

## *Jess Rothwell*

2008	Racewalking World Cup	Cheboksary	10 km	5 <sup>th</sup>	46:44
2008	World Junior Championships	Bydgoszcz	10,000m	4 <sup>th</sup>	44:44.22
2009	IAAF World Championships	Berlin	20km	21 <sup>st</sup>	1:36:01
2010	Racewalking World Cup	Chihuahua	20km	9 <sup>th</sup>	1:35:04
2010	Commonwealth Games	Delhi	20km	Withdrew	
2013	IAAF World Championships	Moscow	20km	53 <sup>rd</sup>	1:38:03

Jess Rothwell, born 18<sup>th</sup> June 1989, did not have an easy path in her quest to become an international racewalker. She lived on a dairy farm in Katunga, in north eastern Victoria. The nearest walking centre to the family was the Bendigo Walkers Club but Katunga is 1.5 to 2 hours drive from Bendigo.

Once the family realised that Jess had potential as a racewalker, they decided to join Bendigo Walkers Club. The opportunities to train with the walkers at Bendigo were few and far between and most of her training was done on her own, but she could at least race with the club and get expert coaching from club president Paul Rance. Added to that, competing in State championships meant a 3 hour drive to Melbourne that had to be fitted in with her parents' demanding lifestyle as dairy farmers. It's not exactly the ideal environment in which to nurture a champion athlete but Jess and her family achieved just that in spite of the odds.

The following results show how she was rarely been out of the medals at the Australian championship level in her developmental years.

Australian U14 3km road	2002	3 <sup>rd</sup>	15.42
Australian U16 1500m track	2003	2 <sup>nd</sup>	6.58.5
Australian U16 5km road	2003	1 <sup>st</sup>	24.09
Australian U18 3000m track	2004	3 <sup>rd</sup>	14.35.1
Australian U16 5km road	2004	2 <sup>nd</sup>	25:09
Australian U18 8km road	2005	2 <sup>nd</sup>	42:37
Australian U18 8km road	2006	1 <sup>st</sup>	40:31
Australian U20 10000m track	2007	2 <sup>nd</sup>	49:29.10
Australian U20 10000m track	2008	1 <sup>st</sup>	46:15.17

It was her 2003 win in the Australian Under 16 5 km roadwalk in Melbourne that gave her a national profile. Her time of **24:09** was a huge PB and was walked with consummate ease.



*Jess wins the 2003 Australian Under 16 5 km roadwalk in 24:09*

In 2006, she approached Simon Baker for additional coaching help, a partnership that produced spectacular results.

2007 saw Jess doing her Year 12 studies so her racing opportunities were few. She started the year with 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Australian 10,000m track championship in a PB time of **49:29.10** but then settled down to a year of study and raced only occasionally. But when the final exams finished, she burst back onto the scene with a series of top races.

Things started with a first place in the VRWC 10 km race, held in conjunction with the Australian 50 km championships at Albert Park in December 2007. Her time of **47:03** was a huge PB. Then it was off to Canberra for a 6 week training block with the AIS walkers.

Her next appearance at the National Series 20 km walk in Canberra in January 2008 saw her beat all the seniors to win with **1:37:34**, a huge first up performance and one that rocketed her into the Australian all time ranking lists. Two weeks later she travelled to Melbourne where she won the Victorian Under 20 5000m track walk title in a new Victorian Junior record of **22:08.76**. Two weeks later, she was back in action, winning the Under 20 10 km roadwalk held in conjunction with the Australian 20 km championship. Her time of **45:45** was another big PB and rocketed her to the top of the Australian 10 km ranking lists. Finally, she rounded off her summer season with a win in the Australian Under 20 10,000m track championship in mid March with a new Australian Junior record time of **46:15.17**.



*Jess records 45:45 at Fawkner Park in Melbourne in February 2008*

It was no surprise that she was subsequently named to represent Australia at both the 2008 World Racewalking Cup and in the 2008 World Junior Championships.

Her first two international races were fantastic. First, in Russia at the World Racewalking Cup in May, she placed 5<sup>th</sup> in the Under 20 Women's 10 km roadwalk in a huge PB time of **46:44**. Then in July in Poland at the World Junior Championships, she improved one spot to place 4<sup>th</sup> in the Under 20 Women's 10,000m track walk in yet another PB of **44:44.22**. This performance bettered her own Australian junior record which she had set in March. Jess followed her race plan to perfection, placing herself in the leading group and passing halfway in 22:03. From then on, it was a tough job but she held on magnificently to finish just over 20 seconds behind the bronze medal position.



*Jess in action in the Racewalking World Cup (left) and the World Juniors (right)*

*“Training had been going very well, but I wasn't expecting to be in the 44s”, she said regarding her finishing time. “The race is all a bit of a blur. Because we were lapping people there was always somebody to work on catching.”*

When asked what was next, Jess indicated that she had her sights firmly set on transferring her success as a junior into the senior ranks. *“Next season I'll be working towards doing an A-qualifier for Berlin”,* she said in reference to the 20km walk event at the world championships in the German capital. *“It would be great to challenge some of the older girls for a spot in the team.”*

The rest of the year was spent quietly in Melbourne as she managed a troublesome hamstring and concentrated on fitness. Stints visiting at the AIS in Canberra and a full month there in January 2009 proved to be just what was required to move her up to the next level.

Jess's first race of 2009 was a sizzler. Although finishing second to English walker Jo Jackson in the Australia Cup 5000m in Brisbane in early February, she walked a huge PB and became the second fastest ever Australian woman with a time of **21:12.63**. A week later in a VRWC club race at Albert Park, she powered through to record a 10km PB time of **44:01**. Another week went by and she won the Victorian Open 5000m championship with yet another PB – **21:03.33** – and a new Victorian record. Another week and another race – this time at the Sydney Grand Prix where she crossed the line first in 21:13 but was subsequently disqualified – a disappointing first for Jess.

Coming off such a wonderful racing preparation, it was little surprise when she smashed through the 20 km barrier a week later in the Australian Summer roadwalking championships at Fawkner Park in Melbourne. After passing through the 10 km mark together with Cheryl Webb in 44:52, it was Cheryl who finished the stronger, walking an identical 44:52 for the second 10 km to win in 1:29:44 (Cheryl's performance was the first sub-90 done by an Australian on Australian soil). Jess, still only 19, was almost as good, holding on well to record a 7 minute PB time of **1:30:25**. There were no surprises when, a few weeks later, both girls were named, along with Claire Tallent, to represent Australia in the 2009 IAAF World Championships. Jess's 2008 wish to make the Berlin team was now a reality.



*Jess races to 1:30:25 in Melbourne in March 2009*

Her next race was a low key affair in the Victorian country championships in Bendigo in May 2009, where she recorded **44:19** for the 10 km distance. She won well in the LBG 10 Miles race in Canberra in June (**1:14:33**) and then headed off to Europe to St Moritz to prepare for the World Champs.

Her walk in Berlin in August 2009 was a solid one in hot conditions - 21<sup>st</sup> in **1:36:01** - and she was the first of the Australians to finish.

Jess next raced in November 2009 in Melbourne, winning comfortably with **1:34:22** at the annual Fawkner Park 50km meet. She was upbeat about her performance

*Mexico for the IAAF World Race Walk Championships is what I'm preparing for at the moment so to start like this in tough conditions is great. Speed training hasn't really commenced yet so I'm really happy with my time and feel confident heading into some pretty big events.*

But it was not to be. A niggling hamstring injury put an end to her racing and the World Cup meet in Chihuahua in May 2010 would be her next hitout after 6 months nursing herself through training. Yet her performance in Chihuahua was outstanding, with a top 10 finish - 9<sup>th</sup> with **1:35:04** - in hot conditions. In fact, she had been in 7<sup>th</sup> spot at the 15km mark before being passed by a couple of fast finishing walkers.



*Jess with coach Simon Baker at the 2010 IAAF Racewalking World Cup in Chihuahua*

She then travelled to Europe for a couple more races before returning home. She did **44:05** for 10km in Krakow, Poland, followed by **1:30:53** for 20km in La Coruna, Spain. It had been a very solid racing block after such a difficult preparation.

With the 2010 Commonwealth Games to be contested in Delhi in October, the Australian team travelled to China in September for the IAAF Challenge Series Final in Beijing. The women's 10km race was not kind to Australia, with Claire Tallent disqualified at the 8.8km mark when in 5<sup>th</sup> place and with Jess aggravating her hamstring and forced to take it very easy to finish with what was for her a slow **46:03**. The even worse news is that Jess was now forced to withdraw from the Commonwealth Games.

It was nearly 12 months before Jess was back in action again but it was not a happy outcome. She was first to finish in the Australian 20km Roadwalk Championship in August 2011 but she was subsequently disqualified. She had looked uncomfortable and she was obviously still not walking fully free of her hamstring issues. It would be some 19 months and a major operation before her next race.

With the AIS scholarship program terminating at the end of 2012, she returned to Melbourne to pursue her University studies. Her former AIS walks coach Brent Vallance, also now in Melbourne, took her under his wing and guided her back into racing shape.

In January 2013, she had been just getting back into some gentle walking on the treadmill. Two months later, she was a surprise starter in the Sydney Track Classic, racing strongly and finishing second to Tanya Holliday in the 5000m in the impressive time of **21:28.92**.

She still had to get a 20km qualifying performance on the board and she chose the annual Sesto San Giovanni 20km in Italy in early May. Taking an early lead in a group of five, she led the race through 5km in 23:45 fading slightly in the humid conditions but still crossing in 6<sup>th</sup> place with **1:34:13**.



*Jess races in the Sesto San Giovanni 20km in Italy in May 2013*

Her preparation had been limited but she had now done enough to confirm her selection for the 2013 IAAF World Championships. Alas, fast forward 3 months to Moscow and it was a tough day in the office for Jess who finished in 53<sup>rd</sup> place with **1:38:03**.

This would be her final race. Her hamstring continued to give her trouble and, try as she might, she was unable to completely cure it.

While all this was going on, Jess completed her university training as an Accredited Practising Dietitian and Sports Dietitian and has since upgraded to a Masters qualification at La Trobe University in Melbourne.

She been working regionally at Echuca Regional Health to get a foot in the competitive hospital setting and is about to commence a role at The Northern Hospital in Melbourne, alongside private practice/sub-contracting dietetics and casual floristry work.

She has also been assisting the Athletics Australia U20 walks squad in a mentoring capacity and is the current Athletics Australia Talent Target Program (TTP) racewalks.

It is wonderful to see her moving forward with her life after sport and to see that she continues to give back to our sport.