

Tom Barnes

| | | | | | |
|------|------------------------|-----------|-------|------------------|---------|
| 2007 | World University Games | Bangkok | 20 km | 17 th | 1:33:26 |
| 2009 | World University Games | Belgrade | 20km | 19 th | 1:28:11 |
| 2010 | World Racewalking Cup | Chihuahua | 50km | 33 rd | 4:16:17 |



Tom wins the 2007 Victorian 20 km title in a PB time of 1:27:45

With Tom Barnes' selection in the Australian team for the World University Games, he joins a long and illustrious list of Victorians who have won the ultimate selection – the highly sought Australian vest.

Tom, currently aged 24, was born on 22 September 1982, is 174 cm in height and races at a lean 63 kg. He started racewalking in Little Athletics in the Under 9 age group after his mum insisted that he use it for warm-up.

“I had always told her that I hated it but, when I tried it, I found I could move my hips in just the right way and won the race without getting disqualified. So I kept at it because it was the only event at Little Athletics that I was winning and it grew from there as I became more dedicated and enjoyed it. At school I used to get teased a fair bit for being a walker so when I was a teenager I wasn't doing much training but was doing a lot of cross-country running for my school. I think this gave me a good long distance base that set me up for when I gained the self confidence to train and not care what people at school thought.”

“I competed in the Little Athletics Victorian championships but didn't have much success until Under 15 when I won bronze. I actually don't remember what position I came in my earlier years. For a long time when I was a teenager, I didn't have a coach and just made up training on the day with little real thought behind it. Then I started to plan my own sessions a bit more and think about how I could train to get faster, using what I had learnt in school cross-country training.”

Tom joined the Victorian Race Walking Club in April 2002, having decided to concentrate on racewalking as a serious sporting endeavour. After the National 20 km championship in Sydney in 2004, he met Paul Van Kopplen who was coaching Michael Beaton-Wells at the time.

“He agreed to start coaching me and we formed a really good partnership, partly because I had heard about how good a race-walker he had been, partly because I was so happy just to have a coach, but mostly because of the

patience, friendship and belief he showed to me at training and racing. “

Results came immediately

| | | | |
|------|-----------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 2004 | AV 10 km Championship | 1 st | 47.11.0 |
| 2004 | AV 15 km championship | 2 nd | 1:09:33 |
| 2004 | AV 20 km championship | 2 nd | 1:32:07 |

When Paul retired from coaching due to family commitments in 2005, Frank Bertei took over the reigns.

“It took a little while for me to adjust to Frank’s coaching style but by the start of 2006 I felt happy to be coached by Frank. He brought a lot of laughs to training and was big on cross-training and strength training. He also had a lot of faith in me which was really important for my self confidence and it is now at the point where I really trust that the sessions he plans will prepare me solidly for racing.”

Results continued to come and times tumbled.

| | | | |
|------|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 2005 | AV 5000m Championship | 2 nd | 21.46.65 |
| 2005 | AV 10 km championship | 2 nd | 49.23 |
| 2005 | AV 20 km championship | 3 rd | 1:33:13 |
| 2005 | AV 30 km championship | 3 rd | 2:24:26 |
| 2006 | AV 10 km championship | 1 st | 44:49.8 |
| 2006 | AV 15 km championship | 1 st | 1:09:05 |
| 2006 | AV 20 km championship | 2 nd | 1:31:08 |
| 2006 | AV 30 km championship | 1 st | 2:28:45 |

In 2006, he won the prestigious Athletics Victoria 'Norman L Goble' Trophy for the walker who performs best over the whole range of Winter racewalking Championships. He also won the VRWC Club Keiko Bowyer Trophy as best stylist in 2005 and 2006.

Tom also started to make his presence felt at the National level, picking up medals in both 2006 Racewalking Australia championships. His results were

| | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------------|----------------|
| Racewalking Australia 20 Mile Championship | Canberra | 3 rd | 2:40:40 |
| Racewalking Australian 20 km Championship | Melbourne | 2 nd | 1:31:08 |

A training stint at Threadbo with the AIS walkers and further training opportunities in Canberra provided the necessary impetus to push Tom's times even further down. Subsequent highlights included

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Australian 50 km Championship | Geelong | 1 Dec 2006 | 30 km - 2:21:20 | (3 minute PB) |
| Telstra A Series 20 km | Canberra | 28 Jan 2007 | 8 th 1:29:05 | (2 minute PB) |
| AV 5000m Championship | Melbourne | 24 Feb 2007 | 4 th 20:37 | (PB) |
| Australian 20 km Championship | Brisbane | 11 Mar 2007 | 4 th 1:34:25 | (very hot conditions) |
| IAAF RW Challenge 20 km | Shenzhen, China | 24 Mar 2007 | 46 th 1:29:33 | |
| AV 15 km Championship | Geelong | 6 May 2007 | 2 nd 1:08:22 | |
| RWA 20 Mile Championship | Canberra | 10 June 2007 | 4 th 2:33:17 | (7 min PB) |
| VRWC 10 km | Albert Park | 23 June 2007 | 1 st 43:01 | (PB) |
| AV 20 km Championship | Albert Park | 1 July 2007 | 1 st 1:27:45 | (PB) |

Tom's 20 km PB time of 1:27:45 beat the 1:28:00 qualifying standard required for the World University Games and he was rewarded with Australian representation. In torrid conditions in Bangkok, he walked excellently in his first international representation, coming 17th in **1:33:26**.

Tom had wanted to walk a 50 km event for some time and an ideal opportunity was presented with the Australian 2008 Olympic 50 km trial being held in Melbourne in December 2007. He had taken a significant break after his World University race so had only a couple of months in which to whip himself into shape and it was a quality field with all the main walkers in attendance. He excelled himself with his final time of **4:11:33** for 7th place. To give an idea of how well he raced, his 30 km split of 2:22:05 was less than 1 minute outside his PB for that distance.

Unfortunately, the Athletics Australia selectors chose not to send a 50 km team to the 2008 World Racewalking Cup, thus robbing Tom of a well earned berth. This, combined with his Ph.D. studies at Melbourne University, meant that he had little incentive to push hard in his training. Further, with Chris Erickson now in Canberra and Frank Bertie retired,

he was on his own from a training perspective. Yet, he continued to race with impressive results. His 2008 winter season results included 4th place in the Canberra 20 Mile in a PB time of **2:32:32**, wins in the Victorian 20 km championship (**1:29:27**) and in the Victorian 30 km championship (PB of **2:17:00**) and finally a win in the Australian 20 km winter championship in late August in Melbourne (PB of **1:26:40**).



Tom walks his first 50 km event in December 2007 – for a time of 4:11:33

In 2008, Tom chose to start working on a Doctorate in his chosen field of pharmacology and he now had to balance the needs for academic excellence and research with his desire to improve as a walker. Early signs in 2009 showed that he seemed to have his house in order on both fronts.

He started the 2008/2009 summer with some blistering Interclub races in Melbourne, covering the 2000m distance in **8:00**. His first road opportunity came in February when he powered through a 10km race at Albert Park in a PB time of **42:41**. He then took 4th place in the Australian Summer 20 km championships in Melbourne in early March in **1:26.57** and secured selection for the 2009 World University Games, his second international vest.

Unable to take the time off to race internationally like the other top walkers, he continued his preparation in Melbourne, racing regularly at Albert Park in the VRWC club races scheduled in the early part of the winter season. One highlight in particular was his win in the club 35 km championship in a PB time of **2:46:50**.

He left for Europe in late May and scheduled two pre-championship races, coming 18th in the IAAF Challenge 10km in Krakow (41:51) and 24th in the IAAF Challenge 20km in La Coruna (1:27:41).

Tom's performance in the World University Games in Belgrade a few weeks later was consistent with his current performances - 19th in **1:28:11** - so a good walk but not a showstopper.

Back in Melbourne in late July, he won the Victorian 30km championship in a PB **2:20:21**. In November, he finished 2nd in the Australian 50km championship in Melbourne in **4:12:05**, another PB. As this was the official trial for the 2010 World Race Walking Cup, he had now earned his third representative vest.

He raced sparsely over the summer, trying to balance the books with his research and prepare as best he could for his next international.

The World Cup 50km in Chihuahua was a very tough event. The sun was out from the start as it quickly heated up towards the expected top of 32°C. To make matters worse, the 2km course had no shade and a hot strong wind kicked up in the second half of the race. Tom had to walk his own race in the middle of the field and was in 31st place at the 20km mark. To his credit, he held his ground and finished a very creditable 33rd out of 53 finishers (58 starters) in his first ever World Cup with **4:16:17**.



Tom cools off in the ice bath before his World Cup 50km in Chihuahua

He did another 3 races over the next few months before announcing his retirement. His Ph.D. was consuming all his time and he had to finally make the choice - will I be a scientist or a racewalker? Career won out.

Tom duly completed his Doctorate and started with the biotechnological company CSL at their labs in Parkville, Melbourne. He is still employed with CSL but is currently based in Bern, Switzerland, with his family. He tells me he still reads the Heel & Toe newsletter most weeks and is pleased to see the young walkers continuing to excel.

His combination of safe technique, strength, speed and consistency marked him out as a walker with a big future but he made the right decision. Career and family were his priority and it has all worked out as planned for Tom.

Final words to Tom:

The decision to walk away from race walking for my career was one of the toughest I've made. My three girls are doing really well, with Matilda showing some walking moves of her own so you never know!