

## GEORGE PARKER – 1920 OLYMPIC SILVER MEDALLIST

George (Geo) Parker took up amateur athletics in 1918, joining the Western Suburbs A.C.C. He showed promise as a distance runner, performing prominently in a 5 mile run from Bondi to Sydney. As a high jumper he cleared 6' 6" which would have earned him a place in nearly any championship. He exuded power in everything he did. At 6 feet in height and weighing in at 12 stone 10 lbs when fully fit, he physically intimidated his rivals and could have excelled at most sports.

In the latter part of 1918, he joined the N.S.W. Walking and Field Games Club and started his career as a racewalker. He soon came to the attention of top walker Ernie Austen who took him under his wing. At the 1919 Metropolitan Championships at the Sydney Sports Grounds, he was runner-up to Austen in both the 1 mile and the 3 mile walk events.

Parker was selected as one of 3 NSW representatives to compete in the 1920 Australian Amateur championships but Austen was expected to dominate proceedings. Parker proved the surprise of the championships with wins in both walks. On the opening day, he won the 3 mile event in 22:45.4 and, on the final day, he demonstrated his marked superiority by winning the 1 mile in 6:49, his nearest opponent being 60 yards away.

Taking part in a meeting at Pratten Park (Askfield) a few nights after the Australasian championships, he won a mile handicap from scratch in 6:33 which beat the NSW record. It was unfortunate for him that the required 3 stopwatches were not present.

These performances gained him Olympic selection for the Antwerp 1920 Games and he fulfilled his promise with a wonderful second place behind Italian Ugo Frigerio who broke the Olympic record. Parker's time of 13:19.6 saw him only 5 seconds in arrears.

### **Men 3000m. Walk. Olympic Games 1920, ANTWERP**

Ugo FRIGERIO	ITA	13.14.2	OR
George PARKER	AUS	13.19.6	
Richard REMER	USA	13.22.2	
Cecil McMASTER	SAF	13.23.6	
Thomas MARONEY	USA	13.25.0	
Charles DOWSON	GBR	13.28.0	
William HEHIR	GBR	13.29.8	
William ROELKER	USA	13.30.4	

On his return to Australia, he seldom competed. One of his rare races was at the 1922 Australasian championships held in Adelaide where he retained his 1 mile walk title in dashing form. He was also expected to easily win the 3 mile event but he was outraced by Tom Radich of Victoria who, although winning the race, was disqualified by Mr Richard Coombes. Thus Parker retained his 3 mile title but in perhaps slightly hollow circumstances.

After this, he went into what was thought to be retirement and this enabled Ernie Austen to win the next titles and gain Olympic selection in 1924.

For whatever reasons, Parker then decided to return to walking and, setting to work with a will, managed to get his weight back to normal. Then, in quick succession, he turned in a series of very high quality performances that rewrote the record books.

First in early November 1924 he won the NSW 7 Mile championship, in pouring rain. On this occasion he broke the Australasian records for 4 miles (29:58), 5 miles (37:40), 6 miles (45:19.5) and 7 miles (53:02.2). A week later he won the Australasian 7 Mile title easily, creating new State records for all distances from 2 to 7 miles and setting new Australasian records for 4 miles (29:42), 5 miles (37:28), 6 miles (45:17) and 7 miles (53:02).

Then walking in the Dunn Shield 3 Mile championship at the University Oval in Sydney on 6 December 1924, he broke the State records for 1 mile (6:40.4), 2 miles (14:03.2) and 3 miles (21:15). A week later, in the Dunn Shield 1 mile walk, he positively flew over the distance in 6:28.4 to lower the new State Record even further. This latter time was only a few seconds outside the World 1 Mile Walk record of 6:25.8, set by George Goulding of Canada in 1910.

1925 saw him expand his repertoire in winning the NSW 20 Mile walk title. After a good winter season of road racing, he returned to the track the next summer with more records in mind.

On 21 November 1925, he went on another record breaking spree in winning the NSW 7 Mile championship and continuing on for the full hour on a specially prepared track (5 laps to the mile). In winning, he broke six NSW

and Australasian records. These included 4 miles (29:31.8), 5 miles (37:09.8), 6 miles (44:50.4), 10000m (46:32), 7 miles (52:45.2) and 1 hour (7 miles 1649 yards 1 foot 9 inches). His 10000m time was over a minute faster than the winning time of Frigerio in the 1924 Olympics and does really raise the question – could anyone have beaten Parker if he had chosen to train for a second Olympics.

Parker's speed was phenomenal and his strength enabled him to hold this pace over the longer distances better than anyone else. As a walker, he had a most effective style. In addition to his power, he had an exceptionally flexible hip action which enabled him to maintain a long stride. The following photos illustrate these facets well.



A local Manly resident and a member of the Police Force, he was a keen swimmer and the following newspaper article is one of many that feature him as a well known sportsman and local Sydney identity

#### Champion walker to rescue

*Sydney, Sunday – George Parker, Australia's representative at the last Olympic Games and champion walker of Australia, figured in an exciting rescue at Manly this morning.*

*A man was being carried out to sea by the strong undertow. When the alarm was raised, Parker donned the belt and dashed to the water. Swimming strongly, he reached his man, but it was hard work to break out of the current when abreast of him. Parker was very tired when hauled in with his man.*

He continued to race during the 1926 season, winning the NSW and Australasian 1 and 3 Mile titles but was beaten into second place by Victorian walker E. S. Sutherland in the Australasian 7 Mile title. He bounced back to retake the Australasian 7 Mile title the following year when the event was held on the Manly Oval in Manly . The local occasion proved just the incentive for Parker and, although his winning time of 53:53.4 was well outside his record, he was still well ahead of his rivals.

Again, he retired and the results for the next few years show only occasional appearances, mostly at club level. His last appearance at State level was in the NSW 1 Mile championship in 1931. The papers reported that

*“there was a hostile demonstration from the crowd when G. R. Parker was disqualified, and this was accentuated when W. J. Clark joined him. The latter was first past the post. Australian champion, T. H. Daintry, was the only other to finish and was awarded first place.”*

This marked the end of his career. There is no doubt that he was a very talented athlete and his many championship wins and records place him amongst our greatest Australian walkers. In an era when opportunities were limited and equipment and training was basic, he set new standards and carved a place in our walking history.