

AUSTRALIAN CHAMPIONSHIPS HELD AT NEW SYDNEY VENUE.

(Report by Bryan Thomas ACTVAC)

This year's 36th AMA Championships were conducted over the four days of Easter in Blacktown (a far western Sydney suburb). A comprehensive track and field program was held at the excellent Blacktown Olympic Park, especially built as a training facility for overseas teams during the 2000 Sydney Olympics, with its relatively new grandstand and freshly laid track. Hammer, discus and heavy weight throws were held on an enclosed throwing field adjacent to the stadium. The 8km cross-country races were held on a 4 x 2km loop grass course at Parramatta – 26km from Blacktown while the 10 and 20km road walks were on a 1km out and back course along a pleasant recreational path beside a nature reserve at Greystanes about 14km from the stadium.

Periods of heavy rain affected some events, especially the throws and jumps, during the first two days of competition as well as sadly causing the abandonment of the traditional medal presentations. Lack of adequate shelter and seating at field event areas, especially on the first day added to the discomfort of both competitors and officials. However, despite these difficulties the carnival generally ran to time and a big thank you is owed to the hardy officials and volunteers who stood out in the inclement weather for many hours each day. All events were efficiently controlled by NSW Athletics officials prominent in their purple and yellow shirts assisted by an army of young volunteers clad in red long sleeved tops and sky blue caps. Many visiting athletes also offered to help when not competing.

NSW obviously had the biggest team followed by Victoria but it was again good to see healthy numbers from all states and the ACT as well as eight overseas visitors. I assume most overseas participants were New Zealanders but the published program did not indicate nationality. M75 Ron Johnson was by far the busiest visitor participating in his usual wide variety of events; M55 R Davison, W40 C McCahill and M65 B Senior were prominent in all the throws; M50 I Calder ran all middle distance races, M50 J Taylor did the pole vault, hurdles and 800m, W50 N Burden entered the hurdles and pentathlon and M55 P Jayamanne the javelin.

M45 to 65 age groups had most male competitors while amongst the women it appeared to be the W40 to 55 categories. The oldest competitor was again the remarkable 98-year-old Ruth Frith (Q) who, as she has done for many years, won all throwing events. The oldest men were Richard Keatinge (race walks) and Felikss Jekabsons (throws) both 85 year old Queenslanders. There were also two W80 and five M80 competitors. Representing the very newest veteran/masters athletes were five 30 year olds – four women and one young man D. Downing from Victoria who participated in all the sprints, jumps and hurdles.

Many competitors plus family and friends enjoyed their stay at the Rooty Hill Holiday Inn. This was an excellent choice because not only was it excellent accommodation just five minutes drive from the track but it also had a direct link to the Rooty Hill RSL - a popular meeting place for drinks and meals and of course socialising as well as being the venue for the Dinner and Presentation Evening.

A Coaches and an Athletes Forum were held at the track following competition on Friday and Saturday respectively. Those who attend such meetings certainly benefit by learning more about masters sport and its organisation but unfortunately over the years numbers have fallen. Does this mean that the majority of Aussie masters/veterans athletes believe everything in our sport is going along quite well and/or that they have nothing new to suggest?

The Dinner and Presentation Evening was again popular. The highlight of this enjoyable social function was the annual announcement of AMA Athletes of the Year (2007) who receive a commemorative plaque and a \$200 gift voucher from Assics. Winners of each category were – Sprint/hurdles - Col Buyers M65 Q, Multi events/relays - Albert Gay M65 NSW, Throws - Byrony Glass W30 WA, Middle distance/steeple - David Carr M75 WA, Distance – Theresa Baird W65 V, Walks – Lyn Ventris W50 WA, Jumps – Dawn Hartigan W50 V, Administrator/official – John Hore SA, Most outstanding performance – Marie Kay W45 Q, Most outstanding female athlete – Ann Cooper W75 SA and Most outstanding male athlete – Andrew Jamieson M60 V.

Some of the ‘stars’ of the carnival were –2000 Olympian Karyne Di Marco (NSW) tossing the hammer 56.30m despite the rain for a sensational new W30 Australian Record. Finishing only 3m behind was Byrony Glass (WA) with a throw of 53.30m. Big Stuart Gyngell’s (M40 NSW) loud exclamations of self encouragement or disappointment may have irritated some fellow competitors and entertained onlookers, never-the-less he put the shot 17.68m. All of the throwing contests were of a very high standard and Ruth Frith W95 (Q), Jayne Hardy W45 (ACT), Felikss Jekabsons M85 (Q) and Graeme Rose M60 (V) were just a few of the best. Gianna Mogentale (NSW) and Julie Brims (Q) had a series of exciting and close battles in the W40 sprints; Gianna winning both the 60 and 100m by the narrowest of margins, .02 and .05 respectively. Other outstanding sprinters were Leo Kennedy M50 (ACT) and Neville McIntyre M65 (NSW). Lyn Ventris W50 (WA) and Heather Carr W55 (V), both World Record holders, once again demonstrated their talents by easily winning both the 5000m track and 10km road walks while Colin Heywood M50 (ACT) was way out in front of all other walkers on both the track and the 20km road. Victoria Gunn W45 (Tas) 800m 2.27 and 1500m 5.03 and Jeanette Flynn W55 (Q) 2.31 and 5.25 in the same events were standouts in the middle distances. In the longer track races notable performances were by Billinda Schipp W30 (NSW) 5000m 17.03, Bronwen Cardy W55 (V) 5000m 18.49 and 10000m 39.02 and David Sweeney M50 (Q) 5000m 15.58. Mary Fien W35 (NSW) and Colin McLeod M70 ran and leapt well in the 2000m steeplechase for times of 7.49 and 8.35 respectively.

But the two most notable performances of the weekend were the World Records set by David Carr (WA) in the M75 2000m steeplechase in a time of 8.56.59 and a composite team of Julie Brims W40 (Q), Ranell Hobson W35 (NSW), Kylie Strong W40 (NSW) and Gianna Mogentale W40 (NSW) for the W35 4x100m relay in 47.74. David also ran brilliantly to easily win the 400, 800 and 1500m and in so doing was the inaugural recipient of the Brian Foley Trophy for best middle distance age graded performance. The other special annual award the Royce Foley Trophy for both the male and female earning highest points in the weight pentathlon – this year the prize went to W45 Jayne Hardy (ACT) and M85 Felikss Jekabsons (Q).

The special crowd-pleasing ‘Champion of Champions 100m Handicap’ being a handicap race between the ten best sprinters of all age groups at the championships, as determined by WMA age graded percentages, is always a highlight. Winners this year were M65 Neville McIntyre(Q) and W40 Gianna Mogentale (NSW).

Another of the special showcase competition is the ‘Champion of Champions Throwing Handicap’ which this year the designated discipline was the heavy weight throw. Each age group winner of the weight throw was invited to participate and the distance of their throw is added to his/her handicap distance. M60 Graeme Rose (V) and W60 Raylea Rudov were the 2008 champions.

Now that the 36th AMA Championships have past we now look forward to participating and meeting up with friends again at the Oceania Masters Athletics Championships in Townsville (July 27 - August 3 2008) and the 37th Nationals in Adelaide next Easter.