

Kellie Wapshott

2006	Racewalking World Cup	Naumburg	20 km	38 th	1:36:49
2008	Olympic Games	Beijing	20 km	40 th	1:37:59



Kellie chases Claire Woods in the 2006 AV 5000m race at the MCG

With her selection in the women's 20 km racewalk in the 2006 World Race Walking Cup, Kellie Wapshott is the next in a long line of Victorian walkers who have won the coveted Australian racing vest.

Kellie, born 23 March 1981, is 24 years old and lives in Wantirna South, one of Melbourne's Eastern suburbs. She started walking seriously in 1992 but her first crack at championship level ended ignominiously – she finished third but was subsequently disqualified in the Victorian Little Athletics Under 11 State Championship. Putting herself under the eye of experienced coach Dave Blackwood, she bounced back and was soon a regular medalist at State level.

In 1993, she improved to finish 2nd in the Little Athletics Under 12 State Championship (**7:37**) in March, medaled in the winter season AV Under 14 road championship and finished the year with gold in the Victorian All Schools Under 14 1500m walk in a PB time of **7:10.0**. Even at that early age, her 3 main attributes were easy to see – speed, speed and speed.

1994 saw her reach even greater heights as she won the Victorian Little Athletics U13 title (**7:01.3**) and the AV U14 track title and take silver in the Australian Under 14 1500m track walk (**6:59.9**). Her only disappointment for the summer was in the Australian Little Athletics Teams Championships when she fell while leading the 1500m walk and had to settle for silver.

From then on, she was never out of the medals in Schools, AV and AA under age competitions. The interstate competition was fierce with rivals like Michelle French, Renee McAskill and Claire Bock. She sometimes even competed up the age groups against the likes of Natalie Saville.

But Kellie did not revel in the fierce competition and, on the whole, restricted her races to the Victorian front. For instance, in 1995, she won 5 golds in Victorian competition but only competed in one Australian title race – the Under 15 All Schools 1500m walk where she finished third in **6:37.03**.

Her first National championship came in 1996 when she won the Australian All Schools U17 3000m walk (as part of the 1996 Pacific Schools Games) in **14:32.6**. Yet in 1997 and 1998 when doing her last 2 years at school, she continued to restrict her racing to the home front. Accumulating more and more Victorian gold, she was a conspicuous absentee from the major Australian titles. In general, she just did not want to go. Her only two National races in this two year period were the Australian Under 20 5000m walk in 1997 (she finished fifth in **26:26**) and the Australian Under 18 3000m walk in 1998 where she finished second in **14:06.8**.

In fact, it was not until after the completion of her secondary school studies that she really knuckled down to some consistently serious training and set her sights on achieving something at the National level. She showed what she was really capable of in early March 1999 when she won the Victorian Under 18 Interclub Grand Final 1500m walk in **6:14.6**. Those of us who were there remember the fantastic walk between her and Chris Erickson – Chris eventually pipped her over the finish line with 6:14.2 but it was touch and go all the way. She backed up to win the Victorian U20 5000m walk in **24:38.4** and then improved by a huge margin to win the Australian Junior 5000m title in **23:12.3**. That winter she also won the Victorian (**51:18**) and Australian (**51:53**) Junior 10 km road titles. It was her best year so far – she had finally arrived at the National level.

Kellie expected 2000, her last year as a Junior, to be her biggest so far with the possibility of a trip to the World Junior championships on offer. Alas, a bout of glandular fever put the end to all her hopes. She successfully defended her Australian Junior 5000m and 10 km road titles and won her customary swag of Victorian gold medals but her times were all down on 1999 and she struggled to train and race competitively.

She finished her junior career with 5 gold, 2 silver and 2 bronze medals at Australian level and so many Victorian medals that I lost count but, at that stage, she looked like yet another highly promising junior lost to the ranks. She did not race at all in 2001 and restricted her appearances to the Victorian State League competition in 2002, 2003 and 2004. She could not race on Saturdays because of work and her previous fire was no longer there. She did win the 2002, 2003 and 2004 Victorian 5000m track titles (**23:30**, **23:23** and **25:35**) but on natural talent rather than on training.

After her 2004 Victorian 5000m walk title, she simply stopped training. She was tired of the sport and hadn't really improved since 1999. She played a bit of netball, attempted a season of hockey, swam and ran a bit but no walking. It was not until late that year, after persistent friendly harassment from Kylie Irshad, that she joined the group of walkers training under Paul Van Kopplen. Her opening comments to Paul summed up her state of mind: "I don't know why I'm even here."

The rest is now history. Paul saw her immense potential and worked hard to bring her into the group and motivate her to 'get serious' once again. The results were fast in coming. In early 2005, she won her fourth straight Victorian 5000m title in a PB time of **23:07**.

With Paul stepping back from his coaching role for family reasons, Frank Bertei took up the coaching challenge and soon built a strong highly motivated team spearheaded by Kellie. The 2005 winter season was her come second to Simone Wolowiec with further PBs in the Victorian 10 km road title (**47:11**) and the Victorian 20 km road title (**1:37:46**). This time shot her into the National rankings and gave her a Commonwealth Games B qualifier. She finished the winter with silver in the Australian 10 km roadwalk behind Simone in **48:17**. She had arrived back on the scene!



Kellie comes second in the Australian 10 km title in Adelaide in August 2005

She was the epitome of the young woman in a hurry. She came 5th in the Australian 20 km roadwalk with yet another PB of **1:37:22** and thus gained selection to represent Australia in the 2006 World Race Walking Cup. She followed up with her 5th straight Victorian 5000m title in yet another PB time of **22:35**. Then she walked yet another PB in the World Racewalking Cup race in Spain in May 2006 to come 38th in **1:36:49**.

She then accepted a scholarship to the Australian Institute of Sport in Canberra. But she had returned from La Coruna

with a niggling injury and it was some time before she could return to competition. Finally in late October, she was back on the track to record a huge PB time of **12:48** in a Canberra interclub race.

After a stint at Threadbo, she traveled to Geelong to race a women's 20 km in the Australian 50 km championship meet. She chased eventual winner Natalie Saville the whole way and was recorded with 2nd place and a PB time of **1:35:45**. But once again her performance came at great personal cost and her injuries flared up once again. It was 7 months before she next raced and the distance was a tentative 5 km roadwalk at the Canberra Carnival in June 2007.

In September 2007, she was finally forced to have surgery on her troublesome hamstring and the recovery period continued.

She eventually made her long awaited comeback on January 27th 2008 with a 10 km hitout in the Canberra National Series meet. Her time of **46:58** was actually a PB although, from Kellie's perspective, it was more a case of relief at finally being able to walk without pain and discomfort.

She had no time to waste with the Olympic trial only 4 weeks away. Her win in the Victorian 5000m track championship in a new Victorian record time of **21:46.70** was a huge confidence booster and she toed the line in the Olympic trial in Melbourne on 23rd February with hope of a 'reasonable' performance.



Kellie wins Olympic selection with her 1:32:57

The race was a battle of four with Jo Jackson of England, Kellie, Claire Woods and Natalie Saville passing the 10 km mark in **46:40** and then increasing the pace. Although Jo Jackson was able to break away after 14 km, it was Kellie who found the final lap finish to take the Australian title with a time of **1:32:57**, a PB of nearly 3 minutes. With an Olympic A qualifier in the official trial, Kellie had been selected in the Australian Olympic team.

Unfortunately, her path to the Olympics was not without its usual issues and her training was soon interrupted by further injury issues. She was forced to forgo her World Cup trip and it was not until late June that she was finally back on the roads pounding the miles. But Kellie had shown previously that she could keep up a high level of fitness with her cross-training and hopes were that a few months of intensive walking would still see her in top shape come August in Beijing.

Alas, the injuries flared up again while in the final training camp in Japan and her preparation of the race of her life was interrupted yet again. All she could do on the big day was walk steadily to 40th place with **1:37:59**.

Back in Australia, it was a case of a long rehabilitation and it was not until early in the 2009 year that she was able to tentatively start training. She retains her AIS scholarship and is now back into serious training. She has missed out on any 2009 team opportunities but 2010 beckens.

Her PBs make for impressive reading and I hope that she is now entering a stage of injury free training and racing which can see her tap into her huge potential

1500m	6:14.6	Melbourne	13/03/1999
3000m	12:48	Canberra	28/10/2006
5000m	21:46.70	Melbourne	09/02/2008
10 km	46:40	Melbourne	23/02/2008
20 km	1:32:57	Melbourne	23/02/2008