

David Smith

1979	Racewalking World Cup	Eschborn	20 km	21 st	1:25:36
1980	Olympic Games	Moscow	20 km	DQ	
1980	Olympic Games	Moscow	50 km	DNF	
1981	Racewalking World Cup	Valencia	20 km	DNF	
1983	Racewalking World Cup	Bergen	20 km	DQ	
1983	IAAF World Champs	Helsinki	20 km	15 th	1:25:23
1984	Olympic Games	Los Angeles	20 km	10 th	1:26:48
1985	Racewalking World Cup	Isle of Man	20 km	DQ	
1985	World Indoor Champs	Paris	5,000m	3 rd	19:16
1986	Commonwealth Games	Edinburgh	30 km	DNS	
1987	World Indoor Champs	Indianapolis	5,000m	5 th	18:52
1987	Racewalking World Cup	New York	20 km	DQ	
1987	IAAF World Champs	Rome	20 km	DQ	
1991	Racewalking World Cup	San Jose	20 km	46 th	1:26:14

Born on 24th July 1955, David Smith grew up in Darwin and initially played rugby league half-back in an 'under 4 stone 7' team but there was not much real future for a small athlete in rugby so he looked further afield. He turned to boxing and won 50 out of 51 amateur fights. He also had ambitions as a jockey and rode trackwork at the Darwin Turf Club.

At 17 years of age, his family moved to Melbourne (Werribee) and boxing and racing prospects seemed remote so he took up athletics. He had enough raw speed to win the AFRWC Junior 6 mile title in Canberra in his first year.

At 172 cm in height and only weighing 63.5 kg, he was built for speed and walking fast seemed to come naturally to this gifted athlete.

For the first few years, he was a track walker only and by March 1977, he was second only to Willi Sawall. In the National track titles of that year, he came 2nd to Willi in **12:40**.

He experienced his first winter season in 1977 and placed 3rd in the Victorian 20 km (**1:35:56**), 10 km (**47:50**) and 15 km (**1:11:50**).

After another successful track season (second to Sawall in the Nationals again), he fronted for his second winter season and continued to progress: he was second to Willi in the AFRWC 10 km title in Hawksbury in NSW (**44:00.2**) and 3rd in the Canberra 20 mile (**2:38:28**). He had teamed up with Tim Erickson and was obviously benefiting from the longer training and racing.

The 1979 winter season was even better with his first Victorian titles – the 15 km (**1:05:28**) and 30 km (**2:17:51.4**). A fine walk in the Lugano Cup 20 km (21st in **1:25:36**) confirmed that he was now a force in Australian walking. For the next 7 years, he was to dominate all distances up to 20 km.

The 1980 summer season saw Dave set 7 new Australian and Commonwealth records and road bests as Australian walking entered a new era. These were as follows:

17.11.79	3000m	11:51.0	Olympic Park, Melbourne	Track
08.12.79	1500m	5:38.4	Olympic Park, Melbourne	Track
13.12.79	3000m	11:35.0	Olympic Park, Melbourne	Track
16.12.79	20 km	1:23.16	Albert Park	Road
22.12.79	1500m	5:32.0	Adelaide	Track
25.01.80	3000m	11:31.0	Adelaide	Track
02.03.80	5000m	20:15.0	Ballarat	Track
	10000m	40:54.7	Ballarat	Track

Yet by season end, he was still number 2 behind Willi who had set new records over 1500m (5:30.8) and 3000m (11:28.5) to re-establish his number 1 position and it was Willi who won the National 3000m track title in a slick 11:32.

A fine second place in the 1980 Olympic trial (**1:27:04**) behind Willi ensured that they were both selected for the Moscow Olympics but it was a disappointing experience for Dave. After a successful series of races in Europe (4 wins out of 4 races), he was one of many disqualifications in the 20 km Olympic event in what seemed to be a judging backlash against criticism of lax judging in the previous few big internationals. It was the 17 km mark and Dave, in 10th place, was moving up through the field. A top ten place had seemed assured.

His next summer season did not seem to be effected by this setback and he was in record breaking form once again with the following list of Australian, Commonwealth (and in some cases World) bests.

08.11.80	1500m	5:27.5	Olympic Park, Melbourne	Track
22.01.81	3000m	11.17.9	Olympic Park, Melbourne	Track
07.02.81	1500m	5:19.1	Olympic Park, Melbourne	Track
28.02.81	3000m	11.15.2	Olympic Park, Melbourne	Track
08.03.81	3000m	11.11.5	Adelaide	Track

He also won the New Zealand Games 20 km in Christchurch in **1:26:15** and did an amazing **19:41** for 5 km road at Albert Park.

He easily accounted for Willi in the Victorian title and was a long way in front in the National 3000m race in Adelaide when disqualified with 2 laps to go. He reacted with frustration and the papers were happy to print his comments – an unfortunate situation that almost certainly put a black mark against Dave.

The 1981 winter saw a win in the Victorian 15 km (**1:01:42**) and a fantastic 20 km timesplit (**1:21:39**) in the first 20 km of the Victorian 30 km race at Albert Park. He followed this up with a fine win in the Lugano Cup 20 km trial (**1:23:31**) and was duly selected for the World Walking Cup in Valencia. But what should have been a top ten place ended in disaster when he pulled out of the race at the half way mark with stomach cramps. Another opportunity lost!

The 1982 summer rolled on and the indefatigable Smith was at it again. In January, he recorded **11:12** for an Interclub 3000m at the Aberfeldie track in Melbourne. Wins in the Victorian 3000m (**11:30**), Victorian 10000m track (**40:58** with a 5000m split of **20:14** for a new Australian record) and the Australian 3000m in hot conditions in Brisbane (**12:00**) confirmed his status as the king of the sprinters.

He was forced to lower his colours to Willi Sawall in the Victorian 20 km (**1:24:43**) and did not race much in the 1982 winter season. He did however, surface for the 1982 Commonwealth Games 30 km trial but was once again disqualified at the 22 km mark when well in front. Another disappointment and another season gone.

The next summer season saw David sizzling on the track again. He started the season slowly with a 2nd place (**43:00**) to Willi Sawall in the Australia vs Italy track 10000m walk in Melbourne in December but in January he recorded **20:02.2** for an Interclub 5000m at Box Hill. Then he won the Victorian 5000m walk in a Commonwealth record of **20:01** and followed this with another National title with **20:39**.



Dave strides out in the leading pack in the middle stages of the 1983 Racewalking World Cup in Bergen. The pack is led by eventual winner Maurizio DaMilano of Italy.

He won the 1983 Australian 20 km title in Adelaide in **1:26:00** and was selected for the Lugano Cup and IAAF World Championship 20 km events. He travelled to Europe and had a great series of races that included the British track title with a new British record of **11:36** and a super fast 20 km win in Luxemburg in **1:20:51**. Yet he finished only 15th in Helsinki in **1:25:23**, another relative disappointment, and was disqualified in the 20k in Bergen. After that disqualification, he had a heated argument with the chief judge and did his cause no good. But Dave was never one to take things quietly on the chin.

The next summer saw even more records. On September 29, 1983, at the Aberfeldie track in Melbourne he set a new Commonwealth 5000m record of **19:20.6**. He then won the VRWC 20 km club championship on December 18 in **1:20:22.7** and topped things off with a 10000m Commonwealth record in winning the Victorian title in the time of **39:41.7** at the Clifton Hill track in February 1984. He then travelled to Sydney for the Olympic Games 20 km trial and won in **1:23:00** without receiving any warnings.



Dave strides to an effortless win in the 1984 Olympic 20 km trial in Centennial Park in Sydney and shows impeccable form.

Finally things were working out for Dave. He was selected for his second Olympics and finish 10th in Moscow in **1:26:48**. To cap off the year, he was awarded a scholarship to the AIS in Canberra.

1985 got off to a good start as January saw him set a new Australian record for the 5000m (**19:07**) and then finish 3rd in the World Indoor Championships in Paris in **19:16**. Then, on his return, he successfully defended his national 5000m title. He was once again selected for the World Walking Championships, this time in the Isle of Man. In typical fashion, Dave bolted out of the leading pack and opened up a big lead before being disqualified. New coach Craig Hilliard was angry – Dave had been instructed to stay in the pack and keep a low profile – but Dave was not one to sit back when he felt good. It is fair to say that, at this stage of his career, Dave was capable of winning a World Championship – the only people who stood in his way were the judges.

Back in Australia, Dave bounced back with an amazing **38:20.9** for a new Commonwealth and Australian record for the 10,000m track walk on September 15 in Sydney. This record still stands today and is arguably his finest. Then in December at Albert Park, he recorded an equally amazing Commonwealth best of **2:06:11** for 30 km.

As 1986 started, Dave broke through the 19 minute barrier for the 5000m to record a new Commonwealth record of **18:52.87** in Canberra on 21 February. He was keen to add a Commonwealth Games berth to his long list of achievements and he was a comprehensive victor in the 30 km trial, held at the AIS in Canberra. His winning time of **2:05:59** set another Commonwealth best and made him a clear favourite for Edinburgh. But once again the fates were not kind to him – he caught flu and had to withdraw before the Commonwealth Games 30 km. He was on the plane back to Australia as Simon Baker strode through the pouring rains on Edinburgh to win gold for Australia.

Dave claimed yet another world record (his fifth official one) at the Perry Lakes stadium in Perth in early 1987 with a time of **11:00:53** for the 3000m walk. This shattered Maurizio DaMilano's six year old record by 7 seconds.

He then finished 5th in the World Indoor 5000m title in Indianapolis in **18:52** and retained the National 20 km title in Hobart with a super fast performance in an Australian best time of **1:19:22**.

But come the IAAF World Championships in Rome, he was disqualified while in the leading pack (as usual) and DaMilano won in near crowd hysteria in front of a partisan local crowd in brutally hot conditions. Then as a final blow, Dave was also disqualified in the World Walking Cup 20 km event in New York. His world was falling around him. He was fitter than ever and racing faster than ever before but could not get through the big ones.

1988 saw him miss Olympic selection and the relationship between him and coach Hilliard soured. This culminated in a very public laundering of dirty washing before a Federal Senate Committee looking into drugs in sport. David and Craig swapped recriminations in a very unpleasant tit for tat. As with many such inquiries, there were no clear winners but only losers.

Dave's AIS scholarship was terminated and he moved north to Queensland and assumed his old career as a salesman and immersed himself in the Brisbane racewalking scene with typical entrepreneurial enthusiasm

This marked a hiatus in Dave's career. He did not even race again until 1990 and his next (and last as it turned out) international vest was not until the 1991 World Walking cup. In fact, he was not even selected initially for the team and it was only via a couple of strong walks in Brisbane in April 1991 that he forced his way in to take the vacant last spot. His selection was justified when he finished 46th in the World Cup 20 km in **1:26:14**.

In 1991 Dave engaged in something of a grudge match with Andrew Jachno at the Australian 20km Championships in Melbourne. He saw this as a chance to inflict a defeat on an old rival and athlete who was being coached by his former coach Craig Hilliard. Dave duly won in **1:23:50** (and recorded an Olympic qualifier) defeating Andrew who was second in 1:25:55.

1992 saw Dave get serious once again as he tried for this 3rd Olympic selection. He won the Queensland 5000m track title in **19:40** and looked to have a chance. The Olympic trial was held in conjunction with the 1992 Track and Field Titles in March and he headed out in typical fashion, matching Nick A'Hern over the first 10 km which was covered in under 41 minutes. But the early pace took its toll and Dave fell off the pace and eventually retired.

A few days later he won the National 5000m track race (**19:23**) after a great battle with Simon Baker and Andrew Jachno. Alas, this effectively marked the end of Dave's Olympic aspirations. He had one Olympic qualifier from 1991 but his failure in the selection race had ruined his chances of selection.

Shortly after this, he retired from top level competition for good. In the years since, he has had considerable success with racewalk coaching on the local Queensland scene and has had stints as President of the Queensland Race Walking club. In 2004, he was voted in as the President of Racewalking Australia, thus marking a further stage in what has been a roller coaster career.

His place in Australian walking is unique. No one else has set so many records or consistently walked so fast for such a long period of time. Dave's six 5000m Australian titles illustrate this – 1983 **20:39**, 1984 **19:31**, 1985 **19:26**, 1986 **19:23**, 1983 **19:22**, 1993 **19:23**. His aggressive walking from the front inspired a whole new breed of walkers – Andrew Jachno, Nick A'Hern, Simon Baker. He set the standard against which all subsequent walkers were measured.