

AFTER 2 OLYMPIC CYCLES, THE DEMISE OF THE AIS NOW BITES HARD

With Rhydian Cowley's fine debut 50km last week in Melbourne (3:52:58), it is timely to consider which other Australian male walkers have also achieved a top 50km time on debut. Here's how I think the list looks

1.	Dion Russell	3:48:12	Melbourne	14/12/1997	22
2.	Adam Rutter	3:52:49	Melbourne	16/12/2007	20
3.	Nathan Deakes	3:52:53	Melbourne	12/12/1999	22
4.	Rhydian Cowley	3:52:58	Melbourne	01/12/2019	28
5.	Jared Tallent	3:55:08	Melbourne	02/12/2006	22
6.	Liam Murphy	3:55:20	Melbourne	05/05/2002	22

One anomaly stands out in that list. All walkers except for Rhydian were aged 20-22. Rhydian was aged 28. Why is that? One 3 letter acronym explains it all – AIS.

The Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) included a T&F scholarship program from its inception in 1981 until early 2013 when the doors were finally locked. All the walkers in the above list, with the exception of Rhydian, were AIS scholarship holders at the time of their debut 50km. Rhydian has never had that foot up the ladder, but has had to map out his own course, with little or no financial support, and having to self fund his career via full time work.

When the AIS walks program was shut down after the 2012 Olympics, we knew that the writing was on the wall for elite racewalking in Australia. Sure, the demise in standard would not be immediately visible, as the top walkers of that time would mostly stay on and do at least one further Olympic cycle. But when they finally all retired, who would replace them?

Consider the number of sub 4 hour walks done by Australians in each Olympic cycle from 1980 till now. It takes many years for a program to reap benefits and that was the case for the AIS walks program. But come 1996, it hit critical mass, and from then on, the number and quality of 50km performances blossomed. Consider the crash in the 2020 Olympic cycle. We have dropped from 14 sub-4 performances in the 2016 cycle to one in the 2020 cycle. Thank goodness for Rhydian Cowley who is that one!

Olympic Cycle	Sub 4hrs	No of Athletes	No of New Athletes	Sub 3:50	No of Athletes	New Athletes
1980	1	1	1	1	1	1
1984	1	1	0	0	0	0
1988	4	3	1	1	1	1
1992	4	2	1	2	1	1
1996	6	4	3	0	0	0
2000	10	3	3	3	2	2
2004	11	4	2	3	1	0
2008	15	5	3	7	3	2
2012	19	5	1	11	3	2
2016	14	4	2	7	2	1
2020	1	1	1	0	0	0

What do we have left now to help athlete become a senior International? We have our January walks camp at the AIS and we have Brent Vallance's elite training group in Melbourne, but there is nothing comparable elsewhere in Australia. We have developmental groups in places like the Gold Coast and the ACT and Gosford, but nothing else in the way of elite senior groups.

The following table traces our rise and fall as a 50km nation. Sadly, I don't see the addition of any further sub 4 hour walkers this cycle. So, It's now up to Rhydian to face the challenge in front of him to reproduce or improve on this in Tokyo.

Australian Performances under 4hrs by Olympic Cycle since 1997

2000 - Sydney Olympic Cycle							
1	3:47:29	Nathan Deakes	VIC	17/08/1977	6	Sydney	29/09/2000
2	3:47:34	Dion Russell	VIC	8/05/1975	1	Melbourne	13/12/1998
3	3:48:12	<i>Russell</i>			1	Melbourne	14/12/1997
4	3:52:53	<i>Deakes</i>			1	Melbourne	12/12/1999
5	3:52:53	<i>Russell</i>			1	Melbourne	12/12/1999
6	3:57:40	Duane Cousins	VIC	13/07/1973	2	Melbourne	14/12/1997
7	3:57:51	Dominic McGrath	VIC	4/06/1972	2	Leamington Spa	23/04/2000
8	3:59:15	<i>McGrath</i>			3	Melbourne	14/12/1997
9	3:59:23	<i>Russell</i>			13	Seville	25/08/1999
10	3:59:34	<i>Cousins</i>			3	Melbourne	12/12/1999

2004 - Athens Olympic Cycle							
1	3:39:43	Nathan Deakes	VIC	17/08/1977	1	Melbourne	7/12/2003
2	3:43:43	Deakes			1	Naumburg	8/04/2001
3	3:47:51	Deakes			1	Melbourne	1/05/2005
4	3:52:40	Deakes			1	Manchester	30/07/2002
5	3:54:37	Liam Murphy	SA	5/06/1979	1	Melbourne	13/05/2001
6	3:55:05	Darren Bown	SA	3/06/1974	2	Melbourne	13/05/2001
7	3:55:20	Murphy			1	Melbourne	5/05/2002
8	3:56:45	Murphy			15	Turin	13/10/2002
9	3:59:25	Duane Cousins	VIC	13/07/1973	3	Melbourne	13/05/2001
10	3:59:27	Cousins			2	Melbourne	5/05/2002
11	3:59:33	Cousins			1	Melbourne	18/05/2003

2008 - Beijing Olympic Cycle							
1	3:35:47	Nathan Deakes	VIC	17/08/1977	1	Melbourne	2/12/2006
2	3:39:27	Jared Tallent	VIC	17/01/1984	2	Beijing	22/08/2008
3	3:42:53	Deakes			1	Melbourne	24/03/2006
4	3:43:53	Deakes			1	Osaka	1/09/2007
5	3:44:45	Tallent			1	Melbourne	16/12/2007
6	3:47:45	Luke Adams	NSW	22/10/1976	10	Beijing	22/08/2008
7	3:47:51	Deakes			1	Melbourne	1/05/2005
8	3:52:49	Adam Rutter	NSW	24/12/1986	2	Melbourne	16/12/2007
9	3:53:19	Duane Cousins	VIC	13/07/1973	2	Melbourne	2/12/2006
10	3:53:19	Adams			3	Melbourne	16/12/2007
11	3:55:08	Tallent			3	Melbourne	2/12/2006
12	3:55:57	Cousins			4	Melbourne	16/12/2007
13	3:58:22	Chris Erickson	VIC	1/12/1981	3	Melbourne	24/03/2006
14	3:59:02	C Erickson			5	Melbourne	16/12/2007
15	3:59:20	C Erickson			26	La Coruna	14/05/2006

2012 - London Olympic Cycle							
1	3:36:53	Jared Tallent	VIC	17/01/1984	1	London	11/08/2012
2	3:38:56	Tallent			1	Melbourne	22/11/2009
3	3:40:32	Tallent			1	Saransk	13/05/2012
4	3:43:36	Tallent			2	Daegu	3/09/2011
5	3:43:39	Luke Adams	NSW	22/10/1976	5	Berlin	21/08/2009
6	3:44:50	Tallent			6	Berlin	21/08/2009
7	3:45:31	Adams			4	Daegu	3/09/2011
8	3:47:34	Adams			1	Melbourne	12/12/2010
9	3:48:02	Nathan Deakes	VIC	17/08/1977	6	Dudince	26/03/2011
10	3:48:45	Deakes			19	London	11/08/2012
11	3:49:33	Tallent			1	Melbourne	11/12/2011
12	3:50:34	Deakes			2	Melbourne	11/12/2011
13	3:51:57	Chris Erickson	VIC	1/12/1981	3	Melbourne	11/12/2011
14	3:53:41	Adams			23	London	11/08/2012
15	3:54:53	C Erickson			11	Dudince	26/03/2011
16	3:54:55	Tallent			3	Chihuahua	15/05/2010
17	3:55:30	C Erickson			1	Melbourne	14/12/2008
18	3:57:55	Ian Rayson	NSW		4	Melbourne	11/12/2011
19	3:59:43	Ian Rayson			2	Melbourne	12/12/2010

2016 - Rio Olympic Cycle							
1	3:40:03	Jared Tallent	VIC	17/01/1984	2	Moscow	1/09/2014
2	3:41:16	Tallent			2	Rio de Janerio	19/08/2016
3	3:42:17	Tallent			2	Beijing	29/08/2015
4	3:42:36	Tallent			1	Rome	9/05/2016

5	3:42:48	<i>Tallent</i>			2	Taicang	4/05/2014
6	3:48:40	Chris Erickson	VIC	1/12/1981	10	Rio de Janerio	19/08/2016
7	3:49:33	<i>C Erickson</i>			11	Taicang	4/05/2014
8	3:49:41	<i>C Erickson</i>			16	Moscow	1/09/2013
9	3:51:26	<i>C Erickson</i>			13	Beijing	29/08/2015
10	3:54:10	<i>C Erickson</i>			2	Melbourne	13/12/2015
11	3:55:03	Brendon Reading	ACT		4	Melbourne	13/12/2015
12	3:55:17	Ian Rayson	NSW		5	Melbourne	13/12/2015
13	3:55:24	<i>C Erickson</i>			1	Melbourne	2/03/2013
14	3:56:38	<i>C Erickson</i>			1	Melbourne	13/12/2014

2020 -Tokyo Sapporo Olympic Cycle							
1	3:52:58	Rhydian Cowley	VIC	4/01/1991	1	Melbourne	1/12/2019

Tim Erickson
10 December 2019