

Chris Erickson

2004	Racewalking World Cup	Naumburg	50 km	31 st	4:14:16
2006	Commonwealth Games	Melbourne	50 km	3 rd	3:58:22
2006	Racewalking World Cup	La Coruna	50 km	26 th	3:59:20
2007	IAAF World Champs	Osaka	50 km	24 th	4:13:00
2008	Racewalking World Cup	Cheboksary	20 km	30 th	1:22:55
2008	Olympic Games	Beijing	20 km	DQ	
2009	IAAF World Champs	Berlin	50km	DNS	
2010	Racewalking World Cup	Mexico	50km	15 th	4:03:56
2010	Commonwealth Games	Delhi	20km	8 th	1:28:35
2012	Racewalking World Cup	Saransk	20km	18 th	1:22:20
2012	Olympic Games	London	20km	38 th	1:24:19
2013	IAAF World Champs	Moscow	50km	16 th	3:49:41
2014	Racewalking World Cup	Taicang	50km	10 th	3:49:33
2015	IAAF World Champs	Beijing	20km	32 nd	1:25:15
2015	IAAF World Champs	Beijing	50km	13 th	3:51:26
2016	Olympic Games	Rio de Janeiro	50km	10 th	3:48:32

Chris Erickson, born 1st December 1981, is one of a number of fine young walkers to have come through the junior ranks in recent years. Standing 178cm and with a racing weight around 60 kg, he possesses a good combination of speed and endurance.

The son of former Australian walking representative Tim Erickson, it was perhaps inevitable that Chris would choose racewalking as his sport of choice, given the continued exposure to the sport throughout his formative years.

Although Chris started in Little Athletics in the Under 8 Age Group, it was not until 1996 that he expressed a desire to start training for racewalking, with immediate success. That year, he took silvers in the VLAA Under 14 1500m walk and the Federation Under 15 2000m in Canberra before winning the Victorian Under 16 4 km (**20:36**) and the Victorian Schools Under 15 1500m (**6:50**). This set the scene for a very consistent underage career in which he regularly medalled at State, Federation and National levels.



Chris and Kelly Wapshott compete in the Victorian U16 4km championship in 1997

1997 saw him improve his times to **6:38** (1500m), **13:32** (3000m) and **23:52** (5000m) and saw him win golds in the VLAA Under 15 1500m walk, the Victorian Schools Under 17 5000m and the Victorian Under 16 4 km as well as silvers at both Federation and Australian level in the Under 17 age groups.

1998 saw him start to test himself over longer distances and, although still only 16, he won the Victorian Under 20 10 km (**48:36**). He also won his first Federation title in the Canberra Carnival Under 17 5 km (**23:21**).

1999 was his last year of secondary school and it proved to be his best year to date. His times continued to tumble and he took silvers in both the Australian Junior 10000m track walk (**47:32**) and the Australian Junior 10 km roadwalk (**48:24**) as well as winning his first Victorian senior medal (3rd in the 15 km title in **1:15:04**). He also improved over the shorter distances, in particular over 5000m where his PB was lowered to **22:20**.

A viral infection at the end of his Year 12 proved to be a major setback that took some 18 months to really shake. He continued to improve over the longer distances but his track times remained static. He did manage to take 2nd in the 2000 Australian Junior 10,000m title in very hot conditions in Queensland and came 2nd in the Australian World Junior 10000m trial in August 2000 (**47:50**) but his walking lacked sparkle.

He finished his junior career as one of the top juniors but without really making it to the top. He has faced tough opposition from a series of exceptional walkers – Troy Sundstrom, Douglas Connelly and Jared Tallent to name a few. Even so, he still amassed 13 gold and 4 silver at Victorian underage level, 5 silver and 2 bronze at Australian underage level and 1 gold, 2 silver and a bronze at Federation underage level.

Although he continued to race and medal over most distances over the next couple of years, it was not really until 2002 that his walking once again started to respond. He won his first Victorian senior title, the 15 km (**1:10:32**) and walked his first Canberra 20 miler - a very creditable 5th in **2:44:37**. This was perhaps an indication of where his real walking future would lie.

The 2002/2003 Summer season saw him improve his 5000m time to **21:30** and his consistent form in the AV State League competition won him the Duncan Knox award as the top State League walker. Perhaps his best walk for the summer was in early March when he won a track 10000m walk in Geelong in a PB time of **45:02**.

2003 saw yet another winter season of testing himself over the longer distances and he had a number of memorable battles with Frank Bertei at the Victorian level. He took silvers in the Victorian 10 km and 30 km, improved to 4th in the Canberra 20 mile walk (**2:43:58**) and took bronze in the Australian 30 km title (**2:35:22**), his first senior Australian medal.

With the 2004 Racewalking World Cup 50 km trial scheduled for Melbourne in December 2003, Chris decided it was time to extend his ever improving repertoire to the 50 km and he mapped out a 3 month training plan to prepare. In a dream finish, all went according to plan and he finished the trial as the third Australian in a time of **4:19:48**, 12 seconds inside the qualifying standard of 4:20:00.

A team of 4 Australian walkers was duly announced for the World Cup 50 km team, Chris included. But the selection was provisional and it was a case of waiting to see if things changed once the 20 km trial was held in February in Sydney. He raced throughout the summer, his best performances being a PB State League 3000m time of **12:27**, a PB 20 km time of **1:34:07** in the Canberra A Series walk and a fine win in 40°C temperature in the Victorian 5000m track title (**23:07**).

The 2004 National 20 km title in Sydney in late February produced the worst possible result from Chris's perspective. AIS walkers Liam Murphy and Darren Bown, who had qualified for both the 50 km and the 20 km, decided to now concentrate on the 20 km and withdrew from the 50 km team. This meant that there were only 2 walkers left from the previously announced 50 km team – Chris and Duane Cousins. The World Cup 50 km team was withdrawn and Chris found himself out in the cold.

As it turned out, circumstances outside Chris's control eventually worked in his favour. Frank Bertei, who had been injured in December and who had missed out on a qualifying performance, was determined to force his way into the team and travelled to Mexico for an IAAF 50 km event, to be held on 20 March. His time there was a PB 4:16:23 and now there were three 50 km walkers – but a team selection required 4. However, the same event saw Liam Murphy disqualified. Liam had been banking on achieving his Olympic 50 km qualifier in Mexico and had swapped to the

World Cup 20 km based on this scenario. With this plan in tatters, Liam advised the selectors that he now preferred to walk the 50 km event in the World Cup.

Chris and the other 50 km walkers were duly added back into the World Cup team a week later and he now had 4 weeks to get his preparation back on track and prepare for the big event. His World Cup time of **4:14:16** (31st from 95 starters) shows that he did indeed recover from this serious setback and did manage to peak on the day to record a 5 minute PB.



Chris contests the 50 km event in the 2004 Racewalking World Cup

Chris stayed on in Europe for 6 weeks and raced the Italian 20 km championship in late May for 15th place and a PB of **1:32:02**. Returning to Australia, he took silver in the Canberra 20 mile walk in yet another PB of **2:37:07** and followed this up with gold in the Victorian 20 km title with **1:31:33**. His final race for the winter season resulted in a silver medal and another PB (**2:23:54**) in the Australian 30 km championship in Canberra in late August.

Although tired after a long year of racing, he contested the Australian 50 km championship in Melbourne in October and, after a fast first half, hung on to win in an inauspicious **4:39:46**. The win was of particular interest to those with an eye for history – with this win he became a partner in one of the few father/son combinations to win the same Australian championship event. His father Tim had won the Australian 50 km title in 1975.

The 2005 year started with promise. He defended his Victorian 5000m title in a PB of **20:58** and then reduced his 20 km time by over a minute to record **1:30:27** in coming 8th in the National championship in Sydney in March.

His next big breakthrough came in May when he contested the Australian 50 km championship in Melbourne. There he finished third to Nathan Deakes and New Zealander Craig Barrett with a huge PB time of **4:03:42**. This time beat the 2006 Commonwealth Games A standard of 4:05:00 and rocketed Chris to second place in the Australian 50 km rankings.

His winter season saw a string of great races. He won the Victorian 10 km (**47:24**), 15 km (**1:09:16**), 20 km (**1:28:22 - PB**) and 30 km (**2:20:14 - PB**) to add to his track 5000m title during the summer. The only 2006 Victorian title he failed to win was the 50 km when he was second to Nathan Deakes in May (see above). He came second to Jared Tallent in the Canberra 20 mile in **2:27:04** (a 10 minute PB) and in the Australian 30 km title in **2:15:04** (a 5 minute PB). On both occasions, he chased the whole way and made up ground on Jared in the latter stages. Jared had the speed but Chris had endurance to burn.

As a result of his outstanding winter, he entered the new Victorian athletics year in pride of place, wearing the prestigious Number 1 on his vest.

Come the summer and the great form continued. His first interclub race was a PB of **7:52** for the 2000m at Aberfeldie. Then after two weeks training at altitude at Thredbo, he recorded **20:00:41** to come 4th in the Ron Clarke Classic 5000m track walk in Geelong in December. He followed up with 2nd in an A series 10000m track walk in Hobart in early January in yet another PB, this time recording **42:37.43**.

The National 20 km roadwalk in Sydney in early February was a disappointing 7th in **1:30:30** but he bounced back in the Victorian 5000m title, coming second to Jared Tallent in **20:10.33**.

After two weeks in Canberra training with the AIS walkers, he returned to Melbourne and tapered down for the Commonwealth Games. In a wonderful walk in hot sunny conditions, he came 3rd in a PB time of **3:58:22**. Seven weeks later in La Coruna in Spain, he placed 26th in the World Race Walking Cup 50 km with a time of **3:59:20**. His two sub-4 performances marked his emergence at an international standard walker.



Chris races in the 2006 Commonwealth Games 50 km

After a significant break from racing, he reappeared in August 2006 looking sharp and strong. An inaugural win in the Racwalking Australia Carnival 20 km event in Melbourne (**1:28:24**) was followed by a fine 3rd in the Australian 30 km championship in Hobart (PB – **2:15:00**) in tough conditions. He was then one of two Australian walkers (Megan Szirom was the other) who were offered the chance of an all expenses paid trip to Seoul to compete in the Goyang International Racewalking Festival. On 4 days notice, he flew out, came 6th in a 20 km PB of **1:26:45** and returned to Melbourne.

His immediate plans were thrown into disarray when a strong field nominated for the Australian 50 km championship, to be held in Geelong on 2nd December. With a field that included Nathan Deakes, Luke Adams, Duane Cousins and Jared Tallent, he realised that his two sub-four 50 km walks from earlier in the year were in danger of being beaten. He embarked on an intensive training period which included several weeks at Thredbo and a week in Canberra. Alas, it was perhaps too much too quickly and he faltered in Geelong, falling off the pace at the half way mark and retiring at 40 km, well off the pace. He could only watch from the sidelines as Deakes, Cousins and Tallent all beat his 3:58:22, relegating him to 4th spot in the all important rankings.

With his selection for the 2007 World Champs looking shaky, he decided to embark on a full scale summer of racing, leading up to an early season 50 km in Europe in March 2007.

Coming straight off a further training stint at Thredbo, he raced a great 3rd in the Canberra A Series meet in late January 2007, his time of **1:24:58** being a huge PB. In quick succession, he knocked out PBs of **19:57.0** and **11:47.21** in Melbourne Premier League competition and then chased Luke Adams to a PB time of **19:40.27** in the Victorian 5000m track title. This time propelled him to 12th on the all time ranking lists. His 3000m split was a PB time of **11:39.0**. His dominant season in Victoria earned him a third Duncan Knox Award.

The Australian 20 km championship in Brisbane in mid March was a forgettable experience. A 9AM start on a very hot summer day meant that all chances of fast times were out the window so he chose to simply walk the race as a training exercise, finishing well back in 9th place. Then it was on the plane and off to Europe where he was scheduled to race 50 km in the Dudince Walking Festival on March 24.

Alas, one again, conditions were dreadful – cold, wet and windy – and his aim of 3:55 or better looked unlikely. The leading pack dropped one by one until, at 37 km, it was Chris and one other, eventual winner Robbie Heffernan of Ireland. Finally Chris also fell off the pace, holding on to finish 4th in **4:04:10**. It was a satisfying yet disappointing result.

Coming back from Europe, he found that his application for an AIS scholarship had been accepted and he was off to Canberra to continue his career in the best possible environment.

His chances of selection were now in the hands of others and he had to wait until the team was announced at the end of May. To his surprise, he found that he had been ranked 2nd in the 50 km selections and he was in the team for Osaka.

After a 2 month break, he was back on the racing circuit again, winning the NSW Teams Walking Championship 10 km in **43:13**, followed by 2nd in the annual Canberra 20 Mile Championship with a 3 minute PB of **2:24:18**.

Training hard in Canberra, he succumbed to shin problems and was sidelined 8 weeks before the World Championships. The injury did not respond to treatment and he lost valuable weeks and found his team place in jeopardy. His race in Osaka had to be a carefully planned operation given this and his final placing of 24th out of 58 starters (**4:13:00**) in the hot and humid conditions was good in the circumstances.



Chris contests the 50 km event in Osaka in 2007

Alas, the shin flared again and another month was lost to training. He now had only a short period to prepare for the Australian Olympic 50 km trial and the odds were stacked against him. He buckled down once the shin had recovered and trained hard but was constantly chasing the other AIS walkers. His one race outing was in a Canberra interclub 3000m where he recorded **11:43**.

The Olympic 50 km trial was held on 16th December 2007 at Albert Park in Melbourne and he was one of 5 walkers who walked superbly on the day and recorded Olympic A qualifiers. Unfortunately he was 5th in **3:59:02**, less than a minute outside his PB but not good enough on the day. It was his third 50 km finish for the year, a tough ask for a young walker.

He bounced back quickly from the 50 km effort and was able to put in a good training block in Canberra through January. His next effort was a solid second place in the National Series 20 km roadwalk in January in late January, his time being **1:27:00**. Two weeks later, he defended his Victorian 5000m track championship with a PB time of **19:35.71**, his 4th win in 5 years in this particular event. Another 2 weeks and he fronted for the Australian Olympic 20 km trial in Melbourne. Such was the depth that, even though he produced a wonderful PB time of **1:23:49**, he was still 4th. Three weeks later, he won the ACT 5000m track championship in another PB time of **19:32.64**.

Chris's case illustrates the depth of Australian walking. His world class 20 km and 50 km times only ranked him 5th and 6th respectively and his Olympic aspirations looked set to wait a further 4 years.

But there was still the World Racewalking Cup on which to focus. He travelled to Beijing in April for a special IAAF Olympic test event, finishing an excellent 11th place in the 20 km walk in yet another PB time of **1:23:28**, a second Olympic B qualifier. From there, it was onto Cheboksary where he was due to compete in the 50 km event.

A week out from the World Cup, Nathan Deakes announced that his injuries had not recovered sufficiently for him to attempt the 20 km / 50 km double at the Olympics and he was withdrawing from the 20 km event. This opened the door slightly for Chris as he was the next in line. He quickly arranged to be changed from the 50 km to the 20 km event in a last throw of the dice.

And did he respond! Starting slowly, he walked his way up through the field in the World Cup event to eventually finish in 30th place in **1:22:55**, an Olympic 20 km A qualifier at last. To top off a great day's racing, the Australian 20 km team of Luke Adams (7th), Jared Tallent (10th) and Chris (31st) took third place in the prestigious Teams Event.

Within weeks, he was added to the Olympic team to fill the vacant spot and his Olympic dream was back on track.

His one final race before the Olympics was the Canberra 20 Mile event in June where he finished 3rd behind Jared Tallent and Adam Rutter in **2:27:08**. Then it was back to a final couple of months of hard training before Beijing.

Alas, Beijing was a sour experience. Sitting mid field and walking strongly in the 20 km event, he was disqualified at the 12 km mark. To the strong Australian contingent, he looked safe and the result was hard to understand. What should have been the biggest walk of his life was quickly reduced to a bitter disappointment. But at age 26, he had plenty more years to race and the likelihood of a further Olympic appointment in 2012.

Back in Australia, he took a complete rest for a month before slowly starting back into training. A stint at Thredbo in early November followed by a win in the VRWC club 20 km championship in **1:25:26** showed that he had recovered well from the shattering experience of Beijing.

With only 1 spot left for the 2009 IAAF World Championships 50 km team (both Jared Tallent and Luke Adams had been preselected after their Olympic performances), Chris fronted for the Australian 50 km championship at Fawkner Park in Melbourne in mid December – his aim to break the A qualifying standard of 3:58:00, win the race and secure the final spot. He was successful on all 3 counts with a PB final time of **3:55:30**, done in torrential rain. It was his second Australian 50 km championship win but nearly 45 minutes faster than his 2004 winning time of 4:39:46! He was now in his second IAAF World Championships team, destination Berlin in August 2009.

A month's training camp at the AIS in January and the presence of a number of overseas walkers proved just the recipe to freshen up after his hard 50 km hitout.

He started his 2009 campaign with a series of 5000m races in February – and times of **20:02.81** (Brisbane, 7th February), **19:25.98** (Melbourne, 21st February) and **19:39.69** (Sydney, 28th February). His Melbourne time was a PB and secured him his fifth win in the Victorian 5000m in six years.

He went into the Australian Summer 20 km championship in Melbourne in early March in great form and hoping for a PB but his final preparation was ruined by a week from hell which saw him moving house and sorting out various family issues. He struggled to a disappointing 6th place in a very slow **1:27.31**. This was one event that had just not been kind to him over the years and 2009 proved more of the same.

It was then off to a three week altitude camp at Flagstaff in Arizona and a lot of solid training. His next race was in Wuxi in China on April 18th and he produced the goods, coming 12th in a PB time of **1:22:53**. This was a race that had always produced the goods for him and 2009 was no exception.

Now back in Australia, he continued his preparation for the Berlin 50 km event. The signs indicated that a big breakthrough walk was on the cards. He came second to Jared Tallent in the LBG 20 mile in Canberra in June in a PB **2:22:47** and was then off to Europe with the rest of the AIS walkers, competing in the 20km at La Coruna 2 weeks later (13th in **1:24:31** in hot conditions) before settling into altitude training in St Moritz. Coach Brent Vallance confided after the World Champs that Chris had "trained his pants off" on the camp and looked set for a huge walk in Berlin.

Alas, it all came apart at the last minute. With a week to go before the IAAF World Championships 50km race, a slight inflammation at the base of his spine increased rapidly. He had been getting antibiotics treatment for some days but his temperature soared suddenly and he was admitted to a military hospital in Berlin and operated on immediately. There was no known cause for the abscess, he had never had anything like it before and there was no obvious scratch or insect bite. It just seemed to be a case of the worst possible timing to put an end to what had been a great injury-free preparation. I remember sitting in the hospital post-operation with him watching Usain Bolt win the 200m in a new World Record of 19.19. By the day of the 50km, he was out of the hospital and walking gingerly and able to watch roadside as the 50km race was held. Interestingly, Athletics Australia decided to announce it as an emergency appendix operation - we jokingly speculated on what would happen if in the future he ever did have an appendix emergency - on AA logic, it would mean he had two appendixes.

In 2010, both World Cup 20km and 50km and Commonwealth Games 20km berths were on offer. Chris chose to bypass the Australian 50km in December in Melbourne and concentrate on the Australian 20km summer championship in Hobart in early February. Coming across the line as the third Australian behind Jared Tallent and Luke Adams in **1:23:37**, he showed that he had bounced back from his Berlin setback and was in good form again. He was duly announced in the 50km team for the World Cup in Chihuahua and in the 20km team for the Commonwealth Games in Delhi.

He celebrated with his usual 5000m track race in the Victorian T&F Championships in mid February, winning as usual with **19:33**. The next big challenge was preparing for the World Cup 50km in early May so it was back into a solid training block that culminated with a few weeks in Albuquerque in New Mexico for a final period of training and altitude acclimatisation.

The World Cup 50km event in Chihuahua was a superb event in very tough conditions. The sun was out from the start as it quickly heated up towards the expected top of 32C. To make matters worse, the 2km course had no shade whatsoever and a hot strong wind kicked up in the second half of the race and blew a gale in the final stages of the event. Early on, Jared Tallent, team captain Chris and Luke Adams were all prominent in the lead pack but two unexpected toilet stops for Chris meant he had to chase the pack down on two separate occasions, both long tough solo efforts. On the second chase, Chris finally recaptured the pack at the 40km mark after walking alone for more than 10km in the hot windy conditions and he was now in 10th place, in a group of 8 covering 5th to 12th places - this group included Slovakian walker Matej Toth, the eventual winner. It was at this stage that the group put the hammer down and Chris, having worked so hard to bridge the gap, was dropped again. He ended up 15th in **4:03:56** for his best ever World Cup placing (after 31st, 26th and 30th in his previous 3 outings) but he was disappointed and felt that his stomach problems had cost him.

Chris had married in March 2010 so he now took 2-3 weeks on a belated honeymoon through Central America, arriving back in Australia in early June to start his Commonwealth Games preparation. He finished just over 1 minute behind Jared in the LBG 20km soon after his return (**2:27:59**) but was vastly improved in his next outing in the Victorian 30km championship in early August, finishing a minute behind Jared once again in a PB **2:09:29**. Three weeks later he won the Australian 20km roadwalk championship in Brisbane in **1:24:45** on a technically demanding 1km loop at St Lucia.

After a stint in the AIS altitude house, he fronted for the IAAF Challenge Series Final in Beijing, contesting a 10km road walk against an elite field. In an amazing race, Jared Tallent (8th with 38:29), Luke Adams (9th with 38:41), Chris (11th with **38:59**) and Adam Rutter (15th with 39:20) all recorded huge PBs. Rarely do we see a single Australian break 40 minutes but on this day our top 4 walkers all did the deed. This was without doubt Chris's best ever race and it boded well for Delhi 3 weeks hence.

Chris's decision to then spend a week in the tropical heat of Cairns followed by some 10 days in the heat and dust of Delhi might have sounded good on paper but his Commonwealth Games race was a disaster - a distant 8th in **1:28:35**. Did the time spent in the heat have the opposite effect, draining him rather than peaking him? It is hard to say but it was a huge disappointment after what had been a great preparation.



Jared Tallent and Chris Erickson compete in the 2010 World Cup 50km in Chihuahua

Chris bypassed the Australian 50km championship in December 2010 - it was only 9 weeks after the Commonwealth Games 20km and did not allow sufficient time to prepare. Instead, he focused his attention on the Australian 20km Summer Championship in Hobart in mid February. The 20km qualification time required for the 2011 World Championships was a very tough 1:22:30 and he knew that it would require a great race to be in the mix. As it turned out, he finished as the fourth Australian behind Jared Tallent, Luke Adams and Adam Rutter in a relatively slow **1:25:29**. To make matters worse, he finished only 9 seconds ahead of a resurgent Nathan Deakes, having his first race since his 2007 World Championship win. All of a sudden, Chris's 50km World Championships spot was in doubt. While Jared and Luke were automatics, the third spot would be now decided between Chris, Nathan and Ian Rayson who also had an A qualifier.

To decide the third World Champs 50km spot, Chris, Nathan and Ian were to race in the Dudince 50km race in late March. While Ian was soon off the pace, Chris and Nathan sat in the lead group for most of the race. Alas, Chris finally succumbed to the steadily increasing tempo and was dropped at the 38km mark (eventually finishing 11th in a PB **3:54:53**) while Nathan held on well to finish 6th in 3:48:02. The World Champs 50km third spot now went to Nathan and Chris was left at home for the year, having failed to make either 20km or 50km team.

As it turned out, Chris may have chosen to bypass the World Champs anyway as his first child was born in August 2011. His domestic winter season included a few races, including a win in the Australian Winter 20km roadwalk championship in Canberra (**1:29:01** on a very slow course), but it was very much a season away from any serious racing.

Come September, he was ready to start his Olympic campaign and kicked it off with a win in the VRWC 35km club championship (a PB **2:37:36**), a PB 5000m in November (**19:24**) and bronze in the Australian 50km championship in December (a big PB of **3:51:57**). Alas, it was a great 50km walk but he ranked 4th behind Jared (3:43:36), Luke (3:45:31) and Nathan (3:48:02) so he had missed out on his Olympic spot in that event.

His task in the 20km was just as tough - a tough qualification standard of 1:22:30 was in effect and it would require a big PB to be in the mix. Fast forward to Hobart in February for the 20km trial, an event which we will all remember for many years. The forecast during the week had predicted a temperature of 35C but on the day it was much worse, peaking at over 38C and still sitting at that temperature at the 6PM start time. The sun was still high in the sky and most of the race was walked with no respite whatsoever until around 7:15PM that the evening shade finally provided some relief - but the damage was well and truly done by then with an attrition rate of around 50%.

Chris's second placed performance of **1:24:12** saw him well ahead of the other Olympic 20km contenders and was without doubt the best 20km performance he had ever pulled out. His relentlessly even pace throughout the race saw him finish just over a minute behind winner Jared Tallent but well outside the required standard. Once again, things had conspired against Chris. Jared was duly named in the 20km team but the remaining two spots remained up for grabs.

With a couple of months until the Olympic 20km team would be finalised, he travelled to Taicang in late March, improving to **1:23:09** with his 11th place finish. Closer but still not there. His next opportunity was a last role of the dice - the 20km walk in the IAAF Racewalking World Cup in May in Saransk, Russia. All the main 20km contenders were there - Luke Adams, Dane Bird-Smith, Rhydian Cowley, Chris and Adam Rutter.

There was great excitement in the Australian camp as Chris led the Australians home in the 20km, coming 21st in **1:22:20**, a 33 sec PB and an all important Olympic A qualifier which cemented his Olympic 20km spot. Adam Rutter was two places in arrears, finishing 23rd in 1:22:54. With two Olympic A qualifiers under his belt already, this cemented the final Olympic spot for him. In a scenario identical to 2008, Chris had cemented his Olympic spot at the death knell with a Russian World Cup 20km walk PB. Russia was indeed kind to him!

Chris's subsequent Olympic 20km finish (38th in **1:24:19**) was perhaps effected by his many months of trying to gain Olympic selection, first with the 50km and then with the 20km. His comment:

"It was a bit disappointing. I was found wanting in the second half of the race. I didn't quite have it out there today. I'm 30, so I think I still have another Olympics in me ... But I will be looking more at the 50km - that's my event. We just happen to have three great guys doing it right now!"



Chris competes in the 2012 Olympic 20km race in London

And that was not the end of the drama. Australia had fared poorly overall in the Olympics and much soul searching was undertaken by the various local sporting administrations. For its part, Athletics Australia decided to terminate its AIS scholarship program, opting instead to setup a different funding model. For the AIS based walkers, Chris included, it was a bitter blow. After nearly 6 years of fantastic support, he was thrown back to his own devices. The only obvious thing to do was to move back to Melbourne with his family and source part time work to fill the financial gap.

A DNF in the Australian 50km in December in Melbourne was the inevitable outcome after such a disruptive process and it put him in the hot seat once again. With Luke Adams winning in 3:57:24, Ian Rayson second in 4:00:39 and with Jared Tallent coming off his Olympic silver medal, he was once again in fourth position in the 50km rankings behind 3 A qualified walkers.

A fourth place in the Australian 20km Summer Championship in February (**1:25:15**) behind Jared Tallent, Luke Adams and Dane Bird-Smith (all in A qualifiers) put him on the back foot in this event also and his 2013 World Championship chances looked shaky indeed. Not to be deterred, he organized an invitation to walk in the Chinese National 50km championship in Taicang in early March, winning in a time of **3:55:24**. He now had his World Cup 50km berth sewn up unless Ian Rayson could raise the ante. Alas, Ian could not so the third 50km spot was Chris's.

With his second child born in April, he was content to stay on the home front and prepare locally, fitting in his training with his part time work commitments and with an increased parental workload. He walked all the Victorian championships, winning the 10km (**41:37**), 15km (**1:06:18**), 20km (**1:23:38**) and 30km (**2:22:16**) before heading off to Moscow for the World Champs.

Chris walked the race of his life in the 2013 IAAF World Championships 50km, his time of **3:49:41** a PB by over 2 minutes and his 16th placing his best ever at World/Olympic level. Back in 25th place at the half way mark, he stepped up his pace in the last 4 laps to climb 9 places.

“That was great. I fulfilled my ambition of sitting on the shoulder of Jesus Garcia who has done this event at a world event a crazy amount of times and was able to go with him past some of the other guys. Plus I’ve finished in the top-16 and have a new personal best which is great, The 50km event is my event. I want to keep improving from here and hopefully be someone that challenges for a top-eight in Rio. The next three years is about getting better, and I think I have potential for a strong performance at the IAAF World Walk Cup next year and keep moving up the ranks from there.”

The pressure was now off with his 3:49:41 top-16 finish and his place for the 2014 World Cup was quickly confirmed. He did not even race the Australian 50km in December, deciding instead to simply train through. Although his second place finishing time of **1:25:23** in the Australian Summer 20km Championship in Hobart in February 2014 was slow, he showed that his training was on track, winning the Victorian 5000m in **19:35**, racing to a big PB 12th place of **1:22:19** in Nomi, Japan, 2 weeks later, then finishing second to Dane Bird-Smith in the inaugural Australian 10,000m track championship in **40:51** 2 weeks further on.

The World Cup 50km in Taicang early May saw Chris deliver his strongest international result, crossing 11th in a PB time of **3:49:33** (this was subsequently changed to 10th when one of the Russians was outed for a drugs failure).

“I’m continuing to chip away at my time and that’s great. I have walked PB’s in both the 20km and 50km event this year and it’s good to know that I am continuing to improve each time I race at a major. I wanted to hold on to the top-ten position that I had coming into the last couple of laps, but unfortunately I got swamped by a couple of Ukrainians and that’s probably the only downside of today’s performance. A top-ten finish would have been icing on the cake. Rio has always been the main aim, and I want to finish top-eight there. I think I am tracking towards that still, and even today I’ve learned a lesson that I can use to improve. Both Beijing next year, and Rio the year after, will probably be warm races and that’s where I perform best I think. I’m heading in the right direction, and I have a new PB so I’m happy.”

Alas, with no walks on offer at the 2014 Commonwealth Games, that was the end of the international season for Chris and he was content to return home for a low key rest of the year. He raced sparsely, coming second to Jared in the LBG 20 Mile championship and winning the Victorian 20km and 30km titles but that was all.

His next major race was in December when he fronted for the Australian 50km championship in Melbourne and it was a convincing display as he powered through to win his third Australian 50km championship in a time of **3:56:38**. It was an impressive walk in hot conditions as he hauled in leader Evan Dunfee of Canada in the last 10km, going on to win by just on two minutes. And it cemented his spot in the 2015 World Championships team.

It was around this time that New Zealand 50km specialist Quentin Rew moved to Melbourne and this provided Chris with a perfect training partner, both walkers having almost identical 20km and 50km PBs.

He was keen to do the 20km/50km double in Beijing and looked fairly certain of the dual selection, ranking second behind Jared in the 50km and third behind Jared and Dane in the 20km. A PB of **19:23** in winning the Victorian 5000m track championship followed by a 20km PB of **1:22:08** in coming 10th in the IAAF Challenge event in Nomi, Japan, cemented his 20km spot. For the first time in his career, he could do the double.

While others in the team headed overseas, Chris stayed on the local front, clocking up wins in the Victorian 10km (**40:36**), 15km (a PB **1:01:09**) and 30km (**2:17:34**). Using an altitude tent and a makeshift heat chamber at home, he was able to delay his departure for the World Championships to the last minute. His selection was made even more special when he was announced as one of four team captains for the Australian T&F World Championships team.

His performances at the World Championships were mixed. In the 20km, contested first, he struggled in the hot and humid conditions, coming in as the third Australian in 32nd place with a time of **1:25:15**. But 6 days later in the 50km, it all came together in equally sweltering conditions. After sitting around 15th for most of the race, he improved to a final position of 13th with a time of **3:51:26**. This was less than 2 mins outside his PB and went a long way to confirm his spot for the 2016 Olympics in Rio.

"I was tenth at the walking cup, but the world championships is another level. I was 16th in Moscow so I have improved on that and I hung tough in that last 10 kilometres, having a bit of a race with the Chinese athlete, and it was great to come past him in the last lap."



Chris competes in the 2015 World Championships 50km in Beijing

Chris cemented his Olympic spot with his walk in the 2015 Australian 50km championship walk at Fawkner Park in December. Finishing second to Canadian walker Evan Dunfee (who also finished one place ahead of him in the 2015 World Championships 50km in Beijing), Chris won his fourth national 50km title with a time of **3:54:10**, thus ticking the box for automatic Olympic selection.

He had intended to race in the Australian 20km Summer Championship in Adelaide in February 2016 but was sidelined with a heavy cold. Losing valuable training time, he chose to bypass the 2016 World Racewalking Team Championships in Rome and concentrate on his Olympic 50km appointment.

He looked strong in winning the Victorian 10km roadwalk championship in May (**41:03**) and looked even better in winning the LBG Carnival 20 Mile Championship in June, recording a PB of **2:19:51** after surging away from Quentin Rew and Jared Tallent in the second half.

With work and family commitments, Chris chose to stay at his home base in Ocean Grove in country Victoria, bypassing the St Moritz training camp, as he prepared for his Olympic appointment. He flew out in early August, spent a short time in an Australian team camp and then went straight to Rio. It was a far from ideal preparation but it would have to be enough.

While Australian attention in the Olympic 50km was focused on Jared Tallent, Chris started slowly and was 31st out of the 80 starters at the 5km mark. From then on, he gradually reeled in those in front of him and worked his way up to 9th by the 40km mark. From then on, he was passed by only 1 fast finishing walker, eventually taking 10th place in a 53 sec

PB time of **3:48:40**. He lived up to his badge as distance team captain, walking very even 25km splits of 1:54:07 and 1:54:33. Now walking that sort of race in torrid conditions is very impressive. It was his best ever international finish, matching his 2014 World Racewalking Cup 50km placing. But being the Olympics, this was definitely a step up.

Like Jared, Chris was delighted that the shadow of doping had been lifted from his sport.

That changed the whole dynamic and opened it up for people like myself to come through. We got a clean podium this time around, like we did at the world championships last year, and we haven't been able to say that for a long time in this sport.



A top 10 finish and a PB in the 2016 Olympic 50km in Rio

It is often said that for endurance athletes, the first Olympic cycle sees you learning your trade, the second Olympic cycle sees an improved and more mature athlete and the third Olympic cycle should see you at your peak. This certainly seemed to be the case for Chris. With his first international vest way back in 2004, he had chipped away at his times year after year until, 12 years later, he was a top ten finisher at the highest international level.

His 2016 form showed that, if he so desired, he could certainly continue walking for Australia for a fourth Olympic Cycle. But, after a quite year in which he did not front for any races, he announced his official retirement in September 2017.

His PBs show that he excelled over all distances.

1500m	5:36	28/02/2009	Sydney
3000 m	11:28.83	18/02/2012	Sydney
5000 m	19:23.72	01/03/2015	Melbourne
10km	38:59	18/09/2010	Beijing, China
20 km	1:22:08	15/03/2015	Nomi, Japan
30 km	2:09:29	08/08/2010	Melbourne
50 km	3:48:40	19/08/2016	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Personal Bests are an accepted measure of improvement and the following chart shows Chris's improvement year by year in the various distances over which he raced. He recorded PBs in every year of his career - an outstanding stat.

Year	Age	1500m	3000m	5000m	10,000m	15km	20km	30km	50km
1996	14	6:47 *	14:49 *						
1997	15	6:38 *	13:32 *	23:52 *					
1998	16	6:16 *	13:29 *	23:09 *	48:36 *	1:19:01			
1999	17	6:14 *	13:18 *	22:20 *	47:32 *	1:15:04	1:40:58		
2000	18				47:03 *	1:11:17			
2001	19		13:06 *						
2002	20		12:55 *	22:12 *	46:27	1:10:32	1:34:31	2:38:36	
2003	21		12:27 *	21:30 *	45:02 *			2:27:04	4:19:48
2004	22					1:08:34	1:31:33	2:23:54	4:14:16
2005	23	5:50 *	11:55 *	20:00 *	43:46	1:06:09	1:28:22	2:15:04	4:03:42
2006	24				42:37 *	1:04:39	1:26:34	2:15:00	3:58:22
2007	25		11:39 *	19:40.27 *	42:22	1:03:36	1:24:58	2:13:52	
2008	26	5:45 *	11:36.6 *	19:32.64 *	41:14	1:01:55	1:22:55		3:55:25
2009	27	5:36 *	11:32.98 *	19:25.98 *	41:09		1:22:53	2:12:34	
2010	28				38:59			2:09:29	
2011	29			19:24.98 *					3:51:57
2012	30		11:28.83 *				1:22:20		
2013	31								3:49:41
2014	32					1:01:44	1:22:19		3:49:33
2015	33			19:23.72 *		1:01:09	1:22:08		
2016	34								3:48:32

* indicates track performance

Tim Erickson
September 2017