

Amy Burren – 2011

2011	IAAF World Racewalking Championships	Lillie, France	5,000m	DNF
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Amy Burren, born 4 March 1994 in Melbourne, came from a sporting family, with her father Gavin a very promising young middle distance runner in England and her mother Joanne a very good Melbourne based junior racewalker. Joanne had been coached by her father Brian and the tradition continued with Brian and Joanne taking on Amy, then her younger sister Sarah and finally her younger brother James. All three were fine young athletes.

Amy's first race with the Victorian Race Walking Club was on 3rd April 2004, when she won the VRWC U12 2km walk with a promising **11:58**. Her younger sister Sarah also raced with the club for the first time on that occasion, winning the VRWC U9 1km walk with 6:49.

Amy and Sarah started training under the watchful eye of Simon Baker in 2004/2005. They would train at the Box Hill athletics track on a Sunday morning, doing light track sessions.

Simon introduced us to pace judgement, developing our core strength as well as daily habits such as checking our pulse in the morning (I don't think we made this a habit despite Simon constantly asking us at each session!)

On the Victorian Little Athletics front, Amy was unchallenged, winning the VLA track walk titles four years in row (2003-2006), just as her mother Joanne had done in 1979-1982. That made a unique mother-daughter double that we are unlikely to see for some time.



Amy and Joanne compare their collection of state medals (Berwick News, Thursday 23 March 2006)

Amy also won the Pacific Schools U12 1500m walk in December 2005 in **7:39** against good competition, confirming her place at the top of her age group.

But come the 2006 winter season, she had to lower her colours to Cassie Raselli who literally came from nowhere and took a whole string of titles including the Victorian U14 3 km roadwalk (15:46), the Victorian U14 All Schools 3 km (15:50) and the RWA U12 2 km in Canberra (9:47).

This coincided with some serious health issues for Amy. She had been suffering from gastro-intestinal (GI) issues for some time. She was 12 years of age when her surgeon decided to remove her gall bladder, which was subsequently found to be harbouring a large cyst containing carcinoma cells. Once the gall bladder was removed, her symptoms gradually settled but it was a number of years before the damage was fully repaired.

Cassie continued her great form into the 2006/2007 Summer season, beating Amy in the AV U14 1500m walk and the VLAA U13 15000m walk. On that occasion, the two girls were timed at 6:53 (Cassie) and **6:58** (Amy), indicating the high quality of their walking.

To her credit, Amy bounced back as her body recovered from the operation, winning the Little Athletics U13 1500m Australian championship in Perth in April 2007 (**6:56**), followed by wins in the Victorian U14 All Schools 3 km roadwalk (**15:26**) and the Victorian U14 3 km roadwalk (**15:20**). She finished her winter with a win in the Australian U14 3km roadwalking title in Perth in a PB time of **14:28**.



2007 at Middle Park – a young Amy Burren with an equally young Brad Simpson

Amy finished her 2007 year with a win in the Australian Schools U14 1500m walk in Sydney in a PB time of **6:51.2**. The next day she took silver in the Australian Schools U15 3000m in a time of **14:41.26**.

2008 was just as impressive. She started the year with 2nd place to the much older Jess Rothwell in the Victorian Open 5000m track championship in early February with an inaugural **25:46.58**. She was still only 13 years of age. Two weeks later, she won the Victorian U16 3000m track championship with **14:43.97**, beating the older Rachel Tallent who came second with 14:46.53.



February 2008 – Amy beats Rachel Tallent to win the Victorian U16 3000m Track Championship

After being beaten in the Victorian Little Athletics U13 1500m in 2007, Amy bounced back in March 2008, winning the U14 1500m track walk with **7:20.00**. That made 5 wins out of 6 in the annual VLA championships.

She had some great battles with Rachel Tallent during the 2008 winter season and, although usually second to Rachel (who was a year older), Amy was never far behind. First to the AV Schools U16 3km Road Championship in early June where Rachel won with 14:35 and Amy was second with **14:43**. Then to the Victorian U16 5km Road Championship in late July when Rachel won with 24:50 and Amy was second with **24:55**. It was definitely the race of the meet. In early August, the two girls tested themselves out in the Victorian Open 10km Road Championship, Rachel winning with 52:06 and Amy second with **53:41**.

Amy was upstaged by the older Shannon Jennings and Kristie Goznic in the Australian U16 5km Road Championship in Melbourne in late August, coming third with 25:06. But when she competed in her own age group, she dominated. Thus it was that she easily won in the Pacific Schools U15 5000m Track Championship in Canberra in December 2008 with **14:44.19**.

2009 was a relatively quiet year with few championships and few PBs. But one event in particular is worth a comment. In March, Amy won the Little Athletics Victoria U15 1500m Track Walk Championship with a time of **7:03.51**. That made it 6 wins out of 7 years in what was her final year of Little Athletics. It was a dominant display by the Burren family with James winning the U9 Boys, Amy winning the U15 Girls and Sarah (with arm in plaster) winning the U12 Girls. I wonder if we have ever had 3 winners from the one family before?

The Australian Schools Championships in December 2009 signalled a return to form over the longer distances. She easily won the U16 3000m with a PB **14:18.7** and was second in the U17 5000m (to Rachel Tallent of course) with **25:00.27**.

In February 2010, Amy competed in the Australian trial for the 2010 World Racewalking Cup in Hobart, even though she was too young to actually be selected. It was a chance to test herself against the older girls. Walking in the U20 Girls 10km race, she finished 5th with a PB **53:30**.

Back in her own age group, she won the Australian U17 5000m Track Championship in Sydney in March with **25:00.80**.

The 5000m was now Amy's main distance, given the World Youth Championships that would be contested in 2011. She finished 2nd in the LBG Carnival U18 5km (to Rachel of course) in June with **24:55** but it was just an indication of what was to come when, in the Victorian Schools U18 5km walk 2 weeks later, she won with a big PB of **24:18**. She would need to improve further, with the Australian selection standard set for 24:00.



Amy leads younger sister Sarah in a VRWC race at Middle Park in July 2010 – both girls were impeccable stylists

She had a major setback soon after this, badly tearing a hip cartilage from skateboard usage. Even with treatment and rest, it did not respond and she was a DNF in the Victorian U18 5km Roadwalk Championship in late July and a DNF in the Australian U18 5km Roadwalk Championship in August. Further recovery time was required and the clock was ticking – she needed to be ready for the IAAF World Youth Championships trial in March 2011. By the time the injury healed, she had barely two months left to get back to race fitness and meet the qualifying standard.

It was not until the new year that she was ready to race. The signs were promising with a win in February in the Victorian U18 5000m Track Championship with **24:47.49**. A week later, she earned her all important World Youth qualifier at the Victorian Open 5000m Track Championship. While Kelly Ruddick stormed home to win with 23:17.03, Amy celebrated her 17th birthday with a PB of **23:52.18** to become the second Australian World Youth qualifier (Jessica Pickles of Queensland was the other).

Another stong walk would be needed the following weekend in the official trial in Sydney, held in conjunction with the Australian U18 5000m Track Championship. However, this race turned out to be a bit of an upset when Amy (24:25.44) and Jessica (24:53.27) were relegated to the minor medals by NSW walker Amy Bettiol. Unfortunately for Amy Bettiol, her winning time of 24:10 was just outside the WY qualifying standard so Amy and Jessica held onto their position as the only two qualifiers.

Common sense prevailed when, 2 weeks later, Jessica and Amy were named for the 2011 World Youth Team. They were the only 2 qualifiers so it was probably never in doubt.

Unfortunately, three intense races over three weeks in February had effected her health and her recovery was very slow. Her GI issues were becoming chronic once again, making any sort of intensive exercise/training problematic. She was constantly going through a cycle of having a good block of training and then having stomach ulcers/GI upsets from the general stress that intense exercise placed on her body. It was a disruptive and tiring process that occurred even though her training load was still geared to the shorter 5 and 10km distances.

Consequently, she was unable to race between March and July. She went to Lille, France, for the World Youth Championships hoping for the best, but definitely underdone.

So it was that the World Youth Championship 5000m walk was a case of mixed fortunes for the two Australian representatives. Jessica was not far off her best, finishing 15th with 24:01.42 but Amy, who started strongly, was forced to withdraw with 6 laps remaining.

Amy was keen to put this behind her and she focused her training towards her next challenge, to gain one of the three available spots in the Australian U20 10km team for the 2012 IAAF Racewalking World Cup. Alas, it was not to be. That meet in Hobart will be remembered because of the horrendous heat, with the temperature hovering around 38°C during the trial race. Amy was one of the many contenders who failed to finish. History shows that the trial places went to Rachel Tallent, Jessica Pickles and Shannon Jennings, and it was those 3 girls who were selected in the Racewalking World Cup team.

This marked the end of Amy's walking career. It was now obvious that her body would not cope with the demands of training for the longer distance events. Thus she retired from racewalking.

She continued to run with her club Malvern Harriers and joined the running group coordinated by her father Gavin. She is still to be seen, along with her sister Sarah, in the occasional run and still looks fit and lean.

Life has moved on. She graduated from a nursing degree at Monash University in 2015 and is currently studying her Masters in Speech Pathology.

Amy was one of our most talented young walkers, with the attitude and style required to excel. Alas, her health issues put paid to what could have been an ongoing story.