

## VIC SHARP (1913-1993)

Victor Bradley (Vic) Sharp is one of the giants of Australian racewalking. Vic was born in Victoria on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1913 and completed his studies at the University of Melbourne, Faculty of Commerce, in 1937, subsequently taking up the profession of accountancy.

He was a talented sportsman, representing Victoria in amateur football and enjoying the sport of racewalking, first in Victoria with the Victorian Amateur Walkers's Club (VAWC) and then in South Australia where he moved in 1951.

He was an enthusiastic walker without being a champion. I have references to him finishing 7<sup>th</sup> in the 1948 Alexander Cup 50km in Sydney (5:49:51), 14<sup>th</sup> in the 1952 Australian 10,000m Track Championship in Adelaide (53:35), 5<sup>th</sup> in the 1952 Victorian 50km Championship at the Showgrounds in Melbourne (5:49:23), 17<sup>th</sup> in the 1953 Australian 10,000m Track Championship in Sydney (54:38) and 11<sup>th</sup> in the 1953 Alexander Cup 50km in Adelaide.



*Vic Sharp, Tom Kelly and Norm Goble racing in the Alexander Cup 50km in Centennial Park, Sydney, in 1948. Vic was racing in Victorian colours at that stage but his later races were as a South Australian representative*

For professional reasons, Vic moved to South Australia in 1951, joining the then South Australian Farmers Cooperative Union Ltd as Company Secretary. He stayed with the company as it grew and changed, eventually retiring in 1978 from the position of General Manager, Finance & Administration, Southern Farmers Holdings (Group) Ltd.

As his racewalking career drew to a close in the mid 1950s, he looked for other ways in which he could maintain his racewalking associations and further the sport of athletics in Australia.

He was a member of the inaugural 1957 Australian Athletic Union (AAU) Coaching Committee, along with Kenneth Peake-Jones and Jess Jarver. Jarver's subsequent *Modern Athlete and Coach* magazine<sup>1</sup> became a must for all Australian coaches and still exists now, being published under the auspices of the Australian Track & Field Coaches Association.<sup>2</sup>

He became an international judge in the early 1960s and continued in that role until 1983 - a period of over 20 years. He had many international judging opportunities at the highest level, including four Olympic Games (1964, 1968, 1972 and 1976) and the inaugural 1983 IAAF World Championships (this was his last major international appointment).

He confided to Bob Cruise that the Mexico City 1968 Olympics was one of his most memorable judging experience<sup>3</sup>. "I wasn't going to put a red on Pedrasa - I wanted to get out of Mexico alive."

As a senior judge in Australia, he took a younger Ray Smith under his wing, teaching Ray the ropes and guiding him into his own career as an international judge.

1 See <https://www.atfca.com.au/coaches/modern-athlete-coach/>

2 See <https://www.atfca.com.au/>

3 *South Australian Race Walking Photos and Profiles* by Bob Cruise, 204, pages 94-95



*August 1975 in Perth on the occasion of the Australian 50km – Vic Sharp in back, Ray Smith on right and Tim Erickson (with the hair!) on the left*

He had two stints on the IAAF Race Walking Committee, firstly from 1968 to 1972 and then from 1976 to 1981<sup>4</sup>. Whilst on the IAAF RW Committee, he was the leader in a move to remove judges from the international panel once they reached 65 years of age. He became one of the first to 'suffer' under this rule.

He was a major contributor to racewalking in South Australia during the sixties and seventies and was granted Life Membership of the South Australian Athletic Association. He was also granted Life Membership of Athletics Australia in 1968.

Vic was a man of many and varied interests and passions.

He was deeply involved in the South Australian wine industry. In 1971, he was a member of the syndicate that acquired O Basedow Wines<sup>5</sup> and he then served as Director and Secretary, occupying that position until 1988, until Lehmanns, Hoffmans and Basedow were acquired by MS McLeod. In 1978 he became a Committee Member of the Barossa Winemakers Association, eventually taking on roles as Acting Secretary and then Hon. Treasurer. He was inducted in 1990 to the Barons of Barossa<sup>6</sup>, an honour reserved for those who have made an outstanding contribution to the Barossa.

Vic was easily recognisable in any group, with his peak cap and fine moustache creating a distinct French look. Our various interstate racewalking trip to Adelaide would see us walkers taken under Vic's wing, with the compulsory post-event visit to the Barossa to tour and sample the wines.

During the Second World War, Vic had been involved in the Air Training Corps<sup>7</sup>, the part of the RAAF Reserve tasked with the training of young men between 16 and 18, with a view to join the wartime RAAF. In 1946, he was appointed to commissions with the rank of Pilot Officer for duty with the Air Training Corps. He continued his association with the ATC until 1969, by which time he held the rank of Acting Flight Lieutenant.

He was also a long time member of the Naval Military and Air Force Club<sup>8</sup>, one of many clubs with whom he was associated during his long and eventful life.

He was awarded an MBE - Military Division (Australian Military Forces)<sup>9</sup> in the Queen's Birthday Honours List on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1962, in recognition of his services to the Australian Armed Forces. He was the first Australian associated with the sport of racewalking to receive such an honour, albeit not for racewalking in his case. The sport would have to wait until

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4 [http://www.swisswalking.org/data/federation/reglements/PDF/IAAF\\_RWC2013\\_Olympic\\_World\\_Champs\\_Judges.pdf](http://www.swisswalking.org/data/federation/reglements/PDF/IAAF_RWC2013_Olympic_World_Champs_Judges.pdf)

5 See <http://www.snooth.com/winery/b3-wines-unley/>

6 See <https://www.baronsofbarossa.com/meet.html>

7 See <http://www.adf-serials.com.au/atc.htm>

8 See <https://www.navmil.org/>

9 See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1962\\_Birthday\\_Honours](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1962_Birthday_Honours)

1975 for another gong, when Mabel Robinson received her own MBE for services to Australian Sport.<sup>10</sup> Others have followed since.



*An historic photo, taken at the start of the Melbourne to Healesville Relay Race, with Ted Allsopp about to get underway with the baton, and with club identities Ernie Ryall, Ray Smith, Mabel and Alf Robinson, Bert Gardiner and Vic Sharp (in his RAAF uniform) amongst the onlookers and officials (photo from Ray Smith's archives)*

*This 38 miles relay was staged with legs of 2 miles. It was first held in July 1936. After the Second World War, the timing was changed to the Queens Birthday weekend in June. The event started in Alexandra Avenue at 11:30AM on the Saturday and was a major organisational feat. The last scheduling was held in 1954. An old furniture van, owned by Mr Proud who lived in Sunshine, was used to pickup and drop off the walkers along the route.*

Vic died in 1993, aged 80, but his memory lives on in those of us who were lucky enough to know him.

Tim Erickson  
Friday 17 April 2020

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.vrwc.org.au/vrwc-australian-honours.shtml>