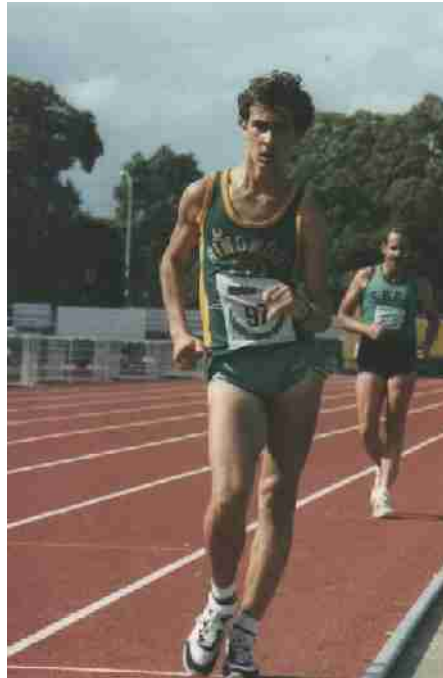


Paul Van Kopplen (Copeland)

1986	World Junior Champs	Athens	10,000m	12 th	43:27
1987	Racewalking World Cup	New York	20 km	74 th	1:31:50
1989	Racewalking World Cup	Barcelona	20 km	85 th	1:33:43
1989	World Student Games	Duisberg	20 km	10 th	1:31:00
1990	Commonwealth Games	Auckland	30 km	8 th	2:19:55
1991	Racewalking World Cup	San Jose	20 km	DQ	
1997	Racewalking World Cup	Prague	20 km	96 th	1:29:53

Paul Van Kopplen (Copeland), born 25th April 1967, won the inaugural Australian Under 18 8 km roadwalking championship in **37:28** in 1983. He was aged only 16 at the time.

He followed this up with further top performances in 1984, starting with gold in the Australian Under 18 track title (**13:01**). Moving to the road, he defended his Australian Under 18 8 km title in **37:10**, was 2nd in the Australian Junior 20 km title in **1:36:17** and won the Australian All Schools Under 19 10 km title in **47:59**. It is true to say that he dominated his age group.



Paul leads David Cash of Sandringham in the 1986 Victorian track title

He returned in 1985 to retain the Australian Under 18 Track title in **12:52**, beating Craig Brill and Nick A'Hern. He was also 2nd in the Victorian Open 10 km title in **44:41** and the Victorian Open 15 km title in **1:11:51**.

By 1986, he held the Australian Junior record for 3000m (**12:37.2**) and was starting to emerge as a serious threat to our senior walkers over all distances. He won the Australian Junior track title in **21:18** and then followed up with victory in the Australian Junior 20 km road title in Adelaide in an Australian Junior record time of **1:31:57**. It was his sixth Australian Under 18 and Under 20 championship victory.

These performances gained him selection in the World Junior team at Athens in July 1986 and he finished 12th in the 10,000m walk in a fantastic **43:27**.

Paul started 1987 off with victory in the Victorian Junior track title and the stage seemed to be set for an exciting clash with Nick A'Hern in the National title. But he ruined any chances of retaining his Australian Junior title by contesting the Racewalking World Cup 20 km trial two days before the track titles. A'Hern blitzed the field to easily win the Junior title in a new Australian Junior record of 20:53, beating a 'flat' Copeland by 30 seconds. But Paul did not regret his decision to compete in the 20 km trial, as his 5th placing in **1:30:06** earned him a trip with the Racewalking World Cup team to New York. He followed this with a fine 3rd in the Victorian 10 km title in **43:39**. His Lugano Cup time of **1:31:50** rounded off a great winter by the young walker.

In December 1987 at Albert Park, Paul and Craig Brill fought out the finish of the Willi Sawall 20 km. Paul was successful in **1:29:42**, a new Australian Junior best time. By the end of the 1987/88 track season, at the age of 20, he had amassed best times of **12:12** for 1500m, **20:45** for 5000m and **42:41** for 10 km and he was optimistic about his Olympic chances.

At the Olympic 20 km trial in April 1988, he was 3rd to Simon Baker and Andrew Jachno in the great time of **1:25:01.85**. But the Olympic qualifying standard was 1:25:00 and 1.85 seconds separated him from Olympic selection. He did not walk a great deal for the rest of the winter – amongst his few performances were 2nd in the Victorian 30 km title in **2:21:15** and 2nd in the July Federation 10 km event in **41:48**.

The bitter blow of Olympic omission was softened a little when he was invited to join the AIS in early 1989. He started the racing year well with his first Victorian Open title, the 5000m (**21:13**) He then followed this up with 3rd in the National Open 5000m title in **21:06** (behind Baker and Jachno) and 3rd in the Lugano Cup 20 km trial in **1:35:23**. The trial was held in hot conditions in March in Melbourne. In his second Racewalking World Cup event, he suffered in the Barcelona heat and faded to 85th in **1:33:43**. It was a disappointing result. He gained some compensation with 10th in **1:31:00** in the World Student Games 20 km walk in Duisberg in Germany.

Back in Australia, he set his sights on the 1990 Commonwealth Games for which the trial was to be held in late October in Melbourne. Well back in 5th place early on, he walked his way up through the field. Although eventually in 3rd place (behind Baker and Jachno as usual), he was in danger of missing the qualifying standard and he had to call on all his mental and physical reserves to hold on for a fine **2:14:53**, just 7 seconds under the required time. So whereas he had just missed out on the 1988 Olympics, this time the fates favoured him and he gained Commonwealth Games selection.

Unfortunately a back injury in December 1989 severely hampered his final preparations and his 8th place in **2:19:55** in the Auckland Games in January 1990 was a disappointment after his wonderful trial performance. Growing disillusioned with the AIS, he eventually made the decision to return to Melbourne and continue his career in the more familiar home environment.



Paul Copeland (41) along with Andrew Jachno (38) and Simon Baker (18) at the start of the 1990 Commonwealth Games 30 km walk in Auckland, New Zealand. Eventual winner Guillaume LeBlanc (214) is also shown.

This decision seemed to be correct. In December 1990, he walked **1:26:27** for 4th in the VRWC 20 km club championship and then in January 1991, he was 2nd in the Victorian 10,000m track title in **42:20**. He was once again approaching top form. He recorded **1:25:19** over the 20 km distance in April in a pre-World Cup fitness trial race at the Knox venue and was 4th in the Victorian 15 km title in a fast **1:02:00**. His subsequent DQ in San Jose was a bitter disappointment.

He bounced back in August to come 2nd in the Victorian 20 km title in **1:25:35** and followed this up with **1:24:35** in November at the Knox venue.

As 1992 started, he was back on the track and looking towards the Olympics. He put out an **11:50** for Interclub in Melbourne in November 1991 and was 3rd in January 1992 in the Victorian 10,000m title in **41:05**. Unfortunately he was disqualified in the Olympic 20 km trial in March and his career seemed to be in trouble.

As the Olympics came and went, he continued to race locally and won 3 State titles that year – the 20 km in **1:29:38**, the 30 km in **2:20:30** and the 50 km in **4:14:20**.

In June 1993, Paul finished 2nd to Nick A'Hern in the Canberra 20 mile event in **2:29:13** and followed up in August with his first Australian 20 km title in Canberra. At the 14 km mark, he and training partner Mike Harvey broke away from the field. Paul stamped himself as a favourite to win a place in the forthcoming Commonwealth Games team with the seemingly effortless way in which he slipped into top gear to win by nearly a minute in **1:29:42**.

Alas, in October 1993, his niggling back injury flared up again and effectively ended his Commonwealth preparations. It was not until October 1995 that he could return to racing and it was not until 1997 that his performances were once again competitive.

February 1997 saw him gain 5th place in the Australian 20 km title (**1:27:06**) held in Melbourne in February. This gained him selection for his fourth Racewalking World Cup and **1:29:53** in Prague was the result. He then continued to race for a couple of years, coming 2nd in the 1998 Victorian 5000m title and winning the 1999 Victorian 30 km title in **2:21:49**. He now makes the occasional Interclub appearance but nothing higher.

He has now moved successfully into the coaching sphere and has a strong squad of walkers in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne.

His injuries nowadays prevent any really serious training and his family and work commitments take precedence over any thoughts of a comeback. Paul's career was one of highs and lows but his highs were exceptionally high. His seven Australian Team selections rate him amongst our best walkers ever.