

TIM'S TOP TEN WOMEN FOR 2017

Last week it was my Top Ten Australian Men for the year. This time it is my Top Ten Australian Women for 2017. These are 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 always, it was a very tough task. I found I had to include 12 women as I was not really able to hone it down to a top 10. And that still left out other talented walkers like Jess Pickles, Rachel Tallent, Philippa Huse and Simone McInnes.



1. Katie Hayward (QLD)

17 year old Katie was the world leading U18 female walker for 2017 and it was only the decision by AA not to send a team to the final IAAF World Youth Championships that robbed her of a potential world gold medal. She dominated the track with wins in the Australian Open 10,000m Track Championship (45:51.09) in March and the Australian U18 5000m at the Australian School Championships in December (22:06.65). She also led the Australian yearly ranking list for 1500m (5:49.93), 3000m (12:46.34) and 5000m (21:50.0) and was 2nd overall in the 10,000m ranking list (45:51.09). And all at age 16/17. A huge talent!



2. Regan Lamble (VIC)

26 year old Regan only race sparsely in 2017 but each of her races was of a high quality. She started off the year with two 10,000m track walks as part of the AIS camp last January (46:33 and 45:29). She then won the Australian Summer 20km championship in Adelaide in a year leading time of 1:29:58. Her next major race was in August when she finished first Australian in the IAAF World Championships in London (22nd with 1:31:30). In September she won the Australian University Games 5000m track title with 22:56. Her final race for the year was another 20km at Fawkner Park in December (4th with 1:35:04).



3. Claire Tallent (SA)

36 year old Claire had 9 races this year, not bad considering that she gave birth to baby Harvey mid year. In fact, her first race was not until June (5km in 24:30). Two months later, she represented Australia in the IAAF World Championships in London (43rd in 1:37:05), a late edition after the withdrawal of Rachel Tallent. She backed up with a win in the Australian Winter 20km Championships (1:37:54) before racing in all 4 days of the Lake Taihu Classic in China, finishing 14th overall. She finished off the year with 2nd in the Fawkner Park 20km (first Australian) with a much improved 1:33:59. What a comeback after a first baby!



4. Allannah Pitcher (NSW)

14 year old Allannah continued on where she left off last year, continuing to set the standard within her age group. She took silver in the Australian U17 5000m Track Championship (24:47) and bronze 4 days later in the Australian U15 3000m Track Championship (14:25) in March. At the annual LBG Carnival in June, she took golds in the U14 2km (9:20) and the U16 3km (25:24). She won the Australian U16 5km Road Championship in August (24:34) and finished second in the Australian Schools U16 3000m Track Championship in December (13:45.78). She also dipped her foot into the longer distances, recording 10km times of 51:31 and then 50:44 in July, while still aged 13. A very talented young walker.



5. Jemima Montag (VIC)

19 year old Jemima had a relatively low key year but it did have its highlights. She won the Victorian Open 5000m track title in February (23:11) and the Victorian 15km road title in May (a huge PB of 1:13:37). She won the LBG Carnival U20 10km roadwalk championship in Canberra in June (46:43) and finished the year in fine style, finishing 3rd (2nd Australian) in the Fawkner Park 20km in December (1:34:18). This last time should qualify as an Australian U20 Record. With that walk, Jemima has put herself into contention for both Commonwealth Games and World Team Championships.



6. Rebecca Henderson (VIC)

16 year old Rebecca has had an excellent year that started with gold in the Victorian U17 5000m track championship (23:31) and gold in the Australian U17 5000m Track Championship (24:05). A bronze in the Victorian Open 15km Road Championship in May (1:18:52) confirmed her potential over the longer distances (she was aged 15 at that stage). She won the Australian U18 5km Road Championship in August (24:19) to sweep the pool nationally. She is also an excellent swimmer and triathlete so has a lot on her plate. A very promising athlete on many fronts. It remains to be seen which sport will win out!



7. Clara Smith (QLD)

19 year old Clara started the year strongly with wins in the Oceania U20 10km Championship in Adelaide (47:48) and in the Australian U20 10,000m Championship in Brisbane (49:17.99). She did not reappear until September when she walked two of the legs in the 4 Day Lake Taihu Classic in China (including an inaugural 20km time of 1:39:44). She then improved her 20km PB to 1:37:06 in finishing 5th in the Fawkner Park races in December.



8. Gwen Steed (VIC)

75 year old Gwen has been amongst our top Masters walkers for many years, regularly competing for medals in the various World Masters Championships. But this year has seen a surge in performances coinciding with her 75th birthday in July. Since then, she has bettered W75 World and/or Australian Records on 11 separate occasions, with W75 best times now set at 20:04.5 (3000m), 35:49 (5km) and 1:13:33 (10km).



9. Emma Blanch (NSW)

14 year old Emma has had some great battles with Allannah Pitcher this year, both girls being in the same U15 National age group. Emma won out in the Australian U15 3000m Track Championship in March (14:10) and in the Australian Schools U16 3000m in December (31:41.78) and generally little separated the 2 girls. However, Allannah won the head to head competition 8 to 2 so must be ranked higher. Both girls deserve to be in my top 10 for the year.



10. Beki Smith (NSW)

31 year old Beki finished 3rd (2nd Australian) in the Australian Summer 20km Championship in Adelaide (1:31:23), thus gaining selection for the IAAF World Championships. There she finished as the second Australian (38th with 1:35:31). Her racing year finished with the Lake Taihu 4 Day Classic in China, walking in 3 of the 4 stages and finishing 30th overall. A sparse racing year but one that shows her ongoing excellence.



11. Elizabeth McMillen (NSW)

13 year old Elizabeth has been our top U14 female walker this year, with silver in the Australian U14 3000m Track Walk in March (15:02) and golds in the Australian U14 3km Road Championship in August (14:53) and in the Australian Schools U14 3000m Track Walk in December (14:40).



12. Heather Carr (VIC)

68 year old Heather continued to dominate her W65 age group on the world stage this year. In March, she won dual golds in the WMA World Indoor Championships in Daegu (3000m and 10km), setting a W65 World Record for the 3000m Indoor (16:57.96) in the first of the two wins. She then won 3 walk golds at the 2017 World Masters Games in Auckland in April (3000m, 5000m and 1500m). She then won dual golds in the Australian Masters T&F Championship in Darwin (1500m and 5000m). With her goals for the year completed, she went under the surgeon's knife for a full hip replacement operation in late June. By October, she was back on the track, competing in the Victorian Shield and VRWC competitions each week and gradually getting her times back down again. What an amazing walker!