

### *Craig Brill*

1986	World Junior Champs	Athens	10,000m	20 <sup>th</sup>	45:27
1987	Racewalking World Cup	New York	50 km	52 <sup>nd</sup>	4:19:46
1989	Racewalking World Cup	Barcelona	50 km	DNF	
1991	Racewalking World Cup	San Jose	50 km	DQ	
1993	Racewalking World Cup	Monterey	50 km	48 <sup>th</sup>	4.24.43



**Craig in action in the Victorian 15 km title at Fishermans Bend in 1991**

Craig Brill, born in 1968, was a product of the Victorian Little Athletics movement where he started as a 7 year old at the Collingwood venue, mixing walking with running. He enjoyed distance events at an early age and as a 15, 16 and 17 year old, he was the first Junior to finish the Big M Marathon in Melbourne.

Luckily for walking, he decided to concentrate on walking rather than running and he had his first serious crack at the National level in 1984 when he came 4<sup>th</sup> in the Australian Junior 20 km roadwalk in **1:37:20** and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Under 18 8 km roadwalk in **38:09**. He was only 16 at the time and already showing a likeness for the long distances.

1985 saw him win 3 silver medals at the National level - 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Australian Under 18 3000m track walk in **12:59**, 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Australian Junior 20 km roadwalk (**1:38:03**) and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Australian Under 18 8 km (**37:34**) roadwalk.

His improvement continued in 1986. He started the year with a fine 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Australian Open 5000m title in **22:57**, came 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Australian Junior 20 km again in **1:34:12** and finally won his first National title in the Australian Junior 10 km road championship in **45:21**. This victory gained him selection in the World Junior team at Athens in July 1986 where he finished 20<sup>th</sup> in the 10,000m track walk with **45:27**.

He came 2<sup>nd</sup> to Nick A'Hern in the 1987 Australian Junior 10 km roadwalk title in **45:39** and then backed up with a fine 2<sup>nd</sup> behind Kevin Lowden in the Australian Junior 20 km road title with a time of **1:34:57**. It was his 4<sup>th</sup> minor placing in this race in 4 successive years but the title had eluded him.

At the 1987 Lugano Cup 50 km in New York and while still a junior, Craig clocked an Australian Junior best of **4:19:46** to be the first Australian to finish, in front of his older team mates Mark Donahoo and Mike Harvey.

In February 1989, he won the Racewalking World Cup Trial in Melbourne with a PB of **4:14:34** and then in March he showed his versatility in winning his first Victorian Open title, the 5000m track walk, with **24:10**. The race was contested in sweltering heat and it suited the tough youngster.

Craig was expected to do well in the Racewalking World Cup in May in Barcelona but he fell foul of a virus and was forced to withdraw from the 50 km event after only 20 km. While Simon Baker went on to become the first and only Australian to win this World Championship, Craig could only watch in disappointment from the sidelines.

He bounced back with a vengeance in August in the Australian 50 km championship race where he finished a fine 2<sup>nd</sup> in **4:01:48**, only 4 minutes behind Simon Baker and ahead of Willi Sawall who took 3<sup>rd</sup> place. On this occasion, he negative split the race with his second half faster than his first half. This happened on a number of subsequent occasions with Craig. He seemed to prefer to start slowly and gather steam as the event progressed.

In October 1989, he narrowly missed out on gaining a place in the Commonwealth Games 30 km trial held in Melbourne. In that race, he finished 4<sup>th</sup> in **2:16:51**, less than 2 minutes behind third place getter Paul Copeland who went on to Christchurch.

In 1990, he travelled to Europe to compete in the Eight Nations Meet where he completed the 35 km event in 24<sup>th</sup> with **2:50:46**. Back in Melbourne in September, he was part of an amazing 50 km track race (the Victorian title) that saw Simon Baker set multiple Victorian, Australian and Commonwealth records in winning in 3:43:43. It was Craig who was 2<sup>nd</sup> in **4:09:52**.

In the Lugano Cup 1991 trial in Melbourne, he clocked **4:05:05** for first place and gained a second World Walking Cup selection but his subsequent DQ in San Jose was a big disappointment. Coming back to Australia, he fronted up a month later in the Australian 50 km race title race and came 2<sup>nd</sup> in **4:02:45** (the event was won by Dariusz Wojcik in 4:00:38).

In January 1992, the Olympic 50 km trial was held in Melbourne and Craig once again finished 2<sup>nd</sup> to Dariusz. This time Craig recorded **4:00:21** as against Dariusz's time of 3:58:30. Both walkers were well under the Olympic B Qualifying standard and Craig's time placed him 5<sup>th</sup> on the all time Australian ranking. Yet neither Dariusz nor Craig was selected as the selectors would not ratify the results, given the small field and the absence of people like Simon Baker.



**Knox Industrial Area – 1992 Victorian 50 km championship. The walkers are Michael Harvey, Mark Donahoo, Craig Brill and Simon Baker**

In a surprising and controversial decision, it was announced that the 'official' 50 km trial would be in Czechoslovakia and anyone wishing to gain an Olympic berth must compete in this race. With A.A. unwilling to bend, walkers, Craig amongst them, had no alternative but to self-fund a European trip to try to qualify.

History shows that only Simon Baker walked the 50 km at Barcelona. In the European based trial, Dariusz was disqualified at 40 km, Craig did not finish and Michael Harvey finished in 4:13 odd.

It was a bitter disappointment for Craig but he showed great determination and kept training. In December 1992, the Racewalking World Cup trial was held in Melbourne in very hot conditions. Like the rest of the field, he suffered in the heat and faded to 3<sup>rd</sup> place in **4:13:33**. But it was still good enough to gain selection in his fourth Racewalking World Cup team, a great achievement for someone who was still only 25 years of age.

In Monterey, he finished 48<sup>th</sup> out of 99 starters in **4:24.43**, again in horrendously hot conditions.

But the two 50 km races, walked in such hot conditions, took a great personal toll and this combined with his Olympic disappointment and the need to provide for a young family, made the decision to retire an inevitable one.

At the time when walkers are just starting to mature, Craig ended his short career. I have no doubt that he had even better walks in him but his decision to retire was understandable, given the circumstances. He had raced the 50 km distance at an elite level for 7 years but the school of hard knocks had finally won out.