

Dominic McGrath

1995	Racewalking World Cup	Beijing	50 km	75 th	4:36:29
1997	Racewalking World Cup	Prague	50 km	65 th	4:14:49
1998	Commonwealth Games	Kuala Lumpur	50 km	3 rd	4:12:52
1999	Racewalking World Cup	Mezidon	50 km	45 th	4:00:50

Dominic McGrath, born 4th June 1972, was an all rounder as an underage athlete. He successfully combined walking with throwing events, winning a Victorian Junior title in the javelin as well as a bronze medal in the Australian Under 16 Hammer Championship in 1987.

His first tilt at National level racewalking was in March 1988 when he came 5th in Australian Under 16 1500m title in **6:24**. Soon he realised that his real future lay in walking and his enjoyment of the sport started to increase. But he had to wait till August 1990 before he had his first major walking victory – a win in the Australian Schools Under 19 10 km roadwalk at Davies Park in Brisbane in **48:09**.

Yet like many top juniors before him, when he finished his school career at the end of 1990, his walking career also ceased. Work commitments and waning interest pushed his focus elsewhere.

It was not until 1992 that he returned to the sport as a senior and immediately found the longer events to his liking. His first 50 km walk was in September 1993 and his goal was simply to finish – and he did, coming 4th in the Victorian title in **4:51:49**. He realised that if he trained hard and toughened himself mentally, the results would come. He counts his main influences at this stage as Mark Donahoo, Michael Harvey, Mark Thomas and Steve Beecroft. In fact, Mark was his coach from 1993 to 1995.

His first overseas trip was in 1994 when he raced over 20 km and 35 km distances in Europe. His experience in travelling with the likes of Simon Baker, Nick A’Hern, Kerry Saxby and Harry Summers was an eye opener. Back in Australia, he showed amazing improvement to come 3rd in the Racewalking World Cup trial in Melbourne in December with a huge PB of **4:16:41**.

This earned him an Australian vest and a trip to Beijing in May 1995 for the Racewalking World Cup 50 km. In the oppressive heat, he came 75th in **4:36:29**.

In 1996 a couple of significant things happened. Firstly he was retrenched from his position as foreman for a construction company and he took up work with Bill Dyer. This proved the right stimulus for his career to really take off. Bill understood the training commitments required to reach international status and helped Dom with his own experiences and with the required work flexibility. At the same time Dom swapped coach to Simon Baker whom he rates even now as the most inspirational person he met during his walking career.

With renewed enthusiasm he fronted for the Olympic 50 km trial in March and his 4th place in a PB time of **4:06:29** narrowly missed selection. He then turned his focus towards gaining a second World Cup berth.

The trial was in Melbourne in December 1996 and Dom won in hot conditions in **4:16:34**, a finishing time that did not truly reflect the top performance. In February 1997 he finished 7th in the Australian 20 km title in Melbourne with a PB time of **1:27:39**. Then onto Prague in April where he finished a competitive 65th in **4:14:41**.

Up till now, his 50 km times had shown potential but the big breakthrough still beckoned. But not for long! In December 1997, he finished 3rd in the Australian 50 km in a sub 4 hour performance of **3:59:15**. This was the Commonwealth Games selection trial and the qualifying standard had been set at 4:00:00. Dom started slowly as usual and his first 10 km was covered in 49:18, well back in the field. But as the race progressed, he sped up and his last 5 km saw him storm home with a qualifier.

With his Commonwealth Games selection now certain, he was able to concentrate on his racing. In July, he finished 2nd in the Victorian 20 km title in **1:28:19**, then 2nd in the Victorian 30 km title in **2:13:34** in his final warmup race before Kuala Lumpur. In September in the Commonwealth Games 50 km event, he raced with his usual tactics, starting slowly and storming home to 3rd place in **4:12:52**. The event was held in stifling heat and he finished the race with blood streaming down his right leg from chafing caused by ill-fitting shorts.

In March 1999, he started the year well with **1:27:19** in the Australian 20 km title race, held in Melbourne. Then it was off to Mezidon in France in April to his third Racewalking World Cup and he produced yet another superb 50 km time of **4:00:58** for 45th place, his best placing so far.



Dominic storms home to third place in the 1998 Commonwealth Games 50 km event in Kuala Lumpur in hot oppressive conditions.

Back in Australia, he now started his Olympic preparation in earnest. He regularly clocked up big mileages and raced competitively throughout the winter. In September, he finished 2nd in the Australian 30 km title in **2:18:59**, less than a minute behind Duane (as usual – it was becoming a habit). He was in great shape and looked a good chance for the Olympic trial which was to be held in Melbourne in December. But bad luck struck when, in the final leadup period, he suffered a leg strain. He had no alternative but to toe the line in the trial but the odds seemed stacked against him. He struggled throughout the race to finish as the 4th Australian in **4:07:33**. The first 3 (Nathan Deakes, Dion Russell and Duane Cousins) all broke 4 hours to record A qualifiers to he looked to have missed out.

In a last attempt to sway the selectors, he travelled to Europe in April and finished a great 2nd in the European Grand Prix event held at Leamington Spar in England. His time of **3:57:51** was a PB, an Olympic A qualifier and was faster than Duane had recorded to come 3rd in the trial. But the selectors decided on the others and for a second time Dom missed out on Olympic selection.

To his credit, he continued to train, focusing on the 2001 IAAF World Championships that were to be held in Edmonton in Canada. The Australian 50 km title in May 2001 at Albert Park was the trial and Dom walked well for 4th place in **4:01:33** in a very close race. The three 50 km places for Edmonton were filled by AIS walkers.

For Dom, this was the end of the road. His job as a builder was demanding enough but to combine that with training at the highest level for the 50 km event was not the sort of commitment that could be maintained long term. Newly married, he chose to retire and pursue his family and work career.

Post walking, Dom has discovered the world of triathlons and completed his first Iron Man event in 2004 in a time of just over 10 hours. He remains as fit as ever and is often seen around the Tan – but running rather than walking.

His PBs across the board are impressive: 1500m (**5:51**) in 1997, 3000m (**12:00**) in 1996, 5000m (**21:03**) in 2001, 10000m (**44:46**) in 1995, 20 km (**1:27:19**) in 1999, 30 km (**2:13:29**) in 1998 and 50 km (**3:57:51**) in 2000.

Not surprisingly, he rates Duane Cousins as his toughest opponent yet he loved travelling with Duane. They were both members of Glenhuntly Athletics Club and their careers mirrored each other in both time and performances.