

AUSTRALIAN MASTERS' ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS. (A historical summary by Bryan Thomas).

Australian Veterans' or Masters' Athletics Championships have been conducted in one of the state capitals almost every Easter since 1973, the only exceptions being the inaugural event in December 1973 and Townsville 1995 when it was several weeks after Easter. The 'Nationals' now include all track and field events, a road walk and cross-country conducted in five-year age groups while an official social function is always an important and popular component. In 2002 the championships changed its name from Australian Veterans' to Australian Masters' Athletics Championships.

Melbourne, 1973: The inaugural championships, held at Box Hill bitumen track over a December weekend, were for men over 40years-of-age conducted in three 10year age groups (40-49, 50-59 and over 60). However, there were also events for pre-veteran men from 35 to 39. A large team of USA masters participated in the championships.

Sydney, 1974: The 2nd annual Australian Championships were at the new track at Hensley Athletics Field in Botany, Sydney and were held in atrocious weather over the Easter weekend. Official events were still restricted to men over 40 and conducted in 10year age groups. The most significant outcome of the championships was the establishment of the Australian Association of Veteran Athletic Clubs (AAVAC).

Adelaide, 1975: The 3rd annual championships were held at Olympic Park, Kensington. More than 200 men participated in events conducted in 5year age groups for the first time, however athletes over 60 were grouped together in one age group.

Brisbane, 1976: Mt Gravatt Track was the venue for the 4th championships. Four WA athletes made the long trip to Brisbane ensured these championships were definitely 'national'. As in Adelaide events were conducted in 5year age groups up to the over 60s. An important milestone in the evolution of our sport was that a small number of women were permitted to participate in non-championship events.

Perth, 1977: Glorious weather favoured the 5th championships at Perry Lakes Stadium. Jack Pennington (current ACT patron) won the 'unofficial' 10km cross-country race. Until now cross-country had always been separate from track and field but it was proposed that it be incorporated into next year's championships.

Melbourne, 1978: Women and pre-veteran men (M35) participated in non-championship events during the 6th championships at Olympic Park. Following the success of the trial in Perth a 10km cross-country was officially incorporated into the championships.

Sydney, 1979: The 7th championships were held at the Hensley Track in Botany. Women were officially permitted to participate in the championships for the first time.

Adelaide, 1980: The 8th championships were conducted at Olympic Park. Although several Canberra and Tasmanian athletes had competed previously it was not until now they had the opportunity to represent their territory or state club at the 'nationals'.

Brisbane, 1981: It was decided at the AAVAC AGM held during the 9th championships that Canberra would be the venue for a combined 12th Australian and 2nd Oceania Veterans' Athletics Championships at Easter 1984.

Perth, 1982: Five Canberrans made the long trek across the Nullarbor to participate in the 10th championships and its president Peter Frylink surprised everyone by winning a silver medal in the M45 shot put.

Melbourne, 1983: The fledging ACT club, apprehensive about organizing next year's joint Australian and Oceania Championships, asked the AAVAC AGM held in conjunction with the 11th championships not to incorporate both events, but the meeting denied the request.

Canberra, 1984: The relatively inexperienced ACTVAC sought and received much assistance from ACTAA and many visitors in conducting the 12th Australian and 2nd Oceania Veterans' Championships. Being joint championships required two sets of awards to be presented in all events. A highlight was the dinner/dance that attracted almost five hundred athletes and friends from all states of Australia as well as NZ.

Hobart, 1985: This was the first time the 'nationals' had gone to Tassie. Tasmanian Vets were a small and inexperienced club having formed only a month earlier than the ACT (1979) but they conducted an efficient and friendly 13th championship. Most 'mainlanders' took the opportunity of incorporating a tour of the island following the weekend.

Adelaide, 1986: It was so hot during the 14th championships that organizers set up water stations along side the track during distance races. A highlight of the 'Opening' was a giant birthday cake and singing "Happy Birthday" to Bill Empey (NSW) who had turned 90 that day. Bill subsequently went about establishing a couple of M90 Australian Records including the 100m in which he was loudly cheered for every one of the 24.1 seconds it took him to complete the race.

Sydney, 1987: Nine World and thirty-six Australian Records were broken or established during the 15th championships at E.S. Marks Field. The outstanding athlete was M40 Garry Hand (ACT) who won five gold medals, including two ARs (5000 and 10000m), less than a week after winning the Canberra Marathon in an AR 2.19. NSWVAC introduced two innovations that have since become features of all subsequent championships; they produced a distinctive medal to replace the generic AAVAC medal and organized the first 'Champion of Champions' sprint spectacular.

Brisbane, 1988: Four months after the euphoria of having participated in the World Championships in Melbourne many athletes were still enthusiastic enough to make the trip north for the 16th championships. It rained heavily all weekend and the few times it eased the humidity was stifling. Some lucky athletes enjoyed dormitory accommodation on the top floor of QEII and could emerge from warm dry quarters in time for their event

then retreat to its comforts as soon as it was completed. It was Bicentenary Year and QVAC had permission to incorporate the official symbol into the championships logo.

Perth, 1989: Perth suffers from the 'tyranny of distance' so participation tends to be less than at other cities. Numbers at the 17th championships may have also been affected by the large contingent of Aussies planning to attend the World Championships in Eugene, USA a few months later. Nevertheless the standards were impressive with 42 Australian and five World Records being set. Lynn Carter (WA) W40 hammer, Eileen Hindle (WA) W40 80m hurdles, Heather McDonald (V) W35 10km road-walk, Theo Orr (V) M65 steeplechase and Antoinette Shaw (WA) W40 steeplechase set the World Records.

Melbourne, 1990: Melbourne always attracts good attendance and Olympic Park was again centre of a very successful 18th championship. Several contentious issues, the most worrying being that Victoria had not paid its affiliation fees, caused the AAVAC AGM to go from 6pm to mid-night. A positive outcome of this long tiring meeting was an agreement that in future such meetings should be separate from the competition.

Canberra, 1991: As this was ACT's second attempt at hosting 'nationals' they did things differently; the most significant was setting up a special team whose sole purpose was to organize a successful 19th championships. The track had been removed from Bruce Stadium so the championships were conducted on what used to be the warm-up track. Two World and 19 Australian Records were set during the championships. M55 Bob Gardiner (V) set both World Records with outstanding efforts in the 5000m and 20km race-walks.

AAVAC AGM was held on Thursday, allowing delegates to conclude the meeting prior to competition. Till now the president of AAVAC was automatically given to the state organizing next year's championships. However, AAVAC had a new constitution requiring an elected president, Bryan Thomas (ACT) was elected to the position.

Hobart, 1992: Tasmania conducted an efficient and friendly 20th championships and the LOC were thrilled with more than 450 entries and by the seven World Records (six by women) set at their picturesque athletics stadium. It was fitting that local lass, W65 Shirley Brasher set four of the World Records (800, 1500, 5000 and 10,000m), Tom Daintry (V) race-walked to a new M80 world best, Helen Searle (NSW) once again improved her own world mark for the W50 hammer and the following day the strong winds eased just long enough for her mother Ruth Frith to get in a legal W80 triple jump record. However the winds were not so kind to Gwen Davidson (V) when she triple jumped further than any other W65 had done but her magnificent leap could not be ratified as a record.

Adelaide, 1993: A crisis confronted the 21st championships when two SA athletes, not members of our association, threatened legal action if not permitted to compete. They were eventually granted leave to do so, but since then entry form wording has changed to overcome this problem and one month later the AAVAC Board decided that in future

non-members can participate at the nationals by paying an extra \$50 on top of the normal entry fees. These championships were also significant as they were first to conduct official competition for M30s. Thirty-one Australian and two World Records (M85 Harry Gathercole (Q) 200m and W35 Pam Matthews (V) hammer) were set.

Sydney, 1994: The 22nd championships were held at the new Olympic Games warm-up track in Olympic Park, Homebush. Unfortunately, many throwing events, especially hammer, could not be accommodated and were conducted in open fields, lacking shade, seats or water for either athletes or officials.

Townsville, 1995: Change in venue and date occurred because it was expected Northern Territory would conduct the 23rd championships. However, they were unable to do so and the states and ACT were reluctant to take on the task at short notice. Fortunately, Queensland Masters Games were willing to incorporate our championships into their inaugural event. Veteran members could enter both our championships and the Games (provided they paid two entry fees) and were eligible for two different medals.

Perth, 1996: The 24th championships were the third 'nationals' staged in Perry Lakes Stadium and adjacent parklands.

Melbourne, 1997: VVAC decided to conduct the 25th championships efficiently but without the extra 'trimmings'. However, because many visiting athletes were disappointed that a special dinner/dance or social evening had not been included in the program, a later board decision mandated that a welcoming ceremony and a social evening should be important components of future championships.

Brisbane, 1998: Very hot humid conditions and violent thunderstorms stole the show at the 26th championships at ANZ Stadium. One storm was so fierce that some afternoon events were held over until the following morning, upsetting the schedules of many competitors. An 'Athletes Forum', that has since become a feature of our annual championships, was conducted for the first time.

Canberra, 1999: Two World (Margaret Taylor (ACT) W50 triple jump and Randall Hughes (V) M75 5000m) and 26 Australian Records were set during the 27th championships. Three innovations were - presentation of AAVAC trophies to our most outstanding athletes, introduction of a special 'champion of champions' javelin contest and perhaps most memorable was a Welcoming Ceremony featuring a poetic rendition and a choir singing the national anthem.

Hobart, 2000: The 28th championships were so cold our national body agreed that in future Hobart should only conduct them when Easter is relatively early. However, the cold and damp did not affect the efficiency and friendliness of officials and organizers. Competing in the final event, Margaret Taylor (ACT) attracted an interested gallery as each of her triple jump attempts were agonizingly close to the World Record.

Sydney, 2001: On five occasions the 'nationals' have been in Sydney they have been held at four different venues; in 1974 and 79 at Hensley Field, in 87 at ES Marks Field, 94 at Olympic Park and the 29th championships at the new Bass Hill Track. Beautiful Indian-summer weather delighted everyone involved. Highlights of the dinner/dance were the stage entertainments by each state.

Adelaide, 2002: The 30th championships were first to be known as Australian Masters' Athletics Championships. They were conducted in the new Santos Stadium with its magnificent warm-up area consisting of a three lane 100m track, a grassed slope for hill running, high jump/pole vault fans, javelin runways, throwing cage and circles all within an extensive grass area. Most outstanding athlete of the meet was M80 Mike Johnston (V) who won all his races in fine style including ARs in the 200 and 400m.

Perth, 2003: Weather during the 31st championships was glorious. Both road walks and cross-country were conducted on excellent venues adjacent to Perry Lakes Stadium and the dinner cruise on the Swan River was a highlight. The championships produced a World Record and nine new ARs, (eight by women). Margaret Taylor (ACT), having just become a W55 set ARs, in both long and high jump and a WR in the triple jump.

Melbourne, 2004: More than 600 competitors made the 32nd championships the largest for many years. A feature of the very successful dinner/dance was the annual presentation of AMA Awards for the 2003 calendar year.

Brisbane, 2005: The 33rd championships held at the QEII was blessed with good weather – not always the case when the 'nationals' go north. One World, 21 Australian and a multitude of Championship Records were set. W70 Heather Doherty (Q) set a WR in the throws pentathlon as well as ARs in shot, discus and heavy weight. Organisers appreciated the operation of a call-room and that most states had team managers.

Canberra, 2006: The 34th championships attracted almost 500 participants approximately a third of which were women. A striking visual feature was the numerous volunteers clad in their bright red long sleeved shirts. The most senior athlete was 96year-old Ruth Frith (Q) who delivered world-class performances in all six throwing contests while two nonagenarians, Eddie Gamble and Andy Smith from Victoria were oldest male competitors. Canberra was blessed with beautiful autumn weather throughout Easter and each of the competition venues - the AIS Athletics Arena for track and field, the four lap cross-country course at Weston Park and the lakeside paths around Lennox Garden used for the road walks were attractive for competitors and spectators alike. A highlight of the weekend was an enjoyable dinner-dance and presentation evening at the Canberra Club in Civic. Presentation of the annual AMA track and Field Awards (for performances achieved in 2005) was the most important formal feature of the evening.

Hobart, 2007: The 35th championships saw the introduction of three new events; the 60m sprint, three additional age bands for relays and 20km road walk available to all walkers. The LOC were thrilled with 431 entries (37.5 females) almost hundred more than in

2000. The remarkable and inspirational Ruth Frith from Queensland at 97 years of age was the most senior competitor as she has been for so many championships, while Victorian M85 Ken Matchett was oldest male.

Unfortunately M90 Victorian Andy Smith was unable to make it to Hobart and so sadly broke his unique and historic string of having participated in every national championship since they commenced in 1973. Race walker Lyn Ventris (WA) who recently moved up to the W50 age group set two new World Records – 5000mW (23.37.78) and 10km road walk (48.27). The Domain Athletic

Centre located on top of a hill with Mt Wellington dominating the background makes this venue one of the most picturesque in the country. The 8km cross-country was held in the area surrounding the stadium and the road walks were conducted on a level stretch of traffic free road through the middle of Kempton, an attractive little village about 45km north.

The Dinner- Dance and Awards Evening, always a highlight, was in the ballroom of the Hotel Grand Chancellor over looking Constitution Dock.

Sydney, 2008: The 36th championships were conducted at the Blacktown Olympic Park in western Sydney. The cross-country near Parramatta 26km from the stadium and the road walks along a recreation path within a nature reserve at Greystanes.

Periods of heavy rain affected some events, especially the throws and jumps, during the first two days as well as sadly causing the abandonment of the traditional medal presentations. However, despite these difficulties the carnival generally ran to time and a big thank you is owed to 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.

There were many outstanding performances, most notably two World Records; by David Carr (WA) in the M75 steeplechase and a composite women's team for the W35 4x100m relay. Ruth Frith (Q) at 98years-of-age was once again an inspiration performing well in all throwing events.

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This was the first championships since 2002 not to enjoy *Telstra* sponsorship that had been arranged through the Athletics Federation.

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Adelaide, 2009: The 37th championships will be remembered for the performances of champion sprinter Gianna Mogentale (NSW) who won all W45 sprint, middle distance and horizontal jump events as well as the women's 'champion of champions' handicap. There were many other outstanding individual performances, producing numerous Championship and Australian Records and even a World Record. M75 David Carr (WA) improved his own WR in the 2000m steeplechase with 9:01.98 as well as convincingly winning the 200, 400 and 800m in this age category.

Adelaide turned on magnificent weather although it may have been a little too warm for the longer races. All track and field events were held at Santos Stadium, the cross-country was four laps of a 2000m course in parklands near the stadium while the road walks were conducted on a 2km loop several blocks away.

There were almost 500 entries of which more than 37.7% were women. Being hosts it was logical that South Australia had the largest contingent with 129, the next biggest representation was NSW with 108 while four were from overseas.

This year the Dinner and Awards Evening was held at the Adelaide Riviera on Saturday rather than Sunday night. The highlight is always the presentation of the annual AMA Awards for the most outstanding performances achieved during the previous calendar year. It was also the ideal opportunity to announce the inaugural inductees into the AMA Hall of Fame - Alan Bradford (Qld), Ann Cooper (SA) and John Gilmour (WA).

Perth, 2010: The 38th championships was the sixth occasion the nationals had been held in Perth but this was by far the largest with 527 participants, better than some recent AMA Championships held in the eastern states.

One of the features of the championships was the magnificent new WA Athletics Stadium. What an improvement on the old Perry Lakes Stadium that had been built for the 1962 Commonwealth Games! The new venue boasted excellent facilities and was equipped with 'state-of-the-art' information technology. Local athletics dignitaries were proud to claim: "Their track was the fastest in the country". The only criticism spectators had of the stadium was that the grandstand was on the wrong side of the track because it faced west there was no afternoon shade.

As Ruth Frith was now a W100 a TV crew, making a documentary featuring active centenarians, accompanied her from her Queensland home and filmed her every throw throughout the weekend. And of course Ruth produced some excellent performances. The traditional Awards Dinner was held in a function room of the Kings Perth Hotel. Apart from being a joyous social occasion, where athletes from around the country mix and enjoy the company of old and new friends, it is also where the AMA recognises our most outstanding track and field performers.

Brisbane, 2011: Three highlights of the 39th championships were the two World Records set by an invitational women's relay team and a W75 throws pentathlon record by Queenslander Heather Doherty. An Australia W45 composite team of Julie Brims (Qld) and a trio from NSW Julie Forster, Giola Moti and Gianna Mogentale, ran 48.92 in the 4x100m relay on Saturday afternoon and next morning completed the 4x400m relay in

the time of 4:01.22. Both performances bettered existing World Records set at the 2009 World Championships in Lahti, Finland by the German team.

Another highlight was the launching of the book *Age is No Barrier*, a history of veterans/masters athletics in Australia written by ACTVAC club life member Bryan Thomas.

A total of 620 persons entered, including 24 from overseas.

The LOC tried something a little different for the AMA Awards Dinner by having it at a lawn bowling club. After the formalities associated with the presentations diners were invited to take off their shoes and participate in some social bowls matches.

Melbourne, 2012: The 40th championships was the first opportunity for most visitors to participate in the attractive new Lakeside Athletics Stadium at Lake Albert.

If the World Masters Athletics Indoor Championships had not been held at Jyvaskyla in Finland at the same time the nationals would certainly have had more than 700 participants but as it was 681 participated. Almost 40% of competitors were females and both men and women over 60 years-of-age were in the majority.

Two World plus 24 Australian and 37 Championship Records were set during the championships. World Records were set by W55 Dawn Hartigan (Vic) in the pole vault (3.20m) and W35 Byrony Glass (WA) in the weight throw (17.29m).

M75 Queenslander Hugh Coogan won the men's Champions sprint for the third time.

W45 Gianna Mogentale (NSW) was the winner of women's race for the fifth consecutive occasion.

Greg Champion, well known Melbourne entertainer and member of the popular radio program "*Coodabeen Champions*", was the celebrity MC for the Dinner and Awards Evening. His many songs and anecdotes, full of humour and satire, were a hit with the audience. Being a member of Victorian Masters and a competitor in several M45 events at the championships gave him plenty of insights into the conduct of the nationals and many of the personalities involved.

Canberra, 2013: The first difference the 640 participants in the 41st championships noticed was that the registration and Official Opening took place inside a licensed club instead of at the track. As 2013 was Canberra's Centenary the LOC received generous support from the ACT Government while the *Tradies Group* of clubs was the major commercial sponsor.

Attractive purple T shirts, avocado coloured polo shirts and navy long sleeved tops with the championship logo featuring the Royal Bluebell (Canberra's floral symbol), were popular. The medals also prominently displayed the Bluebell with the original Griffin plan for Canberra etched into the background.

This year the Champions sprint was promoted with a little more flair. M65 Queenslander Rob McDonald won the men's race by just six thousandths of a second but it was an even more remarkable victory for the winner of women's sprint as it was the sixth consecutive victory for diminutive Wollongong speedster W45 Gianna Mogentale. The AMA Awards Dinner held at the *Woden Tradies Club* was a glittering success. Race walker Lynn Ventris (WA), who has a remarkable record in these awards having previously won the walks category on seven occasions, was the recipient of the Most Outstanding Female

Athlete of the Year. Winding up a memorable evening was the induction of NSW sprinter Peter Crombie and ACTVAC patron Jack Pennington into the AMA Hall of Fame. Early next morning cross country participants were delighted to run on the beautifully grassed Robert de Castella Track while the 10km road walkers enjoyed the scenery as they raced along the recreation path on the edge of Lake Burley Griffin. An exciting climax to a wonderful weekend was the World Record time of 11: 22.59 set by an invitational W60 4 x 800m relay team of Kathryn Heagney (Vic), Kathy Sims (ACT), Paula Moorehouse (NSW) and Jeanette Flynn (Qld).