kept his faith in the ultimate goodness of the sport.

He had married Megan Ann Crafar on 29 August 1968 in Whangarei; they had three daughters and a son. Moving to New Plymouth, he formed New Zealand's first race-walking club, which grew into a nationwide movement. His mana and commitment persuaded the authorities to restore track walking to the national athletics championships, kindling a boom in the sport. As a judge he became only the second New Zealander to officiate at an Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992. He was awarded a diploma by the International Amateur Athletic Federation on its 75th Jubilee in 1987 and in 1990 he was elected a foundation member of the New Zealand Sports Hall of Fame.

When he suffered a fatal heart attack competing in a veterans' cycling race at Pirongia on 22 May 1994, Norman Read was serving as president of Athletics New Zealand. He was survived by his wife, Megan, and his children.

Not too many walkers can say that they have had a postage stamp issued in their honour but that was the case for Read in 1956 with the following commemorative stamp issued by the Dominican Republic.

