

VALE FRANK KEALY : 01/11/1917 - 08/04/2009

Frank Kealy, VRWC club member, Mentone Athletics Club founder, track identity and athletic coach and mentor, who presented the ladies' medals at the VMA 5,000m racewalk championship on 22 March 2009, has passed away. He was taken to hospital on Wednesday 7th April and died the next morning from complications arising from a burst duodenal ulcer.



2003 - Mentone walker Geoff Barrow stands with Frank. Geoff said at the time that he had known Geoff for 37 years, ever since he first joined Mentone Athletics Club as a sub junior athlete.

Everyone who walks regularly at Albert Park would have known Frank Kealy by sight but you may not know THE legendary Frank Kealy. I interviewed Frank in 2003 and draw on that now to mark his passing.

Frank was over 90 years in age but you would never know to look at him. He was always to be seen trackside with a stopwatch in one hand and a pocket radio in the other, keeping up with the footy scores while the walkers sweated it out. Just another avid follower of the sport, you might think? Then read on...

Frank was actually born in Birmingham England in 1917 when his father was in the AIF. When the First World War finished, the family returned to Melbourne and Frank grew up here. Finishing school, he started work as a welder, a career he continued with throughout his working life.

Frank started with Melbourne Harriers in 1936 as a middle and long distance runner. He told me that he did not have an especially illustrious career but enjoyed his athletics. 1942 marked the start of his coaching career and he continued with coaching right through his life. Specialising as a sprints and hurdles coach, he coached many famous runners – Peter Fitzgerald, Gary Minahan and Barry Bozanko to name a few. He had lost count of the number of Underage champions he had coached but thought it must be 50 or more.

Early on, he saw the need for an athletics club to service the southern Melbourne suburbs and was one of the prime movers in the formation of Mentone Harriers in 1942. He was subsequently awarded life memberships by both Melbourne Harriers and Mentone Harriers, just reward for a lifetime of service to athletics.

Frank was for many years an AV official and was a senior starter for 37 years. He remembered manning one of the timing checkpoints during the 1956 Olympic 50 km roadwalk and seeing Ray Smith stride past. He was a professional masseur for many years and had seen all the different coaching techniques and theories develop first hand. He was instrumental in one Percy Cerrutty returning to athletics in the 40's and was credited later in life by Percy as 'the man who started it all'. He was also one of the driving forces in forming the Victorian Marathon Club and helped guide it through the early years of its existence.

He finally retired from coaching in 1992 after a career spanning 50 years but was soon back coaching racewalking in a new endeavour. Starting from scratch in the new discipline, his prime charge was Gwen Steed who thrived under his watchful eye, setting a number of Masters records and winning numerous World Masters medals.

Apart from his loyalty to the Victorian Race Walking Club, Frank was a loyal supporter of the Mentone Masters and

was also a regular at their competitions. The Frank Kealy trophy was awarded regularly at that venue to the winners of the walk handicap events.



Frank keeps a watchful coach's eye on Gwen Steed during a VRWC club race in 2006

We shall miss Frank from our events and will hold him in fondly our memories.