

TIM'S TOP TEN WOMEN FOR 2015

This week I focus on our women and select my Top Ten Australians for the year. As with my selections for the men in last week's newsletter, it is very much my own individual picks based on a combination of absolute quality, consistency across the year and improvement relative to past years. Of course, your picks might differ. Anyway, read on. As usual, it was a very tough task.



1. Regan Lamble

24 year old Regan Lamble burst back on the walking scene after 2 years away from the sport and over 3 years since her wonderful London Olympic walk (1:30:03). Her first outing in late August saw her win the Australian winter roadwalk championship in Melbourne (1:32:51). She then upped the ante with 1:32:36 in Takahata, Japan, in October and improved even more at Fawkner Park in December with 1:30:45. She looks set for a big 2016 and her second Olympic encounter.



2. Stephanie Stigwood

25 year old Stephanie Stigwood has raced 7 times this year and 6 of those outings saw her competing over the 20km distance and reducing her PB by some 6 minutes overall. Her first 20km race was in Adelaide in the Australian Summer Championship where she finished 5th in a PB 1:37:19. Further improvement followed in April with 1:36:24 (Germany) and 1:35:52 (South Korea). These performances earned her a berth in the Australian team for the World University Games where she finished 14th in 1:42:05 in hot conditions. But her finest walk was her last, as she finished 2nd at Fawkner Park in mid December in a huge PB of 1:32:33, catapulting her into Olympic contention.



3. Rachel Tallent

22 year old Rachel Tallent had a very similar year to Steph Stigwood – 6 races, of which 5 were over the classic 20km distance. Her first 20km race was the Australian Summer 20km championship in Adelaide in February (3rd with 1:35:03). A good race in Taicang, China, in early May (3rd with 1:35:45) and an excellent walk in the World University Games in South Korea in July (7th in 1:37:40) indicated a good buildup for the World Champs. Come August in Beijing and she did not disappoint, finishing 34th in 1:36:27 in hot conditions. She finished her year at Fawkner Park in December, coming 4th in a PB 1:34:16. Building very nicely towards the Olympic trials next February.



4. Beki Smith

29 year old Beki Smith started her year with 2nd in the Australian Summer 20km champs in Adelaide (1:34:35). She was looking to build on that in Taicang, China, in early May but suffered a DQ. She bounced back in the LBG Carnival in June, winning the 10 Mile championship with a PB 1:15:12. She warmed up for the World Champs with wins in the NSW 15km (1:07:05) and 20km (1:30:24) championships and looked all set for a big walk in Beijing. Alas, another DQ put paid to what had been an excellent preparation. She finished her racing year with low key 49:35 for 3rd in the Hong Kong 10km in September. She is one of a number of talented girls all challenging for the 3 Olympic 20km spots on offer next year.



E5. Jemima Montag

17 year old Jemima Montag has had a wonderful year during which she battled with Clara Smith for the mantle as out top junior woman. Some excellent 5000m walks early in the year (23:38, 23:31 and 23:06) followed by 2nd place to Clara in the Australian T&F U18 5000m in March (24:21) ensured selection for the World Youth Champs. She won the LBG U18 5km championship in June (22:52) and improved to a world-leading 22:04 in winning a pre-departure 5000m track walk in Brisbane a week later. This was followed by a good walk in the World Youth Champs in Cali, Colombia (11th in 23:46). She finished off her racing year with wins in the Victorian Schools U18 5000m (23:17) and the Australian Schools U18 5000m (23:13).



E6. Clara Smith

17 year old Clara Smith has raced sparsely this year (7 races) but the races have all been high quality. She won the U18 5000m walk at the Australian T&F Champs in Sydney in March (23:08), thus confirming selection for the World Youth Champs. Her race in Cali, Colombia, saw her finish an excellent 7th with 23:22, thus confirming her high place on the world stage. She finished her season with a very fast 6:22 in the Athletics Queensland 15000m classic in November (6:22).



7. Kelly Ruddick

42 year old Kelly Ruddick competed 17 times this year, a lot more than the other Open walkers who are featured in this review. She continues to amaze, rarely putting in a bad race. Her first major race for the year was in the Summer 20km championships in Adelaide in February (4th in 1:36:17). Like Rachel Tallent, she competed in Taicang in May, coming 9th in 1:39:09. She then followed up with wins in the Victorian 20km championship in June (1:36:45) and the Victorian 15km championship in July (1:10:12). Alas, disaster struck as she was forced to withdraw from the women's 20km walk at the World Championships with a severe inner ear infection that almost completely incapacitated her. While the other girls were racing in Beijing, she was on a flight back to Australia. In late November, she travelled to NZ, winning their national 20km championship in atrocious conditions (1:38:32). Still competitive at 42 years of age but a walker for whom 2015 was probably a disappointing year by her own high standards.



8. Zoe Hunt

18 year old Zoe Hunt had an amazing 39 races this year, making her one of our prolific racers. Third in the Australian T&F U20 10,000m in March in Sydney (a 4 min PB with 51:24), she improved further in May when she won 2 golds in the Oceania Championships in Cairns in hot conditions (5000m in 25:28 and 10km in 50:21). She equalled her 10km PB when taking 3rd place in the U20 10km roadwalk at the Australian roadwalk champs in Melbourne in August (50:21) and then improved even further with 2 very impressive final races – 49:45 for a track 10,000m walk in Canberra in late November and 47:41 for a road 10km at Fawkner Park in December. Zoe has pushed herself into contention for World Cup / World Juniors selection next year.



E9. Heather Carr

66 year old Heather Carr not only dominates her W65 age group on the world stage, she is also one of our most hard working and consistent walkers on the Australian scene. During 2015, she competed in an amazing 35 races, all of an amazingly high standard. Along the way, she won all the Victorian / Australian masters track and road championships and won all 3 gold medals on offer at the World Masters Championships in Lyon in August (5000m in 29:28, 10km in 1:00:02 and 20km in 2:06:09). She then won all 3 golds on offer in the Oceania Masters Championships in Raratonga in October (3000m in 17:04, 5000m in 28:57 and 10km in 1:03:40). She also medalled in the Victorian Open 10km and 15km championships and came a creditable 8th in the LBG 10 Mile championship in June (1:37:48). Heather is always in my top-10 list and that seems unlikely to change any time soon.



E9. Lyn Ventris

59 year old Lyn Ventris had battled injury since mid 2012 and did not return to racing until April 2015 (nearly 3 years out of competition!) with some tentative races in the Australian Masters Championships in Sydney. But she had a plan and that plan was to be ready for the World Masters Championships in Lyon, France, in August of this year. And the plan came to fruition as she won all 3 W55 gold medals on offer (5000m track, 26:18, 10km road 53:27 and 20km road 1:53:56). What a fantastic comeback by this hugely talented Masters walker.



E9. Tayla-Paige Billington

18 year old Tayla-Paige Billington has been pretty much unbeaten in her U20 age group this year. She won the U20 10,000m walk at the Australian T&F Champs in Sydney in March (50:11), won the U20 10km at the LBG Carnival in June (49:36) and won the U20 10km at the Australian winter roadwalk championships in Melbourne in August (49:32). She travelled to NZ in November, chasing a big 10km time, but dreadful conditions thwarted her and, although she won the NZ U20 title, her time of 52:35 was a disappointment for her. But it was the only bad race in an otherwise excellent year and she is definitely in contention for World Cup / World Juniors selection next year.



E9. Tanya Holliday

27 year old Tanya Holliday started off her year in fine style, winning the Summer 20km championship in Adelaide (1:34:05) and the Summer T&F 10,000m track championship in Brisbane (44:56). Disaster then struck as she was diagnosed with glandular fever, thus putting paid to the rest of the year. She did not race again until late November when she walked 44:40 for a track 10,000m race in Canberra. She then fronted at Fawkner Park in December, coming 5th in 1:34:56. The signs are promising for 2016 and she seems to be recovering from her enforced layoff. The scene is now set for a great Summer 20km Championship in Adelaide in February.