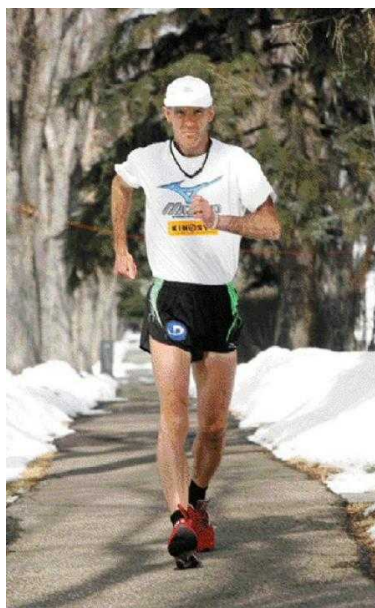


## TIM BERRETT – BITTERSWEET WALK IN THE PARK

The following article, written by John MacKinnon, was published in the Edmonton Journal on Tuesday, March 18, 2008. See <http://www.canada.com/topics/sports/story.html?id=28843432-04e0-44f7-951a-d82da5362ee6&k=30951&p=3>



*Racewalker Tim Berrett trains near his Edmonton home on Monday. Photograph by Bruce Edwards, the Journal*

VANCOUVER, B.C. - On a crisp, sunny-cloudy, see-your-breath morning, Tim Berrett went for a 50-kilometre walk in a suburban high school park on the weekend, and just under four hours later, he had qualified for his fifth Olympic Games.

He was proud, elated and relieved that he had punched his ticket to Beijing by completing the one-man race in three hours, 52 minutes and 41 seconds, comfortably under the Athletics Canada 'A' standard of 3:54.24.

"This was as good as you can get," said Berrett, who wore sunglasses for the first half of the race that was held on a windless, four-degree Celsius day. "That was why I wanted to come here instead of an international race, because you just never know what (weather conditions) you're going to get at this time of year."

Berrett walked 125 laps around a 400-metre Burnaby, B.C., track over the weekend in order to qualify for the 50-km racewalk event at the upcoming Beijing Summer Games.

Happy as he was with his achievement, the Edmonton resident was also angry, bursting with pent-up frustration, hurting because he feels slighted by his own athletics federation. That complex brew of emotions began to spill out shortly after Berrett punched the air for emphasis as he crossed the finish line. He wasn't upset because he had to nail the qualifying standard by racewalking 125 mind-boggling laps around a 400-metre track. At 43, the veteran international athlete can handle the rigours of a time trial. That was his preference, actually. To an outsider, it may have been an odd scene to watch Berrett grinding away out there, lap after lap, all alone except for a half-dozen officials sprinkled strategically about to monitor his technique, making sure he never lost contact with the ground. This was fine with Berrett. No. What Berrett was livid about was that he had to do the thing at all.

Berrett might have --almost certainly would have -- qualified a year ago when he flew to Portugal and won an international 50K racewalk and the princely prize of 250 euros, or about \$360, the biggest purse he had won in years.

But he was racing blind, pounding the sunbaked Portuguese pavement not knowing what time he was aiming for. Despite numerous queries to Athletics Canada over a period of months, Berrett had not been told what the standard was. In the end, Berrett missed the mark by less than one minute, but he would only learn that weeks later, when the draft standards were announced last May.

"They made me do this for the sake of 44 seconds," Berrett said of the B.C. Athletics-sanctioned race staged for his benefit on Sunday. "I won by eight minutes, and I didn't know what the time was, that was the frustrating thing. I didn't find out -- even unofficially -- until a few months later. I didn't find out officially until four months ago (December). That is a travesty, it's just ridiculous.

"If they have a standard that's tougher than the IAAF standard, I'm fine with that. But if you're going to do that, publicize it so the athletes can chase it. It's disgusting that they did that, and I don't know what the holdup was."

Having failed to hit a standard he could not see in Portugal last March, and after finishing 19<sup>th</sup> at the worlds in Osaka, Japan, last August in 4:06.47, Berrett was running out of qualifying options.

"I had to do it this month," Berrett said. "There was no way I could wait until May, which is the World Cup, and which would have been the best race. That's three months to recover, I can't recover in three months and do another one. That just doesn't happen when you're 43. I want to peak in Beijing, I don't want to peak now."

Berrett's best result at the record nine IAAF world championships he has competed in for Canada was seventh place back in 1993 in Stuttgart, Germany. He was 10<sup>th</sup> at the Summer Games in Atlanta in 1996. Now, after saying four years ago that Athens would be his final Games, he has qualified for Beijing.

Why?

"Well, it's something that I obviously love to do," Berrett said. "I love being fit at this age. "I don't think anyone in

Athletics Canada expected me to do this. Two years ago, Athletics Canada had a Team Beijing meeting at nationals. I had finished 11<sup>th</sup> at the world championships the year before. And I wasn't even invited. "The list (of athletes) was long. The feeling I get is that unless you're going to medal, you're garbage. But in an event like mine, you just never know what can happen."

Berrett's frustration is a function of the Canadian Olympic Committee's Road to Excellence program and its emphasis on podium finishes. This is the summer analog to the Own the Podium plan for the 2010 Winter Games in Vancouver and Whistler. Money flows to athletes and sport federations that win medals or post top 12 finishes.

The 50K racewalk, not unlike the marathon, is a bit of a crapshoot. And athletics, Berrett notes, is more competitive worldwide than any sport except perhaps soccer. At his age, recovery is an issue, but on a given day, Berrett still believes he can compete with the best.

"It's still there, and given the right preparation and the right conditions, I know I can go quicker," Berrett said. "Today I was on pace for a two-minute personal best."

It helped that about 27 kilometres into the race Sunday up-and-comers Evan Dunfee, doing a 10K race, and Inaki Gomez, in a 20K effort, took to the track for qualifying trials of their own. Berrett positioned himself on Gomez's right shoulder and stayed there for most of the next 20 kilometres. It helped with pacing and focus. At about the 38K mark, Berrett slowed noticeably, falling nearly 50 metres behind Gomez. But the youngster slowed

considerably in the final stages of his race. Berrett caught him, passed him and kept right on trucking for another 10 laps after Gomez crossed the finish line and collapsed, heaving with exhaustion on the infield.

Once the pace slackened, Berrett just focused on hitting the standard, urged on by his coach, John Fitzgerald, and the young athletes who had shared the track for a time on Sunday. As he neared the finish line, the eight university-age racewalkers formed a line -- a motley honour guard -- and did the wave to cheer Barrett home.

"Oh, that was great," Berrett said of the help from the young athletes. "Evan going out in front there, having a good race. That was motivation that there finally was someone coming up behind me. It has been a few years since we had someone really making some moves in the junior ranks. But to do this on my own basically ... when I tell people (other athletes) as an athlete this is what I have to go through, they don't believe it."

It was a little hard to believe for the small gathering of officials and friends who watched on Sunday as Berrett made his mostly solitary, relentless way around a 400-metre track at a high school in Burnaby, his own personal pathway to Beijing.

About 20 minutes after Berrett and the racewalkers had collected their gear and left, a touch football game was underway on the track's infield. Just a bunch of the boys having a Sunday walk in the park of their own.

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For the record, Tim, at age 43, has represented Canada at 7 IAAF World Championships, 3 Olympic Games, 3 Racewalking World Cups, 2 Commonwealth Games and one World Indoor Championships. His amazing international record is as follows

3 <sup>rd</sup> IAAF World Championships in Athletics	20 km Walk	22	01:24:10	Tokyo	24/08/91
3 <sup>rd</sup> IAAF World Championships in Athletics	50 km Walk	15	04:14:35	Tokyo	31/08/91
4 <sup>th</sup> IAAF World Indoor Championships	5000M Walk	4	18:53.02	Toronto (SD)	14/03/93
4 <sup>th</sup> IAAF World Championships in Athletics	20 km Walk	20	01:27:28	Stuttgart	15/08/93
4 <sup>th</sup> IAAF World Championships in Athletics	50 km Walk	7	03:50:23	Stuttgart	21/08/93
5 <sup>th</sup> IAAF World Championships in Athletics	50 km Walk	14	03:57:13	Göteborg	10/08/95
26 <sup>th</sup> Olympic Games	50 km Walk	10	03:51:28	Atlanta, GA	02/08/96
19 <sup>th</sup> IAAF World Race Walking Cup	20 km Walk	47	01:29:01	Mézidon - Canon	01/05/99
27 <sup>th</sup> Olympic Games	20 km Walk	26	01:25:29	Sydney	22/09/00
8 <sup>th</sup> IAAF World Championships in Athletics	50 km Walk	19	03:59:34	Edmonton	11/08/01
17 <sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Games	50 km Walk	3	04:04:25	Manchester	30/07/02
9 <sup>th</sup> IAAF World Championships in Athletics	50 km Walk	19	04:02:03	Paris Saint-Denis	27/08/03
21 <sup>st</sup> IAAF World Race Walking Cup	20 km Walk	64	01:28:34	Naumburg	02/05/04
28 <sup>th</sup> Olympic Games	50 km Walk	31	04:10:31	Athína	27/08/04
10 <sup>th</sup> IAAF World Championships in Athletics	50 km Walk	11	03:55:48	Helsinki	12/08/05
18 <sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Games	50 km Walk	5	04:08:18	Melbourne	24/03/06
22 <sup>nd</sup> IAAF World Race Walking Cup	50 km Walk	39	04:12:37	La Coruña	14/05/06
11 <sup>th</sup> IAAF World Championships in Athletics	50 km Walk	19	04:06:47	Osaka	01/09/07