

**VALE VAREL NEWMARK 1939-2024**  
**VAWC CLUB MEMBER AND FUND RAISER EXTROARDINAIRE**

Preston Athletics Club walker Varel Newmark will be well known to older members of the club, having raced in Melbourne from 1958 to 1985. He was one of those walkers you never forgot once you had met him or raced against him.

I was lucky enough to live near Varel and I did my early years of training with him, meeting him every Sunday at his place for a long walk of between 5 and 10 miles (and sometimes even further). Varel's ideas were certainly different – I remember he often used to try to find large crowds of people (eg a congregation leaving church) to walk through, calling loudly to make way for us. His idea was to convince me that walking was not something to be done in the back streets – you should be proud to be a walker and not scared to walk in public. It worked!

By the time I met him in 1966, Varel was one of the top Victorian walkers, having already won a number of Victorian championship medals and having represented Victoria in various interstate matches.

Varel was born on 7 July 1939 and lived in West Heidelberg in suburban Melbourne. His athletics career started in October 1957, running 880 yards and 1 mile events with Preston Amateur Athletics Club. After a summer in which he finished last in every race, his father gave him some good advice for the last race of the season – get a good start and stick with the bunch. Varel did just that, going on to finish 5<sup>th</sup>. It became his trademark way of racing in later years – heading out hard regardless of the opposition, usually leading for the first mile and then hanging on and gusing it out to the end.

In 1958 he switched to walking and never looked back. Pairing up with Preston teammate Harry Summers, they formed a daunting Interclub combination over the then track distances of 1 Mile and 2 Miles. One of his proudest moments on the track was in 1960/61 when Preston won the A Grade Premiership flag as the top Victorian club. His interclub record is amazing – he raced for Preston from 1957 to 1985 and only missed 3 interclub races during that whole period. His track PBs were impressive for the time - 6:57.7 for the 1 Mile walk (equivalent to about 6:30 for the 1500m), 13:43 for the 2 Miles walk (equivalent to about 12:40 for the 3000m), 22:06 for the 3 Miles walk (a Preston club record) and 46:51 for the 10,000m walk (another club record). His efforts were duly recognised in 1978 when he was made a life member of Preston.

He was also a regular Victorian Amateur Walkers Club competitor, racing with us from 1958 to the early eighties. He often started as the backmarker in the predominantly handicap events and rarely missed a race. His favourite road races were the Victorian Amateur Athletic Association Teams Races and he spearheaded the winning Preston team on an amazing 7 occasions out of 11 starts (1965, 1966, 1969, 1979, 1972 and two in 1974), alongside walkers such as Dave Black, Harry Summers, Dave Grenfell, Barry Larchin and Neil Larchin.



*The start of the 1966 Victorian 10,000m championship at the Melbourne University track. From left to right: Jim Henderson, Alan Viney, Ross Haywood, Jim Gleeson, John Sheard, Bruce Thorne, Dave Grenfell, Robin Broberg, Robin Wood, Alan Lucas, Graeme Russell, Graeme Nicholls, Tom Daintry, Harry Summers, Bob Gardiner, Varel Newmark, John Busst. On that occasion, Varel finished 4<sup>th</sup> in a time of 49:38.*

His times were equally impressive over the shorter road distances – 37:30 for the 5 Miles, 76:46 for the 10 Miles and 98:50 for the 20km) but he was never quite strong enough to put together really good times over the long distances. But that did not stop him from trying and the VRWC archives record a number of good efforts over longer distances as

follows: 3:04 for the 20 miles in 1964, 4:11 for the Melbourne to Frankston in 1962, 5:13 and 5:08 for the 1963 and 1965 Victorian 50km championships and 9:19 and 9:51 for the 1963 and 1965 VAWC 50 Mile walks.

He was the consummate team man, proudly wearing the VAWC colours when competing against the other State based walking clubs in the various interstate carnivals. He was part of the VAWC Number 1 Team on six occasions, bringing home team gold on four of them as follows

1963	Alexander Cup	20km	Melbourne
1967	Glover Shield	10,000m	Brisbane
1970	Glover Shield	10,000m	Adelaide
1972	Glover Shield	10,000m	Brisbane

In the last occasion in 1972, he was actually Team Captain.



*1972 Glover Shield Winners – Alan Lucas, Robin Whyte and Varel Newmark (with manager Ralph Field)*

He was also a regular in the Victorian teams which contested the Australian 20 km championships and was part of a gold medal winning Victorian team on three of the five occasions (1965 in Sydney, 1967 in Melbourne and 1970 in Adelaide).



*Varel leads Frank Leonard, Robin Whyte, Keith Henness and Barry Whittaker in the 1970 Glover Shield Competition*

As mentioned above, Varel only knew one way to race – from the front. As soon as the gun went, he would surge to the front, regardless of the distance and the opposition, and hang on for as long as he could. This aggressive racing mode earned him more than his fair share of reports and a number of disqualifications but he never really changed his racing mode throughout his career. It was a case of 'Here I am, come and get me if you are good enough!'"

Varel's racing career was only one side of the equation. What he is also remembered for is his uncanny ability to raise money - Varel was without a doubt the best grass roots fund raiser Australia has ever seen. When the Australian Olympic Federation decided to sell Olympic bibs to raise money to send the team to the 1976 Olympics, Varel put up his hand and started his campaign – the result an astonishing 10,500 bibs sold by him alone. He roamed the city, stopping passers by along the way and it took a strong person indeed to resist his sales pitch and 'in your face' approach. He was present at every athletics meeting working the stands, always to good effect. So impressed was the AOF that after the Olympics he was awarded a special gold medal to recognise his fund raising prowess. He continued to raise money for the Australian Olympic team, selling a further 36,600 bibs in 1980 and an additional 15,000 bibs in 1984 – for a grand total of 62,100. His equal is not likely to be seen again.

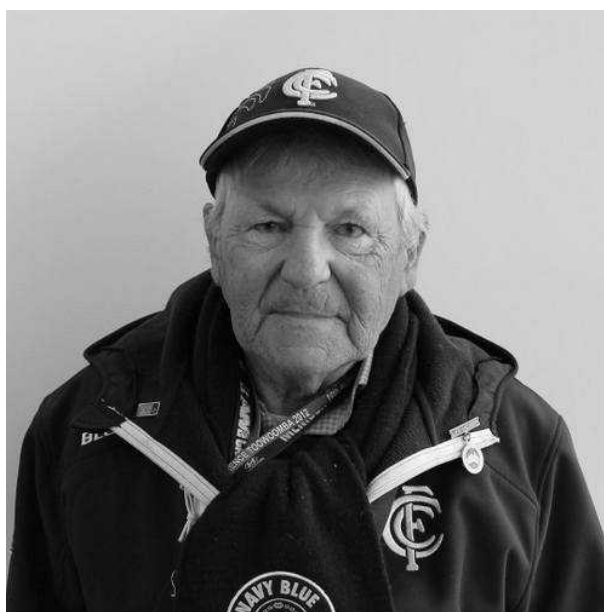
The generous gift of his time and effort was not restricted to the AOF. He was also awarded a cup for outstanding service to Athletics by the Victorian Amateur Athletics Association (VAAA) and he was also recognised by both Preston Athletics Club and the VAWC for his fundraising efforts for those clubs.

Varel's Victorian championship medals tallied 10 – 8 bronze and 2 silver) and were done against quality opposition over a 12 year period from 1963 to 1974. His name is mixed in the results lists with the likes of Bob Gardiner, Noel Freeman, Ted Allsopp and Harry Summers.

1963	50km	Gleeson, James	4.52.56.2	Breen, Gavan	5.02.23	Newmark, Varel	5.13.31
1965	10M	Gardiner, Robert	1.17.57.4	Allsopp, Edward	1.19.40	Newmark, Varel	1.21.56
1966	20km	Allsopp, Edward	1.34.08	Gardiner, Robert	1.36.24	Newmark, Varel	1.40.21
1967	10km	Haywood, Ross	46.52.0	Gardiner, Robert	48.25	Newmark, Varel	49.05.0
1967	10M	Gardiner, Robert	1.17.13.0	Newmark, Varel	1.19.08	Wood, Robin	1.19.29
1968	10km	Freeman, Noel	45.17.8	Summers, Harry	48.31.6	Newmark, Varel	48.44
1968	10M	Gardiner, Robert	1.15.19.0	Summers, Harry	1.21.39	Newmark, Varel	1.22.01
1969	10km	Freeman, Noel	45.07.0	Gardiner, Robert	45.09.0	Newmark, Varel	49.41.0
1974	10km	Haywood, Ross	45.40.0	Bethune, Peter	49.49	Newmark, Varel	50.46
1974	15km	Haywood, Ross	1.13.47.4	Newmark, Varel	1.13.51.6	Smith, David	1.15.32.0

In the early 1990's Varel moved to Tasmania to the Hobart suburb of Moonah, along with his wife Fay. He still popped up occasionally in the Tasmanian Masters results, holding true to the old adage that 'old walkers keep on keeping on'.

He also featured in 2015 in a Tasmanian Australian Labor Party instagram post - he was a strong Labor supporter all his life



Varel in 2015 (see <https://instagram.com/p/4lVN6RyXGA/>)

The photo caption says a lot about the man:

Varel from Tasmania: "In school I was sent back a year for being left handed, it was silly and unfair. I'm glad that doesn't happen anymore. I was born in Carlton and I've loved the football team ever since... they have good working class values, the most important value is fairness. Fairness is also why I'm passionate about having a strong democracy... one day I'd like to vote for an Australian President."

Varel had more than his fair share of hard knocks in his life. A severe epileptic at a time when treatments were in their early days, he was not able to attend school on a regular basis and was effectively home schooled by his parents. But while his education was rudimentary, he was no fool. He kept abreast of everything and had a prodigious memory, always able to remember the fine details of all his races and all his conversations with officials and fellow competitors. You could never put anything over Varel!

He was active as a Freemason all his life, eventually holding a senior position within the organisation. He and Fay were also heavily involved in the Salvation Army in Hobart for many years. He was not one for a quiet retirement.

Varel passed away on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, aged 84 years, dying at home following a long period of poor health. According to his wishes, there will be no funeral, but his ashes will be scattered near his and Fay's favourite cafe.

Long may he be remembered as one of our VRWC legends.

Tim Erickson

Last Updated: Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2024