

### *Gabrielle Blythe*

1986	World Junior Champs	Athens	5,000m	7 <sup>th</sup>	23:56
1988	World Junior Champs	Sudbury	5,000m	7 <sup>th</sup>	22:44
1992	Olympic Games	Barcelona	10 km	31 <sup>st</sup>	50:13
1993	Racewalking World Cup	Monterey	10 km	21 <sup>st</sup>	48:00
1993	IAAF World Champs	Stuttgart	10 km	33 <sup>rd</sup>	48:23

Gabrielle Blythe, born 9<sup>th</sup> March 1969 in Geelong, was a phenomenal junior walker who swept all before her.

She won the Australian Under 18 3000m track walk in **14:50** in March 1985, improved her time to win the Australian Schools Under 19 track walk in Perth in December 1985 in **14:02** and then led a one person assault on the Australian Junior record book.

In quick succession, she lowered Sally Pierson's Victorian 3000m record by 14 secs to **13:35** and then slashed Sally's National records and won the Australian Under 18 track title in **13:21**. By the end of the track season, she had lowered the Australian Junior 1500m record to **6:20.2**, the Australian Junior 3000m record to **13:12.6** and the Australian Junior 5000m record to **22:37.4**. She was still Under 17 at the time of these walks!

She was fittingly rewarded with selection to the World Junior Championships which were held in Athens in July 1986. There, although still only 17 years of age, she came a very creditable 7<sup>th</sup> in **23:56**.

Back in Australia after this success, she won the 1987 Australian Junior track 3000m title in **13:51** and then retained the title the following year in **14:03**. It was her fourth successive year as an Australian underage champion.

By the end of 1988, she had reduced her National Junior 3,000m record to **13:09.14** and she was selected for her second World Junior Championships where she raced up to her best to come 7<sup>th</sup> in **22:44**. Back home, she recorded **47:49** in the Victorian 10 km title and looked set to be a regular member of our international teams.

At this stage, she seemed to disappear from sight and it was not until 1991, when she was awarded an AIS scholarship, that her career received the boost it needed to move that extra step forward.



**Gabrielle and Dion Russell racing at the AIS in 1991.**

In February 1992, she placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Victorian 5000m title (**22:52**) and then a week later she recorded a sizzling **12:51.2** for a track 3000m walk in Melbourne. This was followed in March by a 5<sup>th</sup> placing in the Australian 5000m (**22:39**) title and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Olympic 10 km trial (she was beaten by both Kerry Saxby and Lorraine Jachno). Although

she was walking well, her trial time of **47:49** was well outside the Australian Olympic qualifying standard of 45:30, a time that both Kerry and Lorraine had already achieved, so she looked to have missed Olympic selection.

Surprisingly, Lorraine was only given a B grade selection, meaning that she had to confirm her place with other qualifying performances. She did this twice, firstly in Melbourne on the road (45:24) and then in Bergen in Norway on May 16 on the track (45:26). Her Bergen time was a new Victorian record and she beat the Chinese girl who went on to win the 1992 Olympic walk.

With Kerry and Lorraine in Europe chasing times and races, Gabrielle won the Australian 20 km title in Melbourne on May 24 in **1:40:02**. In this race, her first 10 km split was **44:21**. She then backed this up with **44:27** in La Caruna in Europe. So now she had 2 Olympic qualifiers to her name and it was not surprising when she was added to the team. However, the big shock was Lorraine Jachno's omission even though she had 3 qualifying performances and had come 2<sup>nd</sup> at the official trial.

Gabrielle's Barcelona performance of **50:13** for 31<sup>st</sup> place was a disappointment after her great 10 km qualifiers. The effort in making the team had been at a great cost and the Olympics came just too quickly for her to refresh and refocus.

She bounced back in February 1993 to win the Victorian 5000m track title in a new State record time of **21:55** and followed this up with 5<sup>th</sup> (**22:24**) in the Australian 5000m track title in March.

It was then back into a further period of intensive trainin. She emerged in July to record her best ever time of **43:28** for the 10 km walk in Hawkesbury. Then it was off overseas for the big races. The first was the Racewalking World Cup in Monterey in Mexico. There she walked a very competitive race (**48:00**), given the merciless Mexican sun that scorched the pavement. She finished 21<sup>st</sup> out of a huge field of 115 starters.

From there she travelled to Softeland in Norway where she placed 5<sup>th</sup> in the womens 10,000m track event in **44:12**. The final event for the year was the IAAF World Championships in Stuttgart where she finished 33<sup>rd</sup> in **48:23**. It had been a big year.



**Gabrielle poses for the photograph in 1992**

Surprisingly, at the end of 1993, Gabrielle forfeited her AIS scholarship and returned to Melbourne. Her final big race was the 1994 Commonwealth Games trial but she managed only 5<sup>th</sup> in **47:05**. She made the decision to retire. It had been a short but a star studded career.

The quality of her performances is shown by the fact that she still retains the following Victorian records:

U17-U19	3000m	13:12.6	Melbourne	06/01/1986
U17-U20	1500m	6:20.2	Geelong	08/02/1986
U18-U20	5000m	22:37.4	Melbourne	16/02/1986
Open	3000m	12:28.0	Norway	09/05/1993
Open	5000m	21:55.5	Melbourne	20/02/1993