



HEEL AND TOE ONLINE

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PAUL F DEMEESTER TALKS RACEWALKING

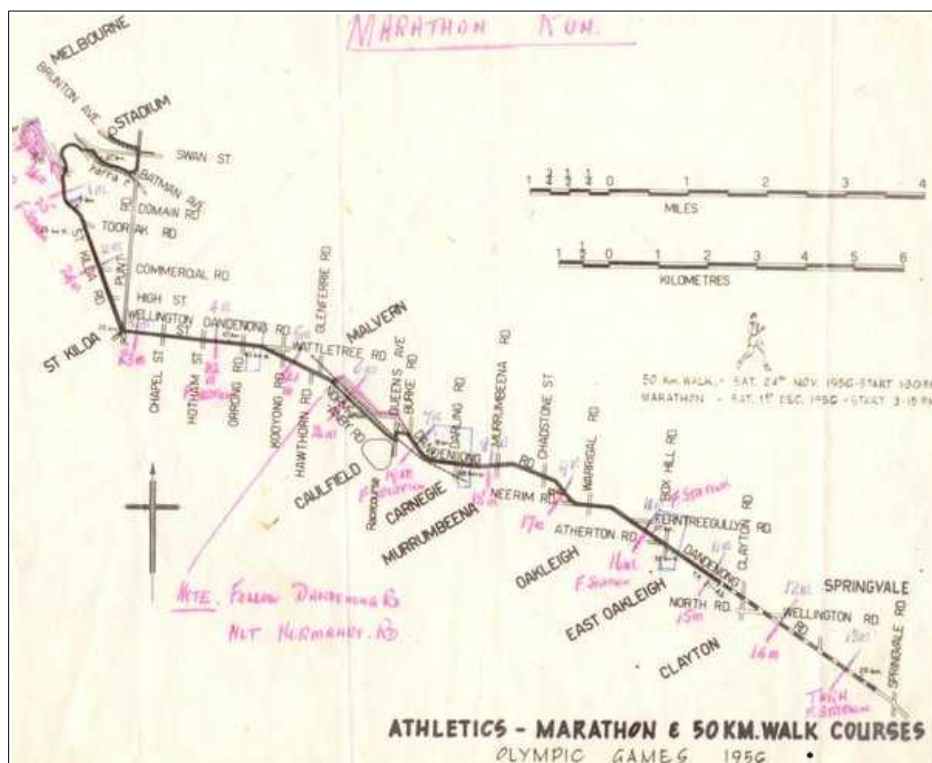
Thanks to US Attorney at Law Paul F. DeMeester for another wonderful article - the 40th in a row – and it’s as good as ever. You can see links to all Paul’s articles at the bottom of webpage <http://www.vrwc.org.au/save-the-50km.shtml>.

CIRCUITOUS THOUGHTS ABOUT THE 50K

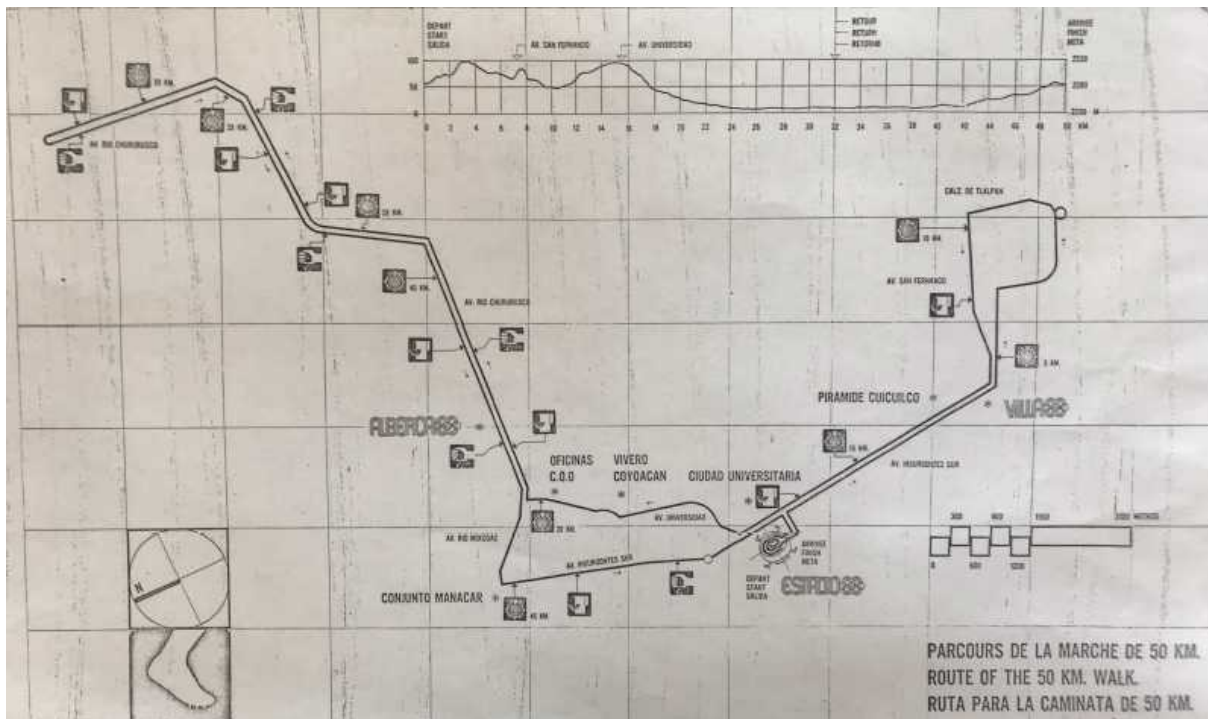
By Paul F. DeMeester

Standing on the Mall in London on August 13, 2017 was a rare treat. The late Peter Ryan and I were chatting up a storm on an absolutely gorgeous day while watching the men’s and women’s 50K men’s at the World Championships Athletics. We could see the walkers pass us just on the other side of the balustrade, so close that I’m sure it would violate some social distancing measure nowadays. That’s when the competitors were on our side of the road. When they returned in the other direction, the walkers were even easier to see from our vantage point. The turn point to our left was the circle around the Victoria Memorial right in front of Buckingham Palace. On our right, the walkers turned near the Admiralty Arch. The 2km circuit has become standard for top-level 50K races. But it was not always so.

The early long distance race walks, starting with the 50K in 1932, would have their start and finish in the stadium, with a giant loop outside of it, often as a basic out-and-return course, as was the case at the 1956 Olympics in Melbourne. The 1956 course photo seen below is part of an elaborate special section on the 1956 Olympic Games race walking events that are part of the Victorian Race Walking Club’s permanent collection available on the website (<http://www.vrwc.org.au/>) under the heading *Other Pages, 1956 Olympic Reflections*.



The 50K course at the Mexico City Olympics was a variant of the out-and-return course, with the first part consisting of an out-and-return portion to the south of the stadium (where the start and finish took place). The course then passed near the Estadio Olímpico at about the 17th K, after which the course veered in a northwesterly direction to take a grand tour of the Avenida Rio Churubusco, with a turn point at about the 32nd K. Mexico City 50K bronze medalist Larry Young send me a copy of his route map (note the northerly direction arrow points to the bottom left on the map).



1968 Mexico City Olympic 50K Race Walk Course (Courtesy of Larry Young)

What the map does not show is the difficulty of the course, separate and apart from the heat and high elevation (7,350 feet), with inclines on the course. Even a photo (see below) will not always do justice to just how steep the uphill is for those staring at it for real.



What the Mexico City Route Map Does Not Show: Hills

To get a flavor of the race, a must-see is the film taken by Robert Young, Larry's dad who was Larry's biggest fan and who himself became a race walker with some notable results. Robert Young captured both of his son's Olympic races, the 1968 race (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f12mXeBfktQ>; length 17:53) and also the 50K Munich 1972 Olympic race (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpdtkKkdWE6s>; length 14:51), where Larry Young was the only one of the Mexico medalists to return to the podium for his second Olympic bronze medal.

The Melbourne and Mexico City courses had two inherent difficulties in having such a stretched out landscape on which the race unfolded: it is hard on judges and spectators alike. U.S. Olympian Tom Dooley's 20K race had already taken place three days prior to the 1968 Olympic 50K event, when he went on course to cheer on his U.S. teammates. It's a good thing Tom was an Olympic athlete, as he darted across the course to about four of five different spots to get a glimpse of the 50K walkers. Tom estimates he covered some 10 to 20K just trying to keep up with the race. Towards the end of the race, Tom entered the stadium to watch the finish.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) took note and suggested the elimination of the 50K. During the IAAF Congress held in Munich in 1972, concurrent with the staging of the Olympic Games, the Congress Minutes reflect that "[t]he final reason given that the staging of a 50 Km Walking Race posed insuperable problems for traffic authorities had to be acknowledged, even though it had been shown that the difficulties could be reduced by using a smaller circuit of about 5 Km." (IAAF, Minutes of the 28th Congress 1972, p. 35.)

The difference can be seen in Robert Young's videos from the 1968 and 1972 long distance walks. In the Mexico film, throngs of fans run, walk and cycle along the route, in order to keep up with the action. By 1972, the smaller circuit concept had been introduced (still much longer than the current 2K iteration). Spectators could stay put in one spot and see their favorite athletes pass by numerous times without having to sprint about like Tom Dooley in 1968. With the return of the 50K to the Olympic schedule in 1980, the circuit shrunk even more.

But the smaller circuit does not solve all problems. With a start and finish in the stadium, a ticket is needed to get in to watch those portions of the race; and lots of moving about is still needed in order to catch the rest of the race. The IAAF showed the way when it started conducting its World Championships race walks completely away from the stadium. This achieves two worthwhile ends: the event truly becomes free to spectators, a unique feat in this day and age of highly commercialized top sport; and a more suitable race venue can be selected because the course is no longer appended to the stadium like an umbilical cord. An extra bonus is that host cities can show off some of their beauty.

Tim Erickson, your Heel and Toe editor, has become a frequent visitor to Olympic and Worlds 50K venues, courtesy of his own international career and that of his son Chris. Tim loves the notion of being "able to watch the whole race unfold," by having the 2K circuit away from the stadium. His favorite was the 2009 Berlin World Championships course, set in a historic part of the city with plenty of facilities and eateries for the spectators to watch the race and enjoy the afternoon as well. The 2012 Olympic venue in London followed the Berlin model, a first for the Olympics. The London Worlds in 2017 used a variant of the same course.

The 2K circuit offers plenty of upsides and no downsides in 50K racing: judges can do their judging without having to worry about transportation along the course; the race walkers are presented with a course on ideal surfaces, rather than having to use the thoroughfare to the stadium; two sets of replenishment stations will cover the entire race; spectators can watch all the action from start to finish (for free to boot); and those who wish to film the race have an easier time doing so. What's not to like? Maybe we should try this at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics. After all, the Olympic 50K was born in the City of Angels.

WHAT'S COMING UP

I don't expect any further race results for 2020 but we won't have to wait long until our summer racewalking season resumes in 2021. The main Victorian dates for January read as follows

Jan 16 (Sat), 2021	AVSL Round 5 (no walks)	Various venues
Jan 17 (Sun), 2021	VRWC Road Walks	Middle Park
Jan 22-24, 2021	Victorian Country Track & Field Championships	Ballarat
Jan 27 (Wed), 2021	VRWC Track Races	Mentone

Note that our VRWC Summer Season races will continue on Sunday 17th January 2021, with road races at Middle Park. Check out our full summer season fixture at <http://www.vrwc.org.au/vrwcs21.shtml>.

ATHLETICS WA INTERCLUB, WA ATHLETICS TRACK, PERTH, FRIDAY 18 DECEMBER

Only a small walks field in Perth last weekend for their latest round of Interclub.

5000m Walk

1.	Ben Reid	24:35.71
2.	Bradley Mann	25:25.17
3.	Alexandra Griffin	25:50.44

ATHLETICS SA INTERCLUB, SA ATHLETICS TRACK, ADELAIDE, FRIDAY 18 DECEMBER

The South Australian walkers contested a 3000m race last Friday evening, with **Kim Mottrom** leading them home as usual. He commented: Nice conditions and some good times overall;

Open 3000m Walk

1.	Kim Mottrom	13:07.85
2.	Kiera Ross	15:05.63
3.	Sebastian Richards	15:15.45
4.	Nellie Langford	15:44.46
5.	Jordan McKenna	18:32.94
6.	Katie DeRuvo	18:45.24
7.	Marie Maxted	19:48.76
8.	James Hoare	23:55.11
	Liz Downs	DNF

ATHLETICS SOUTH REUNION DAY MEET, DOMAIN ATHLETICS CENTRE. HOBART, SATURDAY 19 DECEMBER

Thanks to Dave Moore for the latest results from Tasmania. He reports: Today's event in cool conditions saw a field blitzing walk from **William Robertson** to take out the Men's section of the Albert Johnson Memorial Trophy. Next across the line winning the Women's section of the Albert Johnson Trophy for the first time was **Elizabeth Leitch**, while **Wayne Fletcher** and **David Moore** battled for honours at the rear of the field, with Wayne holding David at bay by a metre at the finish line.

Albert Johnson Memorial 3000m Walk

1.	William Robertson	OVA	13:19.89
2.	Elizabeth Leitch	TMA	20:14.56
3.	Wayne Fletcher	NS	29:30.44
4.	David Moore	TMA	29:30.67



2020 Albert Johnson 3000m Walk Memorial Trophy Winners William Robertson and Elizabeth Leitch

Older English readers will recognise the name Albert Johnson. Albert, born in Yorkshire in 1931, competed for Britain in the 1956 Olympic 50km in Melbourne. In 1974, he and his wife Mildred decided to move to Australia and start a new life with their young family. Their destination was Tasmania and they settled in New Norfolk where Albert worked as a qualified nurse at the hospital. He had no intention in resuming his coaching career but was persuaded otherwise and over the years, he coached a whole swag of top Tasmanian athletes, including a number of walkers. He is remembered in Tasmania for his great contribution over a period of nearly 40 years. Read more at <http://www.vrwc.org.au/tim-archive/articles/wo-albert-johnson.pdf>.

QMA T&F MEET, SAF, BRISBANE, SATURDAY 19 DECEMBER

A mixture of Masters and youngsters competed in the 3000m walk at the weekly Queensland Masters meet in Brisbane last Saturday.

3000m Walk

Gee, Tamika	W13	QMA	16:17.62	71.09%
Bennett, Peter	M65	QMA	17:17.29	80.36%
Gannon, Brenda	W46	QMA	18:39.89	67.09%
Gee, Blake	M11	QA	20:17.69	51.85%
Kirwin, Roslyn	W31	QMA	21:27.95	53.96%
Gee, Isabella	W9	QA	24:12.51	47.85%
McKinven, Noela	W78	QMA	24:31.03	71.56%

MARCIADALMONDO AND OMARCHADOR ROUNDUP

Marciadalmondo has 5 press releases this week, but note in particular the first one. **Nicola Maggio**, the website administrator, along with **Sandro Damilano**, has been providing almost daily updates to the racewalking world since early 2006 (nearly 4000 press releases). The site also features a huge archive section of reports, photos, videos and much more. Thanks so much Nicola and Sandro. Your ongoing efforts have made my job a lot easier and have provided so much enjoyment to us all world wide. You both deserve GOLD MEDALS!

- Mon 22 Dec - Marciadalmondo celebrates 15 years of reporting on the sport of racewalking.
http://www.marciadalmondo.com/eng/dettagli_news.aspx?id=3942
- Sun 20 Dec - Olhao (POR): Victories of Ana Cabecinha (POR) and Tom Bosworth (GBR)
http://www.marciadalmondo.com/eng/dettagli_news.aspx?id=3941
- Sun 20 Dec - Suqian (CHN): Wang Kauhua and Yang Jiayu wins in Lake Taihu Challenge
http://www.marciadalmondo.com/eng/dettagli_news.aspx?id=3940
- Tue 15 Dec - Paul Nihil, a legend of British race walking, passes away
http://www.marciadalmondo.com/eng/dettagli_news.aspx?id=3939
- Tue 15 Dec - Around Taihu second stage - Victories of Zhang Jun e Yang Jiayu
http://www.marciadalmondo.com/eng/dettagli_news.aspx?id=3938

Omarchador has 9 press releases.

- Sun 20 Dec - Ana Cabecinha and João Vieira win Portuguese 20km championships - Olhão 2020
<https://omarchador.blogspot.com/2020/12/ana-cabecinha-e-joao-vieira-vencem.html>
- Sun 20 Dec - On Piergiorgio Andreotti's birthday
<https://omarchador.blogspot.com/2020/12/no-aniversario-de-piergiorgio-andreotti.html>
- Sat 19 Dec - José Luis Doctor and Ilse Guerrero victorious in Tecamac, Mexico
<https://omarchador.blogspot.com/2020/12/jose-luis-doctor-e-ilse-guerrero.html>
- Sat 19 Dec - Paola Pérez and David Hurtado win in Quito, Ecuador
<https://omarchador.blogspot.com/2020/12/paola-perez-e-david-hurtado-vencem-em.html>
- Fri 18 Dec - Yereman Salazar and Ana Sulbarán win 20,000m at Venezuela 2020 Championships
<https://omarchador.blogspot.com/2020/12/yereman-salazar-e-ana-sulbaran-vencem.html>
- Thu 17 Dec - Ding Chen and Jiayu Yang win the second stage of the 2020 China Tour
<https://omarchador.blogspot.com/2020/12/ding-chen-e-jiayu-yang-vencem-segunda.html>
- Wed 16 Dec - Paul Nihill (1939-2020)
<https://omarchador.blogspot.com/2020/12/paul-nihill-1939-2020.html>
- Wed 16 Dec - Jun Zhang and Jiayu Yang win the first leg of the 2020 China Tour
<https://omarchador.blogspot.com/2020/12/jun-zhang-e-jiayu-yang-vencem-primeira.html>
- Tue 15 Dec - Erick Barrondo, Maritza Poncio and Uriel Barrondo win Guatalalan Championships in San Jerónimo
<https://omarchador.blogspot.com/2020/12/erick-barrondo-maritza-poncio-20-km-e.html>

OUT AND ABOUT

- Very sad news this week with the passing of 81 year old English racewalking legend **Paul Nihill**, who died on Tuesday 15th December due to covid related complications. A fitting obituary has been published in Athletics Weekly at <https://athleticsweekly.com/athletics-news/race-walking-legend-paul-nihill-dies-1039938576/>. I have also updated my own tribute, which I wrote in 2018. See below.
- Wow. This is new. The Commonwealth Games Federation has introduced quota-reduction penalties in weightlifting for the first time, in its qualification rules for Birmingham 2022. Every doping violation during the qualifying period will be punished by the loss of one place from the maximum team size of 16, which is split equally between men and women to match the number of medal events. Nations could be banned outright if they have more than three violations during a year. See <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1102045/birmingham-2022-weightlifting-doping>.
- One for our long distance walkers. The English Centurion website has had a major refurbishment. Check it out at www.centurions1911.org.uk.
- Following on from the photos in last week's newsletter of our Australian walkers training at Thredbo Alpine Village in NSW, Athletics Australia has published its own article: <https://www.athletics.com.au/news/race-walkers-re-group-in-thredbo/>.
- WADA has admitted it is "disappointed" the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) decided not to enforce all of the sanctions it imposed on Russia last year, but claimed the ruling represented a victory for the organisation and that it showed how institutionalised cheating would not be tolerated. The CAS halved the ban on Russia's flag and anthem at the 2020 and the 2022 Olympic Games in Tokyo and Beijing, respectively, and World Championships, including the FIFA World Cup from four years to two. The court also watered down other elements of the initial punishments handed down to Russia by WADA last December for manipulating the Moscow Laboratory data, such as the criteria required for athletes to compete at the Olympics and World Championships and allowing the word "Russia" to feature on their uniforms. See <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1102119/wada-disappointed-claim-victory-doping>. Well, I suppose it's a partial victory but it brings Russia closer to full reinstatement – can we really be sure things have changed?
- If you ever needed any further proof of Russian complicity in doping, you need look no further than this 2018 article, where David Howman, former WADA Director General, cast doubt on race walking gold medals won by Valeriy Borchin and Olga Kaniskina at the Beijing 2008 Olympics. Howman said that a train transporting pre-Games samples taken by the IAAF to the Beijing Laboratory was intercepted inside Russia, and the samples were removed. See <https://www.sportsintegrityinitiative.com/howman-raises-questions-russian-beijing-2008-race-walking-golds/>.
- A third of Japanese residents want Tokyo 2020 to be cancelled due to fears that incoming foreign travellers could cause another spike of COVID-19 cases, a new survey has revealed. The poll conducted by public broadcaster NHK showed that 32% of respondents wanted the Games scrapped completely. Only 27% said the Games should go ahead as scheduled, while 31% favoured another delay. See <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1102023/tokyo-2020-olympics-covid-19-foreigners>.
- Tokyo has reached 10,000 coronavirus cases in a month for the first time since the beginning of the pandemic, raising fresh question marks over the staging of next summer's Olympic and Paralympic Games. The bleak milestone underlines the severity of the situation in the Japanese capital as it grapples with a surge in cases - just seven months before it is due to stage the Games. On Thursday (December 17), Tokyo reported a record 822 new cases in 24 hours as the city reached the fourth level of its COVID-19 alert system for the first time. See <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1102231/tokyo-2020-coronavirus-cases-surge>.

PAUL NIHILL MBE: 1939-2020

I wrote this tribute to Paul Nihill in 2018. I was lucky enough at that time to be able to run the draft past Paul himself and I was then able to incorporate his amendments and suggestions. He wished to dedicate the article in memory of his mother, so that was done. Now two years later, I must sadly update it to reflect Paul's passing from complications arising from a coronavirus infection.

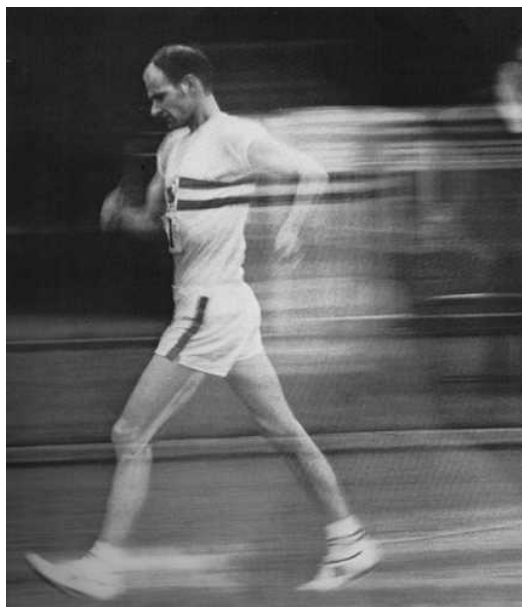
Consider England's racewalking dominance in the early 1960s.

- 1960 Don Thompson wins the 1960 Olympic 50km and Stan Vickers finishes 3rd in the Olympic 20km.
- 1961 Ken Matthews wins the inaugural 1961 Lugano Cup 20km and George Williams is third, while Don Thompson takes silver in the 50km. GBR wins the teams event.
- 1962 Ken Matthews wins the European Championships 20km and Don Thompson takes bronze in the 50km.
- 1963 Ken Matthews wins and Paul Nihill is second in the 1963 Lugano Cup 20km and Ray Middleton takes silver in the 50km. GBR wins the team event, with three 20km walkers finishing in the top 6 and three 50km walkers finishing in the top 6.
- 1964 Ken Matthews wins the Olympic 20km and Paul Nihill takes silver in Olympic 50km.

I have written previously on Don Thompson¹ and Ken Matthews². It is now time to zoom in on the third of these outstanding walkers, namely Paul Nihill.

Less spirited in style than Thompson, less machine like than Matthews, Nihill brought to British walking an astonishing versatility and resilience that now sees him regarded as perhaps their greatest ever walker.

He enjoyed an outstanding, record-breaking career. Between 1967 and 1970, he won 85 of his 86 walking races, his only defeat coming in the Olympic 50km at the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, when in the thin air of the high altitude, he pushed himself to a standstill, collapsing within a few miles of the finish. Nihill then concentrated on the 20km distance, becoming European champion in 1969, winning a European bronze medal in 1971 and setting a world record in 1972. His career included 4 Olympic Games (1964, 1968, 1972 and 1976), the first male British athlete ever to achieve this feat.



Paul Nihill pictured at speed in the 1971 AAA 10,000m (photo ED Lacey)³

The starting place for any article on Paul Nihill is the wonderful 2006 extended audio interview recorded as part of the British Library Sound Archive⁴. It is just over 3 hours in length and I listened to it all as part of the process of writing this document.

And now onto the facts and figures.

For most sporting stars, their life makes for easy reading. They generally come from a stable family background and have lots of support as they progress through the ranks. Nothing could be further from the truth in the case of Paul Nihill.

Vincent Paul Nihill was born 5th Sept 1939, 2 days after the outbreak of WWII.

Nihill's early life was tumultuous. He was placed in an orphanage in Chelmsford at 2 years of age as his family disintegrated around him. He was eventually reunited with his mother in Croydon but family life continued to be fraught with difficulties. His family was poor and they struggled for money. Further, he had a poor but stable relationship with his stepfather and spent much time roaming throughout London rather than being at home.

Eventually, at 9 years of age, he was sent back into care in a Catholic convent school in Littlehampton. Although only there for 6 months, he suffered physical and psychological abuse, an experience that he admits left him scarred for life. His mother fought in the courts to regain custody and he was returned to her on his 10th birthday. Finally some normality returned to his life.

He was sent to the Woodside School in Addiscombe, Croydon, and it was there that he discovered his love for sport. He joined the local boys club and boxed and ran and played football and cricket. Slightly built, he boxed at 6st 7lbs as a 14 year old (he was a late developer and did his growing once he left school at age 15).

He loved boxing more than athletics but he could see that he was better at athletics. For a while he combined the two sports competitively but eventually running took over. A critical point was reached when the boys club coach encouraged him to move to cross country from the sprints. He instantly took to it.

1 See <http://www.vrwc.org.au/tim-archive/articles/wo-don-thompson.pdf>

2 See <http://www.vrwc.org.au/tim-archive/articles/wo-ken-matthews.pdf>

3 The Official Centenary History of the AAA by Peter Lovesey p 143

4 See <https://sounds.bl.uk/Oral-history/Sport/021M-C0790X0037XX-0100V0>

His school career was all too short and he left, aged 15. His first job was as an office boy in a wholesale grocery, where he stayed for 18 months. It was during this time that he had his first racewalk. He was just 17 when he saw an athletics club advertisement in the paper which read "Can you walk 5 miles in an hour?" He duly participated, coming second to famous London to Brighton runner Charlie Busby (Blackheath Harriers), then aged 48. From then on, he was mixing running and boxing and walking.

While his sporting endeavours were flourishing, not much else was. In fact, he was pushed out of home at age 17, after further friction with his stepfather. Finding himself now homeless and with no support network of friends or family, he joined the Army as a regular. It was a decision based on sheer desperation. Alas, he could not cope with the army way of life and ran away within a week. Although he had signed on for 7 years, he was allowed to officially leave after only forty days, after taking an overdose of tablets. He had attempted to kill himself as a means of release from his army commitment. This was an indication of his precarious mental health at that time.

In 1958, he found lodgings in South Norwood and finally settled, staying there for the next 7 to 8 years, sourcing a job with Corona, a soft drinks firm, and eventually marrying and fathering a family of three children, Tony, Clare and Vincent.

He had a lot of knee trouble in his late teens and in 1959, aged 19, the doctors identified a chipped bone within the knee. Eventually he had his patella removed, a serious operation that took many months to recover. He found he could no longer box or run without pain, so walking now took precedence. Within 4 years he was an international walker.

He joined the Surrey Walking Club and threw himself into training. He was a loner who trained morning and night, with long walks thrown in on the weekend, covering many miles a week.

Tall (at 1.8m) and lean (a light framed 66kg), he was a versatile all rounder with an abundance of speed and stamina. Equally good at both track and road, he eventually excelled and set records in all distances from 1 Mile (6m 17s) to 50km.

Over the years, he worked for a number of big companies, including GEC, British Rail and Lloyds Bank. He was generally well supported by these companies and granted additional time to train and take time off for major races. But for now that's all further down the track.

By February 1961, he was mentioned in the Race Walking Record for his 2nd place in the Southern "Garnett" 10 Miles Championship at Brighton (81:13) behind Surrey teammate Maurice Fullager.

A year later, in March 1962, he had started to make his mark nationally, taking 4th in the London Counties 10 Miler (77:17) and 5th place in the 10 Miles National Championship (79:09), one place behind Don Thompson and one place ahead of Ray Middleton). He followed this up with third in the 20 Miles National Championship (2:46:13) behind Matthews and Thompson. He then went into longer distance mode with 9th in the National 50km (4:51:32 and a Surrey Walking Club teams win), 4th in the Birmingham Outer Circle 25 Miler (3:48:44) and 9th in the Hastings to Brighton 38 Miler (6:13:32). The only race he did not seem to do was the London to Brighton! His season finished with appearances in the various 7 Mile classics, gaining places in them all. Ken Matthews was still the dominant walker but Nihill was now one of the young hopefuls nipping at his heels.

If 1962 was a promise of things to come, 1963 saw the fulfilment of that promise. Consider his major races for that year, leading up to his first Lugano Trophy appearance in October:

Feb: 1st in the London Counties 10 Miles Championship (75:07) and the Counties 10 Miles Championship (74:10)
Mar: 2nd to Ken Matthews in the National 10 Miles Championship (73:20 to 73:34)
Apr: 1st in the Metropolitan W.C. Open 20 km (1:32:09)
May: 1st in the National 20 Miles Championship (2:39:43)
June: 4th in the National 50km (4:26:06), followed a week later by 1st in the Southern Area AAA 2 Miles Walk (13:43.6)
Aug: 2nd to Italian Abdon Pamich in the London Vidarians 25 Miler (3:23:00)
Sept: 3rd in the France vs GB 20km match (1:35:04), followed a week later by 1st in the Highgate Harriers One Hour Walk (8m 462 yd)

He was disappointed when he was not invited to walk with Matthews in the 1963 Milan 30km but amends were made when he was named as part of the British team to contest the Lugano Trophy in Varese, Italy. That weekend of 12-13 October 1963 now stands as perhaps the greatest weekend in British racewalking history, with the British team surpassing all expectations in this, the second Lugano Trophy meet. Every member of the team finished in the first 6: Middleton 2nd, Wallwork 5th and Fogg 6th in the 50km and Matthews 1st, Nihill 2nd and Edgington 6th in the 20km. The 20km results showed a close race, but one in which Matthews was not really challenged for gold and Nihill was not really challenged for silver.

1963 Lugano Trophy 20km, Varese, Italy, 13th October

1.	Ken Matthews	GBR	1:30:11
2.	Paul Nihill	GBR	1:33:19
3.	Antál Kiss	HUN	1:33:38

1964 now loomed large as the Olympic year and Nihill weighted his options. If he contested the Olympic 20km, the best he could do was second. No one was going to beat Ken Matthews! So he chose to contest the Olympic 50km. Don Thompson was in the twilight of his career and Nihill was now beating him regularly. The 50km landscape certainly looked clearer. He got to work.

He was second in the National 10 Miles (72:03) in March, won the Metropolitan W.C. 20km (91:39) in April, won the R.W.A 20 Miler (2:40:13) in May and won the National 50km in June (4:17:10).

It was no surprise when he was named as the British number 1 walker in their Olympic 50km team. He was clearly amongst the Olympic favourites and was broadly picked to medal behind the clear favourite, Italian Abdon Pamich.

Race conditions on the day were perfect from Nihill's perspective. The hot and humid Tokyo summer conditions gave way to a wet and cool day, just like home! Pamich lead early with Agapov (Russia) but broke clear at the 15km mark. Soon he was joined by Nihill and Hohne (Germany). The German quickly fell back and it was left to Pamich and Nihill to fight it out. Near the 38km mark, Pamich was forced to stop with stomach problems but Nihill's time in the lead was short and, by 40km, Pamich was 4 secs in front. Nihill chased the Italian through the final 10km but could not bridge the gap, eventually finishing 19 seconds behind in second place.

Both Pamich and Nihill had broken the current world record. Further, the first 12 to finish had bettered the current Olympic record. Retrospectively, Nihill regarded his 1964 Olympic silver medal as his greatest ever performance.

1964 Olympic 50km Walk, Tokyo, Japan, 1st July

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------|-----|-----------|
| 1. | Abdon Pamich | ITA | 4:11:12.4 |
| 2. | Paul Nihill | GBR | 4:11:31.2 |
| 3. | Ingvar Pettersson | SWE | 4:14:17.4 |



Paul Nihill (right) relishes the wet conditions in the 1964 Olympic 50km championship (photo Getty Images)

1965 saw Nihill continue on his winning ways, talking golds in the AAA 2 miles and 7 miles championships, along with wins in the RWA 10 miles and 20 miles and 20km.

1966 continued in much the same mode, but all was not right. Eventually, trying to find a balance between his career as an athlete, his ongoing financial problems and the pressures of a young family, it became too much and he suffered a serious breakdown in health. He was forced to take time off work, he stopped racing and he withdrew from life in general.

The buildup to this was hidden from the public and it was a surprise to the local walking community when the following was published in the September 1966 issue of the Race Walking Record (No 288).

PAUL NIHILL RETIRES

During the month of August, Paul Nihill, the Olympic 50km silver medallist, announced his retirement from racewalking. This announcement came after Paul had been selected to represent Gt. Britain over 20 kms at the European Games. Despite Paul's reported annoyance with the selectors, R.W.A. officials and walkers in general, we find it difficult to understand why he should choose to retire a couple of weeks before the Games. Generally, selected competitors retire afterwards. During 1965, he set standards which future walkers will find extremely difficult to equal, never mind surpass, when he won all the major A.A.A and R.W.A. National titles except the 50km.

Not exactly a sympathetic hearing!

He continued to train as much as he could but it was some time before he could face the starter's gun again. Yet, by 1968 he was back as the foremost British walker, winning all the major championships from 7 miles to 50km. His time the R.W.A 10 Miler in April (72:28) indicated he was getting back into top form.

Again, he had to decide whether to nominate for the 1968 Olympic 20km or 50km as he had clearly qualified for both. He eventually chose the longer distance as he thought it would be the safer option in the high altitude of Mexico City. The discussions had centred on the dangers in particular in the middle distance events.

Yet it proved to be the wrong decision, as the Olympic 50km was walked in oppressive heat, and heat was the one thing that Nihill at that time found difficult. He led the Olympic 50km field out of the stadium, confident in his preparation and feeling he was ready to win. Just as in 1964, the race developed into a two person duel, with him alone in the lead with Christoph Hohne (East Germany) by the half way mark. But things quickly fell apart soon after, with Nihill falling back and eventually collapsing around the 45km mark, while in 11th place. It was Nihill's only defeat for the year. Writing in the Race Walking Record, Ken Best said "*It was unfortunate that this greatest of all sporting events was marred by controversy over altitude.*"

Nihill bounced back in 1969 in the best possible way, winning the first 3 British championships, passing the landmark of 50 consecutive wins in England, setting UK records at 5000m (20:14.2) and 3000m (11:51.2) and setting five other records at championship level.

He was rewarded with vests for two upcoming international meets. The first of the two was held in Brno on the morning of July 6th in humid conditions, over 16 laps of a concrete circuit. Nihill broke clear on the seventh lap, going on to win by over 4 minutes.

Czechoslovakia v Great Britain, Brno, Czechoslovakia, 6th July 1969

1.	Paul Nihill	GBR	1:31:22.2
2.	Peter Fullager	GBR	1:35:30.6
3.	Alexander Bilek	CZE	1:37:20.6

The second meet was a three way contest in Los Angeles 2 weeks later. This was the race he regarded as his greatest ever non-championship performance, defeating Olympic 20km champion Vladimir Golubnichy and Olympic bronze medallist Nikolai Smaga, both representing the USSR.

USA v COMMONWEALTH v USSR, Los Angeles, USA, 19th July 1969

1.	Paul Nihill	GBR	1:31:49.8
2.	Vladimir Golubnichy	USSR	1:32:11.0
3.	Ron Laird	USA	1:32:27.0
4.	Nikolai Smaga	USA	1:32:51.4
5.	Frank Clark	AUS	1:33:14.6
6.	Robert Kitchen	USA	1:38:02.4

It was no real surprise when he backed up with a win in the European Championships 20km in Athens in September.

1969 European Championships, Athens, Greece, 24th September 1971

1.	Paul Nihill	GBR	1:30:48
2.	Leonida Caraiosifoglu	ROM	1:31:06
3.	Nikolay Smaga	USSR	1:31:20

Ominously, Russians finished in 3rd and 7th places and East Germans finished in 4th and 5th places in this race. This period marked the start of the modern doping era and the high placings from these two countries sent an ominous warning.



1969 Sward Trophy Meet at the Crystal Palace in London – Paul Nihill wins the men's track walk (photo mediastore warehouse)

H was a worthy recipient of the 1969 UK athlete of the year.

1970 was another spectacular year for Nihill, achieving world bests at 3000m and 10 miles and winning national titles at 3km, 20km, 20 miles and 50km. But awful news awaited him. His wife had contracted hepatitis and, even though he took all precautions, he too came down with the disease. It was shattering. He had been the firm favourite for the 1970 Commonwealth Games which were to be contested in Edinburgh in July. He now had to bypass the opportunity.

Retrospectively, he felt he was never the quite the same walker afterwards. But he did gradually recover and was well enough to join the team for the 1970 Lugano Trophy meet in Eschborn, Germany, later that year. There he finished a lowly (by his standards) 15th place with 1:33:10, the second of the British walkers, behind Ron Wallwork, who was 10th with 1:31:36.

By late 1971, he was back on song and was named in the team for the 1971 European Championships, contesting the 20km in Helsinki. His 3rd place finish was a personal best 1:27:43.8 and broke Ken Matthews' British record. Of the first 8 placings, Nihill (3rd) and Embleton (6th) were the only non Eastern Bloc walkers.

European Championships, Helsinki, Finland, 10th August 1971

1.	Nikolay Smaga	USSR	1:27:20.2
2.	Gerhard Sperling	East Ger	1:27:29.0
3.	Paul Nihill	GBR	1:27:34.8

In the leadup to the 1972 Olympics, Nihill was chasing both 20km and 50km performances, perhaps eyeing the double at the Olympics.

He travelled to East Germany, for the 1972 May Day (1st May) walk meet in Berlin, choosing the 50km option. After leading at half way with a very fast 2:00:43, he looked set for a very quick time. Yet 500m later, he blew, struggling to finish the 20 lap course in 6th place with 4:30:12, after taking 66 minutes for the last 10km. As the Race Walking Record reported: "*Even Paul Nihill is human and can take a hammering*".

Two weeks later, he won the R.W.A. National 20km championship in a convincing 1:28:45, a superb 5 minute win on a tough course. This locked in his Olympic 20km spot.

Two months later, he raced his fastest ever 20km on the Isle of Man, winning with a World Record time of 1:24:50, breaking the two month old record of 1:25:19, held by Gennadiy Agapov of Russia. This World Record would stand for 4 years until bettered by Daniel Bautista in 1976. It would stand as the British record until 1983 when Steve Barry bettered it with 1:22:51.

20km World Record Progression ⁵

1:25:19	Gennadiy Agapov	URS	1972-05-07	Berlin, Germany
1:24:50	Paul Nihill	GBR	1972-07-30	Isle of Man
1:23:40	Daniel Bautista	MEX	1976-05-30	Bydgoszcz, Poland

He was duly named for the 20km / 50km double for the Munich Olympics, and went into the 20km race as the current World Record holder and clear favourite. But it was not to be. While leading around the half way mark, he experienced severe thigh pain and could only limp home for 6th place with 1:28:44.



1972 Olympic 20km - Bernd Kannenberg, Nikolay Smaga, Peter Frenkel, Paul Nihill and Vladimir Golubnichy
(picture Getty Images)

⁵ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Men%27s_20_kilometres_walk_world_record_progression

The team doctors worked furiously on his leg during the 4 day break before the 50km but had only limited success. He finished 9th in the 50km with 4:14:09. His legs felt heavy and he had obviously not recovered from the 20km race.

Two days later on 5th September 1972, on his 33rd birthday, the Munich Olympic Games terrorist attack took place.

Nihill retired in early 1973, citing a lack of incentive after Munich for his decision. He swapped over to road running, with just the occasional local walk. As far as he was concerned, he had retired from international standard sport.

Late in 1975, he had second thoughts. It might be nice after all to become the first British male athlete to compete at four Olympic Games (an achievement not equalled until Daley Thompson in 1988).

At 35 years of age, he still had enough speed in his legs to win the AAA 3000m title. He backed up with third in the 1976 National 20km in 1:31:38, thus gaining selection for the Montreal Olympic Games 20km, where he finished 30th in 1:36:40.4.



Paul Nihill trains in the 1976 Olympic Village with Australian Ross Hayward

That was definitely the final roll of the dice for him. This time, it would be a permanent retirement. And he stayed true to his word.

In 1976, he was awarded an MBE for services to sport. With this recognition, he joined Don Thompson and Ken Matthews who had both already received MBEs.

The most versatile of British walkers, Nihill won 27 AAA and many more RWA championship titles between 1963 and 1975. His AAA championship wins included

AAA 10 Miles Road:	4 golds
AAA 20km Road:	6 golds
AAA 2 Miles / 3 km Track:	4 golds
AAA 20 Miles Road:	6 golds
AAA 50km Road:	3 golds
AAA 7 Miles / 10 km Track:	4 golds

In the period from 1956 to 1975, Nihill did 574 races, of which he won 358, was second in 53 and third in 43. In Britain, he won 96 races consecutively from 1967 to 1971. In international races, he had 51 consecutive wins.

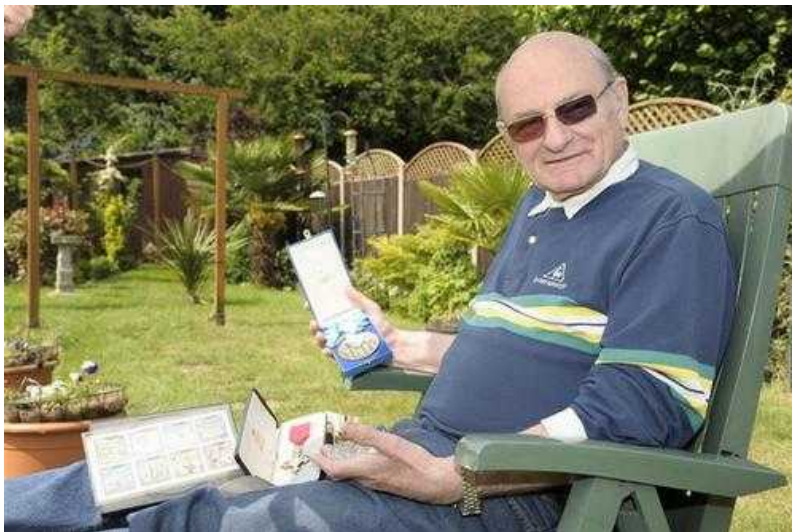
Nihill's punishing training sessions were the stuff of legend, like those of his contemporary and fellow Olympian Don Thompson. In the early 1960s, he trained under the eye of former Belgrave Harriers international George Williams. Williams encouraged him to perform sprint repetitions. Writing in the Race Walking Record 35 years later, Nihill said:

On several occasions we did sixty sprints and thereafter a hard road session up and down hills. One thing I always credit the sprints with was giving me my rhythm, something I did not have prior to meeting up with George. He also introduced me to drinking but that's another story. Later in my racewalking life, when attempting not too serious comebacks, I always prepared by doing "George Williams 100s", plus road work of course. We not only did 100s but 200s, 300s, 400s and 800s, all with little rest between them. If they weren't beneficial, I would not have done them.

Nihill continued to move in racewalking circles after his retirement, doing the occasional race and serving a term as President of the Race Walking Association. He has also continued his association with his first love boxing, holding many positions over a longer period of time.

As well as his various sporting interests, he used to present a midweek show on BBC Radio Medway on 50's rock 'n' roll music – of which he was an expert and had a huge collection.

In 2013, he finally announced that he had done his last walking race. It was time to hang up the shoes for good after a career spanning 60 years.⁶



*Paul Nihill shows off some of his large memorabilia collection on the occasion of his official retirement in 2013
(Photo <https://www.kentonline.co.uk>)*

In 2016, Nihill was honoured to have a road in Addiscombe named after him. It was only fitting that the road-naming ceremony took place on the day on which the 50km walk was taking place at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.



I did like the comment by the Inside Croydon reporter:

*Sadly, we believe that the developers have missed a trick, by opting to call the road Nihill Place. Nihill Walk would have been much more fitting.*⁷

The final months of his life were spent in Amherst Court care home in Chatham, Kent. Seeing the ravages of the covid pandemic, his family had arranged to walk a 50km fund raiser for the home on Sunday 13th December 2020. They had hoped Nihill would join them for the final mile, but he was too ill, and died only 2 days later on Tuesday 15th December, from complications arising from his own coronavirus infection.

⁶ See <https://www.kentonline.co.uk/medway/news/olympic-ace-decides-to-call-2617/>

⁷ See <https://insidecroydon.com/2016/08/18/olympic-medallist-nihill-to-be-honoured-in-addiscombe/>

As a four-time Olympian, European champion and Olympic silver medallist, Nihill deserves his place as of the all-time greats of race walking. He is also my pick as the best ever British walker. Olympic gold eluded him, but his longevity and the quality of his walking over all distances ensures he stands out, even nowadays.

A review of his major meet placings shows the quality of his walking, over an extended period.

12-10-1963	2 nd IAAF Lugano Cup	Varese, ITALY	2 nd	20km	1:33:18
01-07-1964	18 th Olympic Games	Tokyo, JAPAN	2 nd	50km	4:11:31
01-07-1968	19 th Olympic Games	Mexico City, MEXICO	DNF	50km	-
24-09-1969	9 th European Championships	Athens, GREECE	1 st	20km	1:30:48
10-10-1970	5 th IAAF Lugano Cup	Eschborn, GERMANY	15 th	20km	1:33:10
10-08-1971	10 th European Championships	Helsinki, FINLAND	3 rd	20km	1:27:34
31-08-1972	20 th Olympic Games	Munich, GERMANY	6 th	20km	1:28:44
03-09-1972	20 th Olympic Games	Munich, GERMANY	9 th	50km	4:14:09
23-07-1976	21 st Olympic Games	Montreal, CANADA	30 th	20km	1:36:40

His personal bests of **11:51.2** (3000m), **20:14.2** (5000m) **1:24:50** (20km) and **4-11:31** (50km) have stood the test of time and remain competitive in this modern era.

Additional References:

- The Official Centenary History of the AAA by Peter Lovesey, 1979
- Unbroken Contact: One Hundred Years of Walking With Surrey Walking Club, Edited by Sandra Brown, 1999
- British Olympic Association Official Report of the Olympic Games 1964
- British Olympic Association Official Report of the Olympic Games 1968
- British Olympic Association Official Report of the Olympic Games 1972
- RaceWalking Record Archive at <http://www.racewalkuk.com/Archive/Archives.asp>

Tim Erickson

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DATES...DATES...DATES

As usual, I finish with a list of upcoming events on the local, national and international fronts. Let me know of any errors/omissions. It continues to change quickly as a result of COVID-19 issues.

For VRWC race details, see <http://www.vrwc.org.au/vrwcs21.shtml>

For Ballarat Race Walkers Club race details, see <https://www.ballaratracewalkers.com/wp/>

For the Athletics Australia summer fixture, see <https://cdn.revolutionise.com.au/cups/aa/files/aexjryarznk08gxh.pdf>

Victorian Key Dates – Summer 2020/2021

Jan 16 (Sat), 2021	AVSL Round 5 (no walks)	Various venues
Jan 17 (Sun), 2021	VRWC Road Walks	Middle Park
Jan 22-24, 2121	Victorian Country Track & Field Championships	Ballarat
Jan 27 (Wed), 2021	VRWC Track Races	Mentone
Feb 6 (Sat), 2021	AVSL Round 6 (no walks)	Various venues
Feb 10 (Wed), 2021	AV 5000m Teams Race Championship	Mentone
Feb 13 (Sat), 2021	AVSL Round 7 (events TBA)	Various venues
Feb 14 (Sun), 2021	VRWC Road Walks	Middle Park
Feb 14 (Sun), 2021	Australian 20km Roadwalk Championships	Adelaide, SA
	Entries close on Monday 1 st February - https://www.athletics.com.au/events/83392/	
Feb 19-21, 2021	Victorian T&F Championships (Weekend 1)	Lakeside Stadium
Feb 26-28, 2021	Victorian T&F Championships (Weekend 2)	Lakeside Stadium
Mar 5-8, 2021	Australian Masters Championships	Canberra, ACT
Mar 6 (Sat), 2021	AVSL Round 8 (events TBA)	Various venues
Mar 13 (Sat), 2021	AVSL Round 9 (events TBA)	Various venues
Mar 20 (Sat), 2021	AVSL Round 10 (events TBA)	Various venues
Mar 21 (Sun), 2021	VMA 5000m Walk Championship	Mentone
Mar 27 (Sat), 2021	Australian 50km Championship (Men)	VIC
Mar 27 (Sat), 2021	AVSL Playoffs	Lakeside Stadium
Apr 12-21, 2021	Australian Athletics Championships	TBA
Apr 23-24, 2021	Australian Little Athletics Championships	VIC
Apr 24-25, 2021	Victorian Masters T&F Championships	Doncaster

International Dates

May 16, 2021	European Race Walking Team Championships, Podebrady, CZE
July 23 – Aug 8, 2021	32nd Olympic Games, Tokyo and Sapporo
July, 2021	23rd World Masters T&F Championships , Tampere, Finland
Aug 8-19, 2021	World University Summer Games , Chengdu, China
Aug 20-21, 2021	18th World Athletics U20 T&F Championships , Nairobi, Kenya (POSTPONED FROM 2020)
Jan 2022	Oceania Masters Championships , Norfolk Island (POSTPONED FROM JANUARY 2020)
TBA, 2022	9th World Masters Indoor T&F Championships , Edmonton, Canada
Apr 23-24, 2022	29th World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships , Minsk, Belarus
July 15-24, 2022	18th World Athletics Championships , Eugene, USA
July 27 - Aug 7, 2022	XXII Commonwealth Games , Birmingham, GBR
Aug 11-21, 2022	European Athletics Championships , Munich, GER
TBA, 2022	19th World Athletics U20 T&F Championships , Cali, Colombia
TBA, 2023	24th World Masters T&F Championships , Gothenburg Sweden
Aug 2023 (TBC)	19th World Athletics Championships , Budapest, Hungary

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Copies of recent newsletters are kept on the VRWC website (<http://www.vrwc.org.au>)