

Australian Middle and Long Distance Running in the 21st Century

Ref: Article

Depending on who is speaking Australian middle & long distance running is either better than it would appear to the casual observer or at close to the worst its been since the late 1940's! Those that propagate the first position usually point to the many challenges facing the sport while those who take the latter position contrast the advantages today's athletes enjoy and the performances they produce.

The true position is, of course, somewhere in the middle. However, despite the outstanding exploits of Benita Johnson and Craig Mottram, the evidence does suggest the true position is also closer to the negative than the positive interpretation.

Before going further however two things should be noted. 1) The long history of men's Track & Field events makes it easier the draw conclusions from the available data than for the women due to the staggered introduction of the women's 1500m, 3000m/5000m, 10,000m and marathon into world rankings and the Olympics and 2) any objective review of middle/long distance running must go past athletes and coaches and evaluate the effectiveness, or otherwise, of the input coming from Athletics Australia, the Australian Track & Field Coaches Association, the State Athletics Associations, the clubs, the Australian Institute of Sport, the State Institutes of Sport, the Australian Sports Commission and the Australian Olympic Committee as well as the attitudinal environment that dominates the sport.

Part 1 of this document will examine Australia's true position in the world of M/LD running by:

- 1) Comparing the rate at which Australia's national records have improved compared to countries Australia had parity with in the early 1970's,
- 2) Comparing Australia's current capability to produce athletes capable of achieving world "Top 10" or "Merit" rankings against past capabilities and
- 3) Attempting to put the results of 1) and 2) above into context by examining whether the competition today is more intense than it was in the past by comparing the rate at which world records have improved over the last 30 years (1974 to 2003) compared to the previous 30 years (1944 to 1973) as well as comparing the last 15 years from 1989 to 2003 with the last 15 years of the previous 30-year period, ie, between 1959 and 1973.

Part 2 will attempt to analyse why Australia is where it is and to make some suggestions as to remedying the current situation.

Part 1: The Current Situation

1. Comparing the Improvement in Australia's National Records with Comparable Countries.

In normal circumstances the rate at which any country improves its national records is an important consideration in determining performance because it pits the country against itself over time. Equally if a group of countries with similar characteristics were once of a similar standard the rate of improvement made by each country in relation to the other countries can be compared.

History shows the prior to the end of 1973 Australia (and New Zealand) more than held their own in terms of Olympic performances, world records and world rankings. It also shows that, as of December 1973, the world middle and long distance running records were still very egalitarian. See Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Men's National records in 1973 by nation. (*WR's are in Bold Type)							
Event	Australia	Germany	Kenya	NZL	RSA	UK	USA
800m (WR * 1:43.7 /Italy)	1:44.30	1:44.90	1:44.50	1:44.30	1:44.90	1:45.10	1:44.30
1500m	3:35.60	3:36.00	3:34.91	3:37.30	3:37.90	3:38.20	*3:33.10
1 Mile	3:54.40	3:54.70	3:52.00	3:54.10	3:56.00	3:55.30	*3:51.10
3000m (WR * 7:37.6 /Belgium)	7:47.20	7:45.20	7:39.60	7:46.20	7:53.40	7:46.40	7:44.20
5000m (WR * 13:13.00 /Belgium)	13:16.60	13:20.60	13:23.00	13:26.20	13:44.00	13:17.20	13:22.80
10,000m	27:39.89	27:53.40	28:06.40	28:15.40	28:27.20	*27:30.80	27:51.40
Marathon	*2:08:33	2:12:24	NA	2:12:17	2:13:58	2:09:08	2:10:30
3000m SC	8:21.98	8:26.20	*8:14.00	8:29.00	8:45.40	8:26.40	8:26.40

NB: Competition in women's was not sufficient to make comparisons meaningful.

The people who held these records were Marcello Fiasconaro (800m), a South African by birth and Italian by nationality, American Jim Ryun (1500m and mile), Ben Jipcho (3000mSC) of Kenya, Belgium Emile Puttemans' (3000m and 5000m), David Bedford (10,000m) of Britain and Australia's Derek Clayton (marathon).

Therefore while Australia held only one middle & long distance world record by 1973 a study of Table 1 below shows the national records were more than competitive with our southern hemisphere neighbours, New Zealand and South Africa, as well as the USA and the two of the stronger European nations in Germany and Great Britain.

However things have changed significantly over the last 30 years. When the research for this document started in 2002 it revealed the Australian 800m record remained as it was in 1968, the 1500m is 4 seconds faster than a time recorded on cinders in 1960, the 5000m and 10,000m times were 6 and 8 seconds faster than times recorded on cinders in 1965, the 3000m steeplechase is 6 seconds faster than it was in 1970 and the marathon is 43 seconds faster than it was in 1969.

In addition the research shows that between 1973 and 2003 Australia lost ground significantly against each of the other nations mentioned above. In 1973 the Australian records ranked between first and third in all events except the 3000m – which was 4th. In 2003 the highest rankings are 5th and the 800m is equal 7th. See Table 2. (Note: Craig Mottram altered this in 2004 by bringing the 5000m to 3rd.)

Table 2.

Men's National records by nation in 2003							
Event	Australia	Germany	Kenya	NZL	RSA	UK	USA
800m	1:44.30	1:43.65	1:42.28	1:44.30	1:42.69	1:41.73	1:42.60
1500m	3:31.96	3:31.53	3:26.34	3:32.40	3:33.56	3:29.67	3:29.77
1 Mile	3:49.91	3:49.22	3:43.40	3:49.04	3:50.82	3:46.32	3:47.69
3000m	7:37.30	7:30.50	7:20.67	7:37.49	7:44.00	7:32.79	7:30.84
5000m	13:12.04	12:54.70	12:39.79	13:12.87	13:14.16	13:00.41	12:58.21
10,000m	27:31.92	27:21.53	26:27.85	27:41.95	27:29.94	27:18.14	27:13.96
Marathon	2:07:52	2:08:47	2:04:55	2:08:59	2:06:33	2:07:13	2:05:36
3000m SC	8:16.72	8:09.47	7:55.72	8:14.05	8:19.00	8:07.96	8:09.17

NB: Listing 2003 records without the 1973 records invalidated comparisons in the women's events

This slippage is reflected in the fact that the rate of improvement in Australian male records since 1973 is a mere 1.06%* compared to the second worst improvement rate of 1.96% for New Zealand. See Table 3. (Note: Mottram's time for 5000m changed the rate to 1.33% but other nations have improved as well.)

This is well behind the average improvement of 2.66% for the seven countries listed and the 2.20% average improvement if Kenya and South Africa are removed from the calculation.

Table 3.

Percentage improvement in the men's national records between 1973 and 2002								
Event	Australia	Germany	Kenya	NZL	RSA	UK	USA	Av % Improvement
800m	0.00%	1.21%	2.17%	0.00%	2.15%	3.31%	1.66%	1.50% (1.24%)
1500m	1.72%	2.11%	4.15%	2.31%	2.03%	4.07%	1.59%	2.57% (2.36%)
1 Mile	1.95%	2.39%	3.85%	2.21%	2.24%	3.97%	1.50%	2.59% (2.40%)
3000m	2.16%	3.26%	4.30%	1.90%	2.03%	3.01%	2.96%	2.80% (2.66%)
5000m	0.58%	3.34%	5.69%	1.68%	3.76%	2.15%	3.16%	2.91% (2.18%)
10,000m	0.48%	1.94%	6.21%	2.01%	3.47%	0.77%	2.29%	2.45% (1.50%)
Marathon	0.53%	2.81%	NA	2.56%	5.86%	1.51%	3.90%	2.86% (2.96%)
3000m SC	1.06%	3.42%	3.84%	3.03%	5.29%	3.78%	3.52%	3.42% (2.48%)
Improvement	1.06%*	2.56%	4.32%	1.96%	3.35%	2.82%	2.57%	Av 2.66% (2.20%)

NB: 1) The figures in brackets in column on the right represent the average improvement for the five non-African countries.
2) Not enough information is available to draw similar comparisons in relation to the women's events.

Summary

Countries Australia was once competitive with have improved significantly more than Australia. It is interesting that while Australia has chosen to pass the responsibility for high performance to an Institute of Sports system while virtually all the other countries have coach driven programs backed by more systematic grass-roots programs and strong school/club/college competition programs.

2. Comparing Australia's Past and Present Merit Ranking

In 1947 Track & Field News magazine introduced the concept of merit rankings in men's events and did the same for women's events progressively from 1956 (800m) to 1981. The method used was based on the consideration of three factors. There are:

- 1) Honours won
- 2) Head to head performances against an athlete's peers and
- 3) The quality of the times/distances recorded

For the purpose of this document these rankings will be used to assess how nations have performed – both internally against themselves over time and externally against other comparable nations over time.

Using these rankings is also a much more reliable method of assessing performance than using the results of major Championships because it eliminates the discrimination inherent in comparing results produced from competitions which allow only limited entries and therefore exclude perhaps 50 to 60% of the world's best athletes. Example: Kenya had 41 sub 2:10 hour marathon runners in 2003. Had 40+ Kenyans been allowed to run in an Olympic or World Championship race it's hard to imagine one of them not winning! Secondly it also helps dispel the appearance of a countries strength based on the performances of one or two highly talented individuals. Example: Ethiopia in the 1970's and early 1980's.

Since these rankings were introduced in 1947 38 Australians (29 Australian males and 9 females) have totalled 89 appearances in world Merit Ranking lists with Ron Clarke (10), Robert De Castella and Lisa Ondieki (7) as the most Merit Ranked athletes. Only one Australian athlete (Benita Johnson) has been ranked since 1996 although Craig Mottram will be challenging hard for a 2004 position.

1947-1972 (26 years)			1973-2002 (29 years)		
	Event(s)			Event(s)	
Jim Bailey	1500m	Peter Bourke	800m		
Tony Benson	5000m	Dave Chettle	Marathon		
Tony Blue	800m	Shaun Crieghton	3000mSC		
Ron Clarke	5000m/10,000m	Margaret Crowley	1500m		
Derek Clayton	Marathon	Rob De Castella	Marathon		
Noel Clough	800m	Simon Doyle	1500m		
Ralph Doubell	800m	Dave Fitzsimmons	5000m		
Herb Elliott	800m/1500m	John Higham	800m		
John Farrington	Marathon	Mike Hilliardt	1500m		
Brenda Jones	800m	Benita Johnson	10,000m		
John Landy	1500m/5000m	Steve Moneghetti	Marathon		
Allan Lawerance	5000m/10,000m	Lisa Ondieki	10,000m/Marathon		
Merv Lincoln	1500m	Charlene Rendina	800m		
Brenton Norman	Marathon	Bill Scott	Marathon		
Kerry O'Brien	3000mSC/5000m				
Jenny Orr	1500m				
Cheryl Peasley	800m				
Les Perry	5000m				
Judy Pollock	800m				
Dave Power	5000m/10,000m/Marathon	*Non Olympic Event.			
Dave Stephens	5000m/10,000m	<i>Elizabeth Hassall</i>	<i>Marathon*</i>		
Albie Thomas	5000m	<i>Melissa Rollinson</i>	<i>3000mSC*</i>		
Trevor Vincent	3000mSC				
Dixie Willis	800m				

From an Australian perspective it is possible to see a clear division at the end of 1972 Olympiad. The two Olympiads leading into 1973 averaged 14 Top 10 rankings compared to 3.5 appearances in the two Olympiads after 1972 and of the 41 Australian athletes (male & female) who have been ranked since 1947 26 were ranked in the 26 years prior to 1973 and only 14 have been ranked in the 31 years since 1972 - despite the opportunity for many more appearances due to the introduction of the 3000m/5000m, 10,000m and marathon into the women's program!

Table 4 below shows:

- 1) 11.5% of all Australian Top 10 rankings were achieved in the 10 years between 1947 and 1956;
- 2) 54.5% were achieved in the 16 years between 1957 and 1973,
- 3) 21% were achieved in the next 16 years from 1974 to 1988 and
- 4) 13% were achieved in the 15 years since 1989.

Table 4.

Olympiad	Men	Women	Comments	Total
1949 – 1952	1	NA	No women's rankings	1
1953 – 1956	10	NA	No women's rankings	10
9 male rankings/8 years				
1957 – 1960	14	2	Women - 800m only	16
1961 – 1964	6	2	Women - 800m only	8
1965 – 1968	11	1	Women - 800m only	12
1969 – 1972	14	2	Women - 800m/1500m	16
48 rankings/16 years				
1973 – 1976	2	1	Women - 800m/1500m	3
1977 – 1980	3	0	Women - 800m/1500m	4

1981 – 1984	5	1	Women - All events.	6
1985 – 1988	4	3		7
20 rankings/16 years				
1989 – 1992	5	2	Women - All events.	7
1993 – 1996	4	1	Women - All events.	5
1997 – 2000	0	0	Women - All events.	0
2001 – 2003	0	1	Women - All events.	1
Hopefully we will see 14 rankings in 16 years as Craig Mottram must have a strong chance of being ranked on his 2004 performances				
Note: 1) Rankings are not recorded in non-Olympic events, eg, men's 1 mile, 3000m, or women's 3000mSC or women's marathon prior to 1980. 2) The author is aware some deserving athletes are omitted using this criteria , eg, Graham Crouch, an Olympian, who ran an Australian record 3:34/1500m finishing 5 th in the 1974 Commonwealth Games. This omission is balanced by the inclusion of Simon Doyle, a twice-ranked 1500m runner, who missed Olympic selection in 1992 due to injury.				

Even this dramatic decline does not tell the full story however. Forget the halcyon Olympiads up to 1972, and the acceptable showings to 1996 and focus instead on the State Sports Institute dominated period of 1997 to 2004. The 1997-2000 Olympiad is the only one since the introduction of the rankings to score a zero and provided Craig Mottram is ranked, as he should be, 2001-2004 will still be Australia's third worst-ever Olympiad for rankings.

Finally Table 5 lists the number of male and female athletes merit ranked between 1973 and 2002. It confirms what emerged from a study of the national records. In terms of performance we are on a par with New Zealand. An even more disturbing picture of Australia place in the world can be viewed on Table 1 in Part 2 of this document.

Table 5.

1973 to 2002 Inclusive				
Original Countries	Men	Women	Total	Rank
Australia	12	4	16	5 th
Germany	40	40	80	3 rd
Kenya	160	20	180	1 st
New Zealand	9	6	15	6 th
South Africa	9	2	11	7 th
UK	53	22	75	4 th
USA	62	41	103	2 nd
Emerging Countries	Men	Women	Total	
Ethiopia	24	11	35	
Morocco	9	3	12	
Spain	21	3	25	

Summary

It is logical the inability to improve national records at a rate equal to countries Australia was once on a par with is mirrored by the failure to produce athletes capable of gaining merit rankings in the middle/long distance events. It is also clear many other non-African countries have been far more effective in producing elite runners than has Australia. Again, given the fact Australian sports programs are among the most heavily financed in the world, the question reverts to the effectiveness of those organizations tasked with high performance!

3. Examining the Trends in World Distance Running

It is commonly argued that today's runners face a more competitive environment than the runners of yesteryear. This is simply not true to any significant degree.

1. As a comparison between Table 5 above and Table 1 in Part 2 of this document shows, Ethiopia, Morocco and Spain are the only significant countries to emerge in the last 30 years, while many of the formerly strong countries are not nearly so dominant.
2. With the exception of the marathon any performance similar to the world record of 1973 would still have ranked an athlete in the 2003 world Top 30 list and place them well in many major championships.
3. As Table 6 below shows, the rate at which World Records have improved between 1974 and 2003 has actually slowed compared to what it was between 1944 and 1973 - despite the first 10 of these years occurring when Europe was rebuilding after World War 2.

Table 6

World Record Trends 1943 to 2003 (Men)					
Event	World Records 1943	World Records 1973	World Records 2003	% Improvement between 1943 and 1973	% Improvement between 1973 and 2003
800m	1:46.6	1:43.7	1:41.11	2.80%	2.56%
1500m	3:45.0	3:33.1	3:25.00	5.58%	3.45%
1 mile	4:02.6	3:51.1	3:43.13	4.98%	3.57%
3000m	8:01.2	7:35.2	7:20.67	5.71%	3.30%
5000m	13:58.2	13:13.0	12:39.34	5.70%	4.43%
10,000m	29:52.6	27:30.8	26:22.75	8.59%	4.30%
3000m SC	9:03.4	8:14.0	7:53.17	10.00%	4.40%
Marathon	2:25:39	2:08:33	2:04:55	13.30%	2.91%

In their book "Running Out of Time" (1982) the authors T. Dyer and K.F. Dyer used both linear and exponential methods to predict the world records in 2000. The predictions, based on studying the world record progression from the date of an events recognition by the IAAF suggested records superior to today's – predictions that took no account of an athlete's nationality, tribe or race. While some of the women's predictions were recognised by the authors as ridiculous due the lack tradition the men's predictions were, overall, reasonable.

More significantly, and contrary to the 'its tougher today' refrain, study of the improvements in the World Records over last 15 years of each period reveals a similar slowdown. Table 7 reveals the male records improved faster between 1959 and 1974 (average = 2.81%) when Australia, New Zealand and the Americans were leading the charge than between 1989 and 2004 (average = 2.01%) when it was the Algerians, Ethiopians, Kenyans and Moroccans in the vanguard! The women's rates were 1.81% for the statistically significant period between 1989 and 2004

Table 7

Men	1959	1974	% Improvement	1989	2004	% Improvement
800m	1:45.70	1:43.73	1.86	1:41.73	1:41.11	0.61
1500m	3:36.00	3:33.10	1.34	3:29.46	3:26.00	1.65
1 mile	3:54.40	3:51.10	1.41	3:46.32	3:43.13	1.41
3000m	7:52.80	7:37.60	3.21	7:29.45	7:20.67	1.95
5000m	13:35.00	13:13.00	2.70	12:58.39	12:37.35	2.70
10,000m	28:30.00	27:30.80	3.46	27:08.23	26:20.31	2.94
Marathon	2:15:17	2:08:33	4.98	2:08:01	2:04:55	2.42
3000mSC	8:32.00	8:14.00	3.52	8:05.35	7:53.63	2.41
Women	1959	1974	% Improvement	1989	2004	% Improvement
800m	2:06.60	1:57.50	7.19	1:53.28	1:53.28	0.00
1500m	4:29.70	4:01.10	10.60	3:52.47	3:52.47	0.86
1 mile	4:45.00	4:29.50	5.44	4:15.61	4:12.56	1.19
3000m	9:44.00	8:53.70	8.61	8:22.62	8:06.11	3.28
5000m				14:37.33	14:28.09	1.05
10,000m				30:13.74	29:31.74	2.32
Marathon				2:21:06	2:15:25	4.03
3000mSC					8:53.00	

This makes it difficult to advocate that the Moroccans, Ethiopians and Kenyans of today are any more formidable than the Russian, German, Hungarian, American and British athletes, who along with the Australians, New Zealanders and Kenyans, who that dominated world ranking lists from the mid 1950's to the early 1970's.

It follows from this that it becomes more difficult to advocate that the Australians of yesteryear encountered less opposition in real terms than the current athletes – especially when today's athletes enjoy a training life not even dreamed of back then.

Seen from this perspective perhaps the African dominance in men's events is more about the previously dominant nations losing momentum rather than about the Africans (low altitude Moroccans included) accelerating away from the rest of the world.

Finally what of the women? As Dyer & Dyer (Running Out of Time) also found it is difficult to draw conclusions from the available data because 1) the strength of an event will be measured by its place in the Olympic Games and while the 800m has been a modern event since 1960 some events were not scheduled until the 1980's and the steeplechase is still not on the program. Secondly many events were not even recognised by the IAAF until into the 1980's, eg, the 5000m and 10,000m. With this lack of recognition and the subsequent limited opportunities to compete on the European circuit until relatively recently no valid comparisons can be made with the past.

Table 8

World Records Trends 1943 to 2003 (Women)					
Event	World Record/Best 1943	World Record/Best 1973	World Record 2003	% Improvement between 1943 to 1973	% Improvement between 1973 to 2003
800m	2:12.0*	1:57.5	1:53.28	12.34	3.73
1500m	4:41.8*	4:01.4	3:50.46	16.74	4.75
1 Mile	5:15.3*	4:29.5	4:12.56	16.99	6.71
3000m	NA	8:53.0	8:06.11	NA	9.65
5000m	NA	15:48.6*#	14:28.09	NA	9.27
10,000m	NA	34:08.0*#	29:31.78	NA	15.59
Marathon.	3:40:22	2:46:40#	2:15:25	32.22	23.08
3000mS/C	NA	NA	9:08.33 (8:53.6/2004)	NA	NA

*Bests. Pre-IAAF, countries not recognised, etc!

#Australian Adrienne Beames held these records and would have been ranked pre 1974

One fact that does emerge clearly is that the women's 5000m is the event most likely to be improved. Currently the women's records are averaging 89.1% of the men's records with the 5000m at 87.5% while the marathon is at 92.2%. Interestingly the (often questioned) 1500m, 3000m, 3000mS/C and 10,000m records are at 89.4%, 88.8%, 90.6% and 89.3%! Expect the 5000m record to drop to ~14:15.

Conclusion.

Its time to stop the excuses and face reality with the confidence more Australians can perform with the more.

Its time serious action was taken to rectify the current situation so the next generation of talented Australian kids is given a far better chance to realise their potential than the previous one. We have a national Institute of Sport and eight State/Territory Institutes plus many regional Academies. We have a government funded Federation. We have a highly dedicated national Coaches Association. We have coaches who have produced many of the athletes who still appear in the Australian All Time Top 20 lists who have been sidelined or under-utilised. We have had numerous kids over the last 15 years who wanted to be great but who were failed by the system.

Isn't it time the people with the money, finances and resources to change the face of middle & long distance running accepted responsibility for this trust and acted to transform today's kids dreams into reality? Isn't it time the high performance' coaches, in conjunction with the high performance managers, employed by the Institutes started producing some 'high performance'? Isn't it time governments recognised exactly where 'the buck' stops? Isn't it time those charged with the responsibility to provide the avenues through which an athlete and/or coach can reach the top of their profession recognised they are either part of the solution or part of the problem? Isn't it time the business of athletics recognised it is there to service its clients and to deliver a product those who love the sport can take pride in?

After at least 5 major reports and numerous reviews in the last 15 years isn't it time to DO IT?

Australian Middle and Long Distance Running in the 21st Century

Part 2. Creating a Better Situation – A Discussion Paper/Personal View

Preamble

It is difficult to isolate the causes of Australia's middle and long distance decline from factors that transcend running and which impact on the wider issues that the recent Elliott report demands addressing if there is to be a Track & Field revival.

When reading Part 2 of this document, therefore, it should be kept in mind it is concerned only with the impact that the decisions taken by any of the main groups mentioned - AA, the AOC, the AIS, the SIS's, ATFCA and individual coaches taken as a group - have on middle & long distance performance. It is not meant to cover any other discipline or group of disciplines.

Introduction.

The positive aspects of Australian middle/long distance running in the last 30 years can be linked to 1) the attitude of individual athletes, 2) the work of individual coaches, 3) the AIS for employing some of these coaches and encouraging others via its very successful 1980's Satellite Coaches program, 4) The Rothman's funded ATFCA National Coaches' Conferences, 5) Athletics Australia's support of the coaching and performance through the establishment of a National Coaching Director and a Junior Development Officer and 5) A coaching structure that ensured all middle and long distance runners had a good endurance foundation.

On the other hand the dramatic decline in performance that is evident today can be traced back to the early 1990's as a result of:

1. Australia's misplaced perception of its current stature in world distance running.
2. The apologist mentality prevalent within a wide circle of people within the sport who espouse the belief that significant numbers of Australians can never be competitive on the world scene,
3. AA's increasing alienation from the sport as a whole,
4. Institutional failure at the SIS level where, despite 89 years of total existence between the six State institutes and two Territory Institutes, they have failed to produce even one runner capable of achieving a world Top 10 Merit ranking!
5. ATFCA's coach education program that has provided a sound theory base but has not demanded enough in terms of tangible performance before awarding coaches with level 2 and 3 qualifications.
6. The number of coaches who are unaware of just how much speed and endurance a world class athlete possesses and
7. The number of talented athletes who are not prepared to train 20 to 30% harder than the athletes of 30 to 50 years ago in order to keep up with the performances of athletes from countries who have been increasing their training levels by 5 to 10% every decade.

Australia's Place in World Middle/Long Distance Running

In a recent discussion with Peter Bowman, the President of the Australian Track & Field Coaches Association, I mentioned some of the findings I have already outlined in Part 1 of this document. Peter expressed surprise that so few Australians had been Merit ranked in recent years and said that few would have thought the rate of world record improvement between 1943 and 1973 would be greater than between 1974 and 2004. He then asked me about the trends in the period from the time the Africans really started to emerge, ie, from the mid/late 1980's (see Table 7 in Part A of this document) and in particular over the last 5 years.

Table 1.

Individual Athletes, by Country, Who Achieved a World Top 10 Ranking in the last 5 years (1999-2003)											
Country	Men	Women	Total	Country	Men	Women	Total	Country	Men	Women	Total
Kenya	69	11	80	Austria	1	1	2	Australia	0	1	1
Ethiopia	23	11	34	Belarus	0	2	2	Belgium	1	0	1
Russia	2	24	26	Burundi	2	0	2	Ireland	0	1	1
Japan	3	11	14	Canada	1	1	2	Mozambique	0	1	1
Spain	11	3	14	Cuba	1	1	2	North Korea	0	1	1
Morocco	9	3	12	Czech Rep	0	2	2	South Korea	1	0	1
USA	3	4	7	Holland	2	0	2	Surinam	0	1	1
Germany	2	4	6	Italy	2	0	2	Turkey	0	1	1
China	0	5	5	Mexico	1	1	2				
Portugal	2	3	5	Slovenia	0	2	2				
Algeria	3	1	4	Switzerland	1	1	2				
France	4	0	4	Tanzania	1	1	2				
South Africa	3	1	4	Ukraine	1	1	2				
UK	0	4	4								
Poland	1	2	3								

Table 7 (Part A) clearly showed the rate of improvement in the last 15 years is less than in the 15 years between 1959 and 1974 while Table 1 above reveals that the 6 nations have achieved 10 or more Merit rankings and a further 8 have achieved four or more

rankings. The top 6 comprise one North African and two East African nations plus two European and one Asian nation. The top 14 has five African, two Asian and six European plus the USA.

What it reveals is that Australia is not competing with nations like Kenya or Ethiopia (or Russia, Japan or Spain)! They are way beyond our league. Australia is at the same level as Belgium, Ireland, Mozambique, North & South Korea, Surinam and Turkey! Australia is attempting to get onto equal terms with countries like Austria, Belarus, Burundi, Canada, Cuba, the Czech republic, Holland, Italy, Mexico, Slovenia, Switzerland, Tanzania or the Ukraine! Australia ranks =29th!

The Apologist Mentality,

All too often we hear various athletes, coaches, administrators and/or journalists expressing the opinion that 'westerners' (meaning Australians) cannot keep up with the Africans due to any one, or all, the following excuses.

1. Australians cannot train like Africans. No physiological reasons are given and the statement fails to explain why Australia is behind so many non-African nations and why, despite the wide spread of top 5 finishes among many nations at the Olympics and World Championships Australia has not really been close.
2. African performances are the result of genetics and altitude. The success of the north Africans has been achieved without altitude and altitude and genetics do not explain the continual improvement in Kenyan or Ethiopian records over the last 10, 20 or 30 years. The later generations of Kenyans and Ethiopians, with the same genetics and from the same altitudes have far outstripped the superstars of 20 or 30 years ago and the reason is purely tougher training. Kipchoge Keino, acknowledged by all the Kenyans I have spoken to, as their all time great, had a 1:46.4/800m to his credit so he was as fast as any of the modern generation but his 1960's times of 3:34, 7:39 and 13:25 might not make the Kenyan Top 100 all time lists any more. He trained 6 to 8 times per week. Modern Kenyans train 12 to 18 times per week. The same applies to the former great Ethiopians such as Abibe Bikila, Mamo Wolde and Miruts Yifter. On the other hand Australians who competed nearly 40 years ago are still appearing in the Australian All lists precisely because the vast majority of athletes today are not training any harder, and maybe not even as hard, as previous generations and the improvements are mainly coming because they are full time athletes with full on support!
3. Australia is disadvantaged by lack of population. The population argument needs to be linked to per capita income, per capita funding assistance from Federal, State and private sources because the majority of East Africans receive little or no support from their Federations or their government and are undernourished. In a 1973 interview former British champion, Bruce Tulloh, who spent a year in Kenya, said "I estimate the training of the Kenyans is qualitatively about half that of Americans or Europeans of the same level of performance. When the majority of East African children are decently fed, when malaria, tuberculosis and intestinal disease are controlled African runners will amaze the world. They will accomplish performances that are hardly even dreamed of today." Any assistance a promising athlete may get comes from their school, the Armed Forces or their fellow (retired) athletes. During the years I have been in Nairobi lecturing to IAAF courses I have met so many young athletes in the ~3:37/1500m, 8:30/3000mSC, 13:30/5000m type categories that simply run interclub with no-one wanting to assist them its depressing. It's almost as depressing as watching talented Australian kids immersed in a flood of money, being denied the opportunity to succeed because of the Track & Field environment that surrounds them.
4. Running is the main sport in Africa. As in Europe, football (soccer) is the premier sport.

Athletics Australia

The appointment of a new CEO means it is not productive to discuss the mistakes of every past administration since the sport was under-funded and Ric Pannell was the CEO. It means it gives AA an opportunity to implement many things that could assist the revival of M/LD running. Clearly the need for all the major and minor reviews over the last 13 to 15 years shows AA has had little idea of its mission, of how to implement a plan when accepted by the Board or of how to work with their partners to produce a product or to keep their clients satisfied.

It provides an opportunity to revive the policy of directing money from the AOC, AIS, SIS's and National sponsors back into programs similar to those listed below.

- i) The AOC/AIS/National Squad program,
- ii) The National Junior Program,
- iii) The US West Coast developmental tours,
- iv) The 4-Tiered squad system where the AOC funded the Olympic Squad, ie, those whose results made the World Top 16 list, the AIS funded athletes whose performances made the World Top 50 list and the State Institutes assisted athletes whose performances were in basically the top 100 in the world while the AA National Junior program acted as the feeder system for immediate entry into any of these squads according to results and
- v) The high performance coaching support program that was associated with the 4-Tier program which rewarded, in a small way, the coaches who were producing the athletes.

The success of these programs can be confirmed by studying the list of names below.

Athletes who emerged between 1985 and 1992

Sprints:	Kathy Freeman, Kerry Johnson, Melinda Gainsford, Sharon Stewart, Michelle Lock, Dean Capobianco, Damien Marsh, Mark Garner.
Distances:	Sharon Stewart, Michelle Baumgartner, Wendy Old, Gail Luke, Krishna Wood, Sarah Collins, Jenny Lund, Susie Power, Simon Doyle, Shaun Creighton.
Hurdles:	Jenny Laurendat., Lyn Foreman, Kyle Vander-Kuyp, John Caliguri, Rohan Robinson, Simon Hollingsworth.
Jumps:	Vanessa Ward, Gai Kapernick, Alison Inverarity, Leanne Wickham, Tim Forsyth, Ian Hay, Andrew Murphy, Simon Arkell.
Throws:	Danielle Costian, Lisa-Marie Visaniari, Debbie Sosimenko, John Minns, Craig Watson, Vlad Slavnic, Sean Carlin, Andrew Curry.
Multi-Events:	Sharon Jaklofsky, Kylie Coombe, Jocelyn Millar-Cubitt, Dean Smith, Brendan Tennant
Walkers:	Kerry Saxby, Jane Saville, Lorraine Jachna, Gabrielle, Blythe, Andrew Jackno, Paul Copeland, Dario Wojic.

It provides an opportunity for the new CEO and the Board to retreat from a strategy post Rick Pannel strategy of disengaging from the Australian Track and Field Coaches' Association (ATFCA), of marginalizing the National Event coaches and others with proven records in order to gain greater control over the athletes by allowing the State Institutes of Sport to get beyond a support role and entrusting them with high performance and move towards a program that re-engages coaching, seeks to utilise the National Event coaches and the National Coaching Consultants and, most importantly, demands a lot more in the way of 'high performance' from the State IS coaches and managers.

It provides the opportunity for AA to revisit documents such as the "Landy Report", a major developmental paper was produced. In conjunction with its extension document "Athletics Towards 2000" it contained, and still contains, everything AA needs to stimulate athletics at all levels.

It provides an opportunity to review the performance of the head office where, despite an expedient increase from the pre-1990 office of five full time staff and two part time people with invaluable international skills, there is very little to show for all the money spent as regards:

- i) High performance results,
- ii) Genuine junior development,
- iii) Club viability in the face of the sports inability to appeal to the young,
- iv) Total numbers within the all important 17 to 33 year competition age bracket,
- v) Total numbers registered with State associations,
- vi) Meaningful non-competitive developmental and technical contact within schools,
- vii) Raising the profile of officiating in order to attract people to act in that capacity.
- viii) Evaluating the way an interstate competition could be revived and integrated into the Grand Prix program.
- ix) Simplifying the selection policies for the major teams to ensure the athletes who are selected are fresh enough to compete at their best in the competition.
- x) Re-affirming the importance to AA of the club athletes who want to enjoy their training sessions at the club or the 13 to 18 year olds who dream of being the next Craig Mottram or Benita Johnson and
- xi) Promoting the State Associations and the clubs ahead of the Institutes

The State Sports Institutions

In my opinion these bodies are the major reason for Australia's decline. From around 1992 AA assigned 'high performance' to the IS program – a responsibility they gladly accepted. Having done so done it is now appropriate for AA to examine the results in terms of producing world class Middle/Long Distance runners. Consider the following:

- i) The first State Institute came on-line in 1983 and the last in 1996.
- ii) Collectively they have totalled 89 years of existence.
- iii) Since the 1980 Australia has produced nine athletes who have managed a world top 10 ranking – Peter Bourke, Sean Creighton, Margaret Crowley, Robert De Castella, Simon Doyle, Mike Hilliardt, Lisa Ondieki, Steve Moneghetti and Benita Johnson.
- iv) Of these Franz Stampf coached Peter Bourke. Victorian Steve Moneghetti developed from a Ballarat schoolboy to an elite athlete before the Victorian Institute of Sport was established. Nick Bideau coaches Australia's latest member, Benita Johnson. Pat Clohessy, Norm Osborne and Dick Telford coached (sometimes in conjunction with a 'home' coached) the remaining six.
- v) This means the State IS 'high performance' middle/long distance programs have not produced even one M/LD runner capable of attaining a world Top 10 ranking. It also means that when athletes accept scholarships they enter a system that will fail them! Further if the athletes were enticed away from their coaches it may also mean a disillusioned coach moving away from the sport and out of the recruitment and development loop.

When this point, or any similar point, is raised it is deflected by a reference to the Institute's role to 'support' the athlete. However most Institute scholarships are tied to with a long list of conditions that go well beyond 'support', most list athletes on their websites in a way that indicates the Institute is responsible for the athlete's performances and some even reinforce this impression

by not listing the name of the athlete's coach! Claiming an athlete's performances within a week or a month of an athlete changing States/Institutes is not uncommon either!

It is interesting that Greg Chappell has picked up on something similar to this in cricket when he says in an interview with Ron Reed headed "A lot of the (Coaching) stuff is dangerous" (Herald Sun 25/11/2004) that the 'main features of our system are the clubs and first class cricket' and that in analysing the strength of Australian cricket it is the system that is 'the 98 percenter' and the (cricket) 'Academy is a 2 percenter'.

Maybe AA could consider reviving an AIS operating a program similar to the one Pat Clohessy ran where athletes could either choose to domicile at the AIS or stay at home and still receive assistance – in today's environment from a joint program involving the AIS and the athlete's SIS. One only has to look at the athletes who performed well in that era to see it beats the current method hands down. They include all the people mentioned in Table 2 plus many others such as Lisa Ondieki, Marie McDonough, Jackie Perkins, Rob De Castella, Mike Hilliardt, Rod Higgins, Steve Moneghetti and Pat Scammell to name a few!

Acting in this manner would be a good start to implementing recommendations 49 to 55 of the Elliott Report!

Coaching

This is a complex area. Australia has proven coaches and most of the coaches responsibly for producing the above mentioned athletes are still involved in the sport. However both ATFCA and the majority of these coaches have been marginalised in favour of what Greg Chappell called the 'classroom' approach favoured by the current academic approach.

However with the publication of the Elliott Report and its clear direction to AA that coaching must be given a much higher priority (See #Issue 4 of the report) and that it must assume control of high performance by giving primacy to the AIS and reassigning the SIS's to a support role things may change for the better. All the points made are valid and Australian athletics will be much better positioned if they are implemented.

On the other hand the Australian Track & Field Coaches' Association accreditation system has not moved with the times. Originally the majority of coaches accepted onto these courses were coaches with proven records and the courses served as both a 'refresher' and, for those who knew the 'How' it was an introduction of the 'Why' of coaching. These coaches understood technique, they had taken kids from school or club level to elite performance, they knew the world and Australian records, had a sound knowledge of the methods used by history's most successful coaches and the training done by the former and current great athletes and they were well aware that 'recent' and 'new' ideas do not necessarily mean 'better'!

Since the mid 1980's the profile of the majority of middle & long distance coaches accepted onto Level 2 courses has gradually changed but the approach to validating a Level 2 coach has not. These newer inductees generally had never produced an elite athlete and some had never even produced a low level international athlete. Thus, while any level 1 coach should be given the opportunity to enter Level 2 consideration must be given to raising the pass mark of the event specific paper and to delaying awarding the full qualification until the applicant can demonstrate coaching prowess. This may seem harsh but the sport has an obligation to ensure that an athlete approaching a Level 2 coach can be confident the coach knows more than 50% of what is needed and has a proven ability to coach.

'Coaching', both from an individual and an ATFCA perspective, cannot be orientated to 'producing coaches'. It must be founded on a philosophy something like the Hippocratic ideal. An athlete has only one career and any coach who takes charge of that athlete's career has an absolute obligation to ensure the athlete optimises their talent. The concept that a coach will 'develop' is not acceptable if during that 'developmental' period he or she cannot optimise an athlete's only opportunity to excel. It should never be forgotten that a coach will get many opportunities to produce an elite athlete but an athlete has only one opportunity to become elite. Track & Field needs a much stronger, more systematic mentoring system to ensure that a novice coach does not destroy an athlete's dreams any more than, say, a medical intern can operate without supervision.

4. Australian Coaches

Like the Africans of today, a big factor in the success of past Australian athletes was self-belief. It was tough to win all the way from interclub to the National Championships. World ranked athletes or those destined to be world ranked went head to head most Saturdays. These athletes were the role models for the next generation. Club rivalry was fierce. Competing in two or three events at inter-club was normal. The spirit this engendered led to the belief the toughest competition was not in Europe or America but in Melbourne or Sydney.

All that has now changed and, as mentioned, it is interesting Greg Chappell feels the same way about cricket when he says 'peer driven development' is being replaced 'by an academic approach' which is taking the game from a natural environment 'into the classroom', something he does not think 'works very well' because it's not 'a great environment (in which) to learn'.

This spirit has to be re-kindled and it must start with the coaches, because few kids today are fortunate enough to have successful athletes as role models. A coach who has not considered what the world records are now and where the world standards will be when a athlete matures or a coach who is unable to envisage the amount of work it takes to reach an elite level will never produce an elite athlete regardless of how many genuinely talented athletes he/she coaches.

Statements like “Australians cannot train the way the African do” are a) simplistic because there is no standard ‘Kenyan way’ or ‘Ethiopian way’ let alone and ‘African way’ and b) few, if any, of the people who make these comments know the similarities and differences in what the Algerians, Ethiopians, Kenyans and Moroccans are doing anyway. In reality comments like this are often an attempt to divert attention from the fact the coach does not know how to develop programs of a high enough quality to develop their athletes to be able to “train the way the Africans do”. As mentioned in Part 1 of this document a check of the most recent Olympic or World championships shows athletes of European background can be successful and Australia’s Craig Mottram and Benita Johnson have joined that group of athletes who can run with the best from Africa or anywhere else.

In summary coaching in Australian need to get past things like the non-productive quality versus quantity discussion and the equally non-productive endurance versus speed discussion because the best athletes are integrating both quality and quantity into their programs and because it should be obvious that endurance without speed is as useless as speed without endurance. Examples. 1) In the base period Kenyan runners from 800m to 10,000m all train together and virtually any male 800m runner has the stamina to run a sub 7 minute 50 second 3000m. 2) Moses Kiptanui, the 3000m steeplechaser of the 20th century, could run in the 48’s for 400m from a ‘jog in’ start on a dirt track in Eldoret.

Re-kindling the spirit also means confronting the fact that despite (or because of) the current coaching environment almost all the talented Australian juniors found over the last 15 years have not progressed into elite senior ranks. A quick look at the results at the World Junior Championships over the past 15 years shows the talent is there so what happens after these athletes turn 20 years of age?

Finally it is about getting past focussing more on injury prevention than performance enhancement. Having slow uninjured under-performing athletes still means having slow under-performing athletes! This means coaches have to have the knowledge to ‘manage volume’ and if they cannot they should not lead the athlete astray by suggesting volume is not integral to success.

The Athletes

As I mentioned earlier the athletes of 30 to 40 years ago developed naturally, often with coaches who practised what they preached. Running was a part of nearly every activity and kids, like the Africans today, had conditioned themselves with thousands of kilometres, lots of speed-work playing various games and a large amount of daily strength work. Sport was learnt intrinsically by seeing others were better, observing them and working out how to beat them. Often by the time a coach entered the picture the athlete was a dedicated competitor.

Kids today do none of this. Many exhibit great talent but do not want to be M/LD runners – at least not initially. Many others may have talent and ambition but are physically under-developed. Still others are fringe-talented but highly ambitious. This all means that before they can be ‘coached’ it has to be established if they are motivated by the idea of M/LD running and they have to be conditioned to the level yesteryears athletes had reached by the time they met a coach.

On the other hand it has to be appreciated there are always far more athletes who wish to be the best but than there are athletes who are willing to do whatever it takes to get there. As Percy Cerutti said many years ago there are the ‘wishers’ and the ‘willers’. Indeed, as can be seen in Australia today, some talented ‘wishers’ may reach a quite high levels however they will never be truly competitive with the best in the world. Unfortunately current AA/SIS policy forgets ‘talent’ is simply a gift from one’s forebears, focuses far too much on teenage performance, continues to support athletes who are clearly not working hard enough to maximise their talent – all the while failing to distinguish between the ‘wishers’ and the ‘willers’ or understanding the wisdom of encouraging the slightly less talented but highly motivated kids. Programs that focussed on the motivated kids would force the more talented but less motivated ones to ‘get going’ or ‘get out’ because as every successful coach knows a ‘wisher’ rarely changes into a ‘willer’.

Over the last 10 to 15 years an enormous amount of middle/long distance talent has passed through the Australian system, totally invisible to the world because either none of these athletes wanted to leave their mark and/or because coaching could not optimise their talent. Equally there are a large number of middle/long distance runners currently in the system who have the talent to succeed at the highest level but they do not want to, or do not know how to, focus totally on the single objective on being the very best they could be.

Craig Mottram and Benita Johnson have proven athletes can compete with the world. Australia has male athletes running right now who are capable of a sub 2:06 hour marathon, sub 13:00/5000m, a sub 3:30/1500m and a sub 1:42/800m. Australia also has female athletes capable of sub 1:56/800m, sub 4:00/1500m and a sub 15:00/5000m. The reason these times are not being run is 1) inappropriate event selection and, as Arthur Lydiard pointed out 45 years ago to the world and Peter Snell more recently to American coaches, 2) a lack of stamina.

Conclusion

The results at the World junior Championships over the last 15 years show Australia has middle distance talent, which means long distance potential also exists. Its time to find out why this talent has not matured at senior level by examining the attitudes of the athletes, the training programs applied and the support environment offered. Its time those athletes who know what level of training their competitors are doing started emulating them. Its time the professionals in the paid administrative/coaching positions stopped expecting the amateurs to do their jobs. Its time the high performance managers realised coaches do not have time to be ‘getting together’ or developing ‘coaching cooperatives’ that, theoretically, may benefit them and, by extension, the national program. Its time ATFCA took a much stricter position as regards granting coaching qualifications. Its time the SIS’s left

middle/long distance coaching to coaches and financially supported individual athletes deemed worthy. Its time AA itself accepted that the 'buck' stops with the administration. It's time for the sport to decide if it is a 'willer' or a 'wisher'.