

TIM'S TOP TEN MEN FOR 2018

It's that time of the year again so off we go with my Top Ten Men for 2018. 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 ask.



1. Dane Bird-Smith (QLD)

26 year old Dane Bird-Smith started the year on a high, with a win in the Australian 20km Summer Championships (first Australian) in Adelaide in February, albeit in a slower than normal 1:22:18, due to illness. He warmed up for the Commonwealth Games with a super fast 10:56.06 in the Queensland Track Classic in late March, then took gold in the Commonwealth Games 20km 2 weeks later with 1:39:34. The low point was his DNF in the World Racewalking Team Championships in May (hamstring) and it was 4 months before he returned to racing, with the Lake Taihu 3 Day Rally in China in September. Although not up to his standard of past years, he still recorded a fifth on day one and 14th overall. Not as dominant a year on the world stage but far and away our top male walker for 2018.



2. Declan Tingay (WA)

19 year old Declan Tingay has dominated the U20 ranks this year. He started the year at the AIS study/camp in Canberra, winning the Australian 10,000m track walk title in a PB 41:07.88. Two weeks later he recorded a PB 5000m track time of 19:38.81 in the AACT T&F Champs. He won the Oceania U20 10km road title in Adelaide in February with 42:37 and won the Australian U20 10,000m track title in Sydney in March with 42:33.15. Unfortunately, he incurred a 1 minute time penalty in the World Teams Championships U20 10km in China in May when sitting with the lead group late in the race - he went on to finish 14th with 42:01. He had no such problems in July in Tampere, Finland, coming 4th in the IAAF World U20 10,000m track walk and breaking the Australian & Oceania records with his time of 40:49.72. He finished his year with a PB 1:28:04 at Fawkner Park in December. Poised to storm into the open ranks.



3. Kyle Swan (VIC)

19 year old Kyle Swan has had to play second fiddle to Declan for most of the year but, like Declan, his improvement has been rapid and consistent. He was 2nd in the Oceania U20 10km in February (42:40) and second in the Australian U20 10,000m track walk in March (43:57.10). He finished 10th in the World Teams Championships U20 10km in May with a PB 41:44 and finished 6th in the IAAF World U20 10,000m track walk in July with a further PB of 41:24.12. He participated in the Lake Taihu 3 Day race in China in September, an experience that is sure to help his development. Just back from a 3 week altitude camp in Bogota, Colombia, in November, he is well placed for his push into the open ranks.



4. Mitchell Baker (ACT)

17 year old Mitchell Baker was one of two dominant U18 walkers this year. He started with a PB time of 45:37 in the Australian Open 10,000m Track walk in Canberra in January, then came 3rd in the Oceania U20 10km in Adelaide in February (45:53), thus securing his World Teams Championships berth. He walked an excellent double in March in Sydney at the Australian T&F Champs, coming 2nd in the U18 5000m (22:26.99) and 4th in the U20 10,000m (45:47.83), then recorded a very fast 5:52 in the LA-ACT Champs a week later. Aged only 16, he finished a good 41st (46:57) in the IAAF World Team Championships in China in May. At the LBG Carnival in Canberra in June, he won the U18 5km (22:38) and the U20 10km (46:25) and he won again in the U18 5km in the Australian Road Championships in Queensland in August (46:36). In summary, he did everything that was asked of him during the year.



5. Rhydian Cowley (VIC)

27 year old Rhydian Cowley started the year with what looked like a win in the Australian 10,000m track championship in Canberra in January, only to be docked one minute and relegated to second place with a final time of 41:59.33. He was the third Australian to finish in the Australian 20km road championship in Adelaide in February (1:24:54), finished 11th in the Commonwealth Games 20km in April (1:26:12) and finished 47th in the IAAF World Team Championships in May (1:28:54). He mixed running and walking in his winter season and obviously benefited from the variety, bouncing back to better form with a win in the Fawknor Park 20km in December (1:24:24). Definitely not a top year from his high achieving perspective but the signs are promising that he has turned the corner and is coming back into better form.



6. Oscar Tebbutt (NSW)

17 year old Oscar Tebbutt was the other dominant U18 walker this year. His first hitout was in January in the Australian Open 10,000m track championship in Canberra where he finished 8th Australian with a PB 46:09.82. In the Australian Junior Championships in Sydney in March, he won the U18 5000m (22:08.63) and was third in the U20 10,000m (45:32.22). Later that month, he showed his speed with a 1500m time of 6:05.99 in the LANSW Champs. He walked a great double in the LBG Carnival in June, finishing 2nd in the Open 15km (1:15:06) and 2nd in the U18 5km (23:01) later in the day. He won the U20 20km at the NSW Long Course Champs in July with an inaugural 1:45:43 and won the U20 10km at Fawknor Park in December in a big PB of 44:59.



7. Toby Wilks (SA)

13 year old Toby Wilks was the best of the U14 walkers this year. He won the Australian T&F Championships U14 3000m (14:01.22) in Sydney in March, medalled twice in the LBG Carnival in Canberra in June (1st in the U14 2km with 9:18 and 3rd in the U16 3km with 13:47) and won the U14 3000m walk at the Australian All Schools Championships in Queensland in December (14:10.08).



8. William Robertson (TAS)

15 year old Will Robertson was our top U16 walker for the year. He was 2nd in the U16 3000m (13:31.89) at the Australian T&F Championships in Sydney in March, won the U16 5km (23:14) at the Australian Roadwalk Champs in Queensland in August and won the U16 3000m (13:36.67) in the Australian All-Schools Championships in Cairns in December. Racing almost exclusively in Tasmania, he appears only occasionally on the mainland but it is usually for a win.



9. Michael Hosking (VIC)

33 year old Michael Hosking produced the goods when it counted, finishing as the second Australian in the 2019 Summer 20km Championships in Adelaide in February. His big PB time of 1:23:10 earned him Commonwealth and World Team Championships berths. In the Commonwealth Games 20km in April, he walked aggressively, being well placed at the half way mark but slowing in the torrid conditions in the second half to finish 10th with 1:25:35, a good performance. Unfortunately, a hamstring issue put paid to his World Teams Championship appearance in May and he was disqualified. Although these 3 races were his only appearances for the year, he produced the goods when it counted and duly competed at the highest levels.



10. Ralph Bennett (VIC)

76 year old Ralph Bennett (he turns 77 tomorrow) enjoyed a year which culminated in M75 Masters World Championships gold in the 10km road walk in Malaga (1:04:28), along with a silver in the M75 5000m track walk in Malaga (31:38) Ralph dominate his age group in Australia and competed against his much younger rivals in the AV Shield most weeks. Unfortunately, he sacrificed weekly racing during the winter season, being occupied with VRWC official duties; this responsibility taking precedence over his own preparation for the coming Masters World Championships in September. However, his athletic abilities held him in good stead as he stood on the podium in September in Spain.

The following walkers were also considered:

Adam Garganis
Tyler Jones
Brendon Reading
Corey Dickson
Gwyllym Young
Tristan Camilleri
Nelson McCutcheon