

TIM'S TOP TEN WOMEN FOR 2016

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

25 year old Regan Lamble was a clear pick as our top Australian woman for 2016, based on sheer quality and overall consistency. She finished 12th in the World Racewalking Teams Championships in May in a PB 1:29:33 and 9th in the Rio Olympics with 1:30:28. She also walked 1:30:58 in La Coruna in May and 1:30:34 in Rio Maior in April. She finished off her year with 4th overall in the Lake Taihu 4 Day race in China. An excellent year by any measure.



E2. Beki Smith (NSW)

30 year old Beki Smith was yet another of the top women vying for Olympic selection. She finished 3rd in the 2016 Summer 20km Championship in Adelaide in February (1:32:49) but then upped the ante with wins and PBs in the Melbourne Track Classic 5000m (21:19) and the Australian 10,000m Championship (43:48). An excellent 15th in the World Teams Championships in May (a big PB of 1:29:49) saw her right in contention for the final Olympic spot. The selectors went with Tanya Holliday so for Beki, it was a case of year over. She reappeared in December with a win in the Fawkner Park 20km (1:33:54) so it is good to see her continuing on after such a disappointment.



E2. Tanya Holliday (SA)

27 year old Tanya Holliday was second in the 2016 Summer 20km championships in 1:32:15, 2nd in the Melbourne track classic 5000m in 21:44 and 2nd in the Australian 10,000m championship in 44:33. She then walked excellently in the Racewalking World Teams Championships in Rome in May, coming 16th in 1:29:56, a big PB. She then won the 10 Miles / 5km double at the LBG Carnival in June in Canberra (1:12:58 and 21:27). Finally she finished a good 26th in the Rio Olympics with 1:34:22. Another excellent year.



4. Katie Hayward (QLD)

16 year old Katie Hayward has dominated the U17/U18 age groups this year based on times. She won the Australian U17 5000m at the Australian T&F Titles in March (24:08) and won the Australian Schools U18 5000m in December (21:40). She interspersed this with a whole series of world leading U18 5000m times, her best being 21:39 in the Qld Schools U18 5000m championship (a new Australian U18 record). Add to that her 1500m time of 5:48.34, done at the UQ 1500m Classic Meet in Brisbane in November (an Australian Open best and only 1 sec outside the world best). One of our brightest lights in many years.



5. Clara Smith (QLD)

18 year old Clara Smith continues to showcase as a big occasion walker. She was 2nd in both the Oceania U20 10km in February (46:42) and in the Australian U20 10,000m championship in March (47:59.86). A good 3rd place finish in the Australian Open 10,000m championship in Sydney in April (47:17.64) was followed by a 7th place finish in the World Teams Championships in Rome in May (47:10). Finally, she placed 13th in the World Junior Championships in July with 46:59.96. Once again, she produced her best when needed.



6. Rachel Tallent (VIC)

23 year old Rachel Tallent made the perfect start to her year, winning the Summer Australian 20km Championship in Adelaide on February with a huge PB time of 1:31:33. This gained her an automatic Olympic selection. Alas, disaster struck soon after as she fell foul to a niggling leg injury which lingered right through to the Olympics. She did race in the World Teams Championships in May but had to be content with 41st in 1:34:16. She was second to Tanya Holliday in both the 10 Mile and 5km in the LBG Carnival in Canberra (1:13.22 and 21:31) so seemed to be coming good. Unfortunately, her injury worries resurfaced again while training in St Moritz and she was forced to walk in Rio in obvious pain. Her 20km finish place of 40th (1:37:08) was obviously very disappointing for her. She has been slowly rehabilitating since then but we expect to see her back in action as 2017 progresses.



7. Allanah Pitcher (NSW)

13 year old Alllanah Pitcher won it all this year in the U13/U14 age group category. She started the year with wins in the Australian T&F U14 3000m in March (14:44.41) and in the Australian Little Athletics U13 1500m in April (6:43.92). A good double followed in the LBG Carnival in Canberra in June (1st in the U14 2km with 9:28 and 5th in the U16 3km with 14:39). She then won the U14 3km roadwalk championship in Canberra in August (14:34) and the Australian Schools U14 3000m track championship in Canberra in December (14:50.65). She ended the year with a 3km/3000m PB of 14:07.74, an impressive time for a 13 year old.



8. Tayla-Paige Billington (VIC)

19 year old Tayla-Paige Billington battled out the 2016 U20 women's category with Clara Smith and Zoe Hunt. She was 3rd in the Oceania U20 10km championship in February (47:25) but improved to win the Australian Junior 10,000m walk in March (47:47.49). She followed this up with an excellent 14th place in the World Teams Championships in Rome in May (47:41) and subsequently claimed 19th spot in the World Junior Championships in July (48:32.33).



9. Zoe Hunt (ACT)

19 year old Zoe Hunt was our fastest U20 10km walker with a time of 46:29, done when she won the Oceania U20 Championships in February in Adelaide. But such was the depth in our U20 female ranks that she had to content with 3rd in the Australian U20 10,000m championship in March (48:20.73). Again, she was the third Australian finisher in the World Teams Championships U20 10km (48:11) so seemed unable to recapture her wonderful early season form. Two weeks later, she walked her first 20km at Naumburg (a good first up 1:40:31) and she followed this up with 4th in the LBG 10 Miles Championship in Canberra in June (1:18:03) and a win in the Australian U20 10km road championship in Canberra in August (50:49). A niggling injury troubled her in the second half of the year, no doubt disappointing for her after such a bright start.



E10. Heather Carr

67 year old Heather Carr always seems to make my Top 10 and 2016 was no exception. For many years now, she has dominated her particular age group in the World Masters and in 2016, this tradition continued in the W65 division. Her 3 golds in the World Masters Championships in Perth in October/November (5000m 29:03, 10km 59:38 and 20km 2:06:45) were dominant wins. She continues to compete in the Open division with a success that belies her years.



E10. Rebecca Henderson (VIC)

15 year old Rebecca Henderson started her year brilliantly with two great performances in the Australian T&F Championships in Perth in March (1st in the U18 5000m with 24:57 and 2nd in the U16 3000m with 14:07). She won again in the U16 3km (14:08) in the LBG Carnival in June and backed up for a silver in the Australian U16 5km Roadwalk Championship in Canberra in August (25:38). She produced a string of PB performances during the year, including 6:44 (1500m), 14:01 (3000m), 23:58 (5000m) and 49:55 (10km).

As usual, this list was both hard to prune and even harder to rank. There were other strong contenders who could have made the list in other years – **Zahra Hayes, Philippa Huse, Caitlin Hannigan, Michelle Thompson** – but this year was particularly strong.

