

Westfields Athletics Club

Westfields Athletics Club: a brief history

The Westfields Athletics Club was established in 1991. It came about as a necessity when Westfields Sports High School began producing its own athletes and many of those athletes had to find a club to join so they could compete in the Saturday competitions and State Championships etc. Initially these athletes would join the Randwick Botany club because they were using their home ground Hensley Athletics Field at Pagewood which was the only readily available synthetic track in Sydney. It was the suggestion of a Westfields student Dragan Radovac that started the 'ball rolling'. Even though it was inevitably going to happen, it was Dragan's idea that initiated the process. Dan Suchy applied to Athletics NSW to form a senior club in late 1990. Within a few weeks there were concerns expressed by nearby Senior Clubs and ANSW requested justification for the need for another club in the area. It was pointed out that our new club would simply be providing an opportunity for novices at the school who were training in the sport to have a club to join. There were at the time 5 senior clubs within 10 kilometres of the school. Three of those clubs had 10 or fewer senior athletes registered with them, even though in earlier years most had healthy numbers. Athletics NSW was satisfied with our response that Westfields would not attract athletes from those other clubs and early in 1991 Westfields Athletics Club was officially opened. It is interesting to note that even though no athletes from those local clubs transferred to Westfields, nevertheless within two years 2 of the 5 local senior clubs folded.



Paul Stckler and John Thornell (2001)

In celebration of our 20th Birthday here are some historical facts:

Did you know?

First National Title

The first National title won by a Westfields student was Scott Winters who won the 1984 Australian Juvenile (U16) 100m hurdles (91cm) in a new Australian record time of 13.76 seconds. Scott was discovered when students were asked to 'try' the hurdles during a lunch time in 1981 and he was invited to come back after school and start training. He went on to win 6 straight NSW CHS titles. When he competed at the 1984 U16 Nationals he was representing the Randwick Botany club because WAC had not yet been formed. Interestingly it took 18 months before his National record was recognised. Even though it was performed in a National final, electronically timed and wind (+1.1) the Queensland Athletics association that hosted the 1984 Australian Underage Championships were so understaffed they claimed they didn't have time to complete the necessary documentation to Athletics Australia. Numerous letters were written to A.A.'s president at the time Graeme Briggs (since passed away – the annual Briggs Classic bares his name). He was very supportive and eventually had the Queensland official stood down from the position of records officer. After 18 months Scott was finally sent his certificate and the record appeared in the Almanac for just one year – it would be broken several times by Matt Beckingham (13.66, 13.33 then 13.27) of ACT who went onto represent Australia at the 2000 Olympics. Because of the delay in issuing Scott's record, the rules were changed and athletes became obliged to apply for their own records. You can still find the application today on the AA website. AA also introduced a new rule that "records set at National titles become automatic". Accordingly Matt's 13.66 wiped Scott's name out of the records within minutes of crossing the finish line.

The only other Westfields student to win a National title prior to WAC's commencement was David Lavender who won the Australian Sub Junior (U18) 3000m back in 1989. Dragon Radovac won Bronze medals in the Australian Sub Junior (U16) Multi events and Javelin back in 1990. Amanda Dennis also won the Bronze medal in the U15 90m hurdles at the 1983 Australian All Schools.

First National Open Champion

WAC's first National Open Champions were: (female) Dani Samuels in 2005 shot put and discus, and (male) Fabrice Lapierre 2006 long jump

WAC's first International athletes (represent Australia) were (male) Willy Wicks 1998 World Junior Championships 110m hurdles, [non-IAAF Greg Newton 1992 World Schools Games 110m hurdles], (female) Dani Samuels 2003 World Youth Championships discus.

All State Long Jump records

All male long jump records in NSW are held by WAC athletes: NSW U16 – John Thornell (7.06m), NSW U18 – John Thornell (7.78m), NSW U20 – John Thornell (7.99m), NSW Open – Fabrice Lapierre (8.35m). Fred O'Connor was the current coach of John Thornell for all of those records and of course was Fabrice Lapierre's coach right up to his World Junior Silver medal in 2002. Fred is one of Australia's leading long jump coaches having produced a Silver medal at the 2002 World Juniors (Fabrice), a Bronze medal at the 2004 World Juniors (John Thornell), 7th place at the 2004 World Juniors (Naomi Bligh) and a 5th place at the 2006 Commonwealth Games (John Thornell). Fred also coached brothers Dale Jenner and Kurt Jenner to 4th place each at the 2005 and 2009 World Schools Games.

While we are on the World Schools Games; it was most pleasing to note that after decades of controversy over whether athletes should attend the World Schools Games, the IAAF in 2009 gave the World School Games held in Qatar IAAF permit status.

6 out of 6 NSW CHS Titles

Only three Westfields athletes have ever won 6 out of 6 NSW CHS Gold medals in the same event from year 7 to year 12. They are Scott Winters sprint hurdles 1981-1986, Paul Stickler sprint hurdles 1998-2003 and Christie Chamberlain in shot put 2001-2006

Miss Bligh

Westfields former staff member Naomi Bligh jumped the 'B' qualifier for the 2006 Commonwealth Games in the long jump. She recorded a legal 6.44 metres in her build up to the 2004 World Juniors. Naomi became ill for the WJ final in Italy and only managed to finish in 7th place. She was capable of winning on the day when one of her foul jumps was further than the winning leap. It could have been a male-female double for WAC on the medal podium.

Fouracre genes

Junior National 200m & 400m hurdles champion Jack Fouracre has hurdling in his genes. Father David Fouracre won the NSWCHS 17+ 110m hurdles and set the State record at 14.4 seconds (99 cm) more than 20 years ago. Because the hurdles were higher than they are now, the record still exists.

The 2000 Australian All Schools held in Adelaide was Westfields Sports most successful ever. Our team of 40 athletes won 29 medals. It was also the National debut for John Thornell and Dani Samuels

National Knockout success

Westfields is the only school to compete at every National Schools Knockout since the first was held in 1993 in Canberra. In the 18 year history of the tournament Westfields has never failed to come home with team medals. Unfortunately the National knockout underwent major changes in 2010 and Westfields level of participation has been accordingly reduced.

10 second club

The first Westfields male sprinter to join the 10 second club in the 100 metres was 17 year old Justin Hardman in 1993 with 10.92. Since then we have Fabrice Lapierre (19) 10.56, Rob Marks 10.59, John Thornell (19) 10.64,



Fabrice at the 2006 Comm. Games



Joven Clarke (15) 10.80, Hayden Kovacic (20) 10.80, Daniel Small (20) 10.89, Ben Southwell (20) 10.91, Paul Stickler (19) 10.96, Kyle Alexis (16) 10.97, Nathan McRae (17) 10.97. The first and only Westfields female sprinter to join the 11 second club in the 100 metres is Hayley Cameron (now Butler) with 11.67. Hayley is WAC's greatest ever female 'track' athlete with National open medals (Bronze 2005, Silver 2006, Bronze 2007, Gold 2010) in 100m hurdles and Bronze 2012 in 100m. Hayley missed Commonwealth Games selection in 2006 by less than one tenth of a second. However in 2010 she became automatically selected with an 'A' qualifying win at the Australian Open (13.25 the number 8 All-time Australian).

Best all round performance

The best all round performance ever by a Westfields student at a single meet would most likely go to Amanda Dennis in 1986 at the SSW Regional Championships. She qualified to compete at NSWCHS in 9 events – 100m, 200m, 400m, 100m hurdles, long jump, high jump, shot put, discus and javelin (8 of which she won at Region). She had retired from athletics the year before, but as a favour she competed at Region on the understanding she didn't have to go to State that year and it became her last ever competition. In the history of NSWCHS surely no athlete has ever competed in 9 separate events in the one year? In her earlier years she had won NSW CHS medals in hurdles, high jump, long jump, javelin and National medals in hurdles. Retiring at the age of 16 she was nationally ranked in 5 of the 7 heptathlon disciplines, but never contested the multiple events.

Mark Dickson's wrist injuries

Australian Open hammer Champion Mark Dickson has struggled to make the top. In his teens at Westfields Sports he broke the same wrist three times in the same place on three separate occasions, although not while throwing the hammer. All three times came from accidental falls. Of all the throwing disciplines, the one which places the most stress on the wrist is the hammer throw. And yet this never stopped Mark from continuing in the sport. He joined Sutherland Athletics Club after graduating from Westfields, then returned to WAC several years later. In the last three seasons he has won Silver at the Brazilian Open, and Gold, Silver and Bronze at the Australian Opens. Mark and Fabrice are the only WAC males ever to win Australian Open titles.

Our most experienced Athlete

WAC's most experienced athlete is Karyne di Marco. She has medalled at 13 Australian Open Championships dating back to 1997. She represented Australia at the 2000 Olympics and at Commonwealth Games finished 4th, Bronze and 4th in 1998, 2002 and 2006 respectively. She has been selected for yet another Commonwealth Games in 2010- her fourth games



Karyne di Marco

- 1997 Australian Open** (Melbourne) – Bronze medal hammer throw (57.96m)
- 1998 Australian Open** (Sydney) – Bronze medal hammer throw (60.69m)
- 1999 Australian Open** (Sydney) – Silver medal hammer throw (62.59m)
- 2000 Australian Open** (Sydney) – Bronze medal hammer throw (61.43m)
- 2001 Australian Open** (Sydney) – Silver medal hammer throw (61.00m)
- 2002 Australian Open** (Brisbane) – Bronze medal hammer throw (65.71m)
- 2003 Australian Open** (Brisbane) – Withdrew.
- 2004 Australian Open** (Brisbane) – Silver medal hammer throw (65.17m)
- 2005 Australian Open** (Sydney) – Silver medal hammer throw (64.35m)
- 2006 Australian Open** (Sydney) – Silver medal hammer (64.86m)
- 2007 Australian Open** (Brisbane) – Gold medal hammer throw (61.53m)
- 2008 Australian Open** (Brisbane) – Silver medal hammer throw (60.08m)
- 2009 Australian Open** (Brisbane) – Silver medal hammer throw (61.70m)
- 2010 Australian Open** (Perth) – Bronze medal hammer throw 63.13

Royalty visits Westfields

There have been many famous athletes visit Westfields, but probably none so famous as Dame Mary Peters. In 1972 at the Munich Olympics the favourite to win the Pentathlon (now the Heptathlon) was the local German athlete Heide Rosendahl. It looked to all that she was in fact going to deliver a victory for the host city until Mary Peters competing for Britain ran a magnificent final event (200m) and scored enough points to take the gold by the closest of margins. Dame Mary lives in Belfast Northern Ireland and 1972 was indeed a time of violence. While Palestinian Terrorists were assassinating Jewish athletes in the athlete



Dame Mary Peters with Dan Suchy

village at the Munich Olympics, the violence between British troops and the IRA was at its worst in Belfast. Amongst all this Ireland's favourite athlete became the 1972 Olympic Champion. It was such an important win for the people of Northern Ireland that according to news reports at the time, the shooting in the streets of Belfast actually subsided for two weeks while the Irish celebrated the victory of their favourite daughter.

Amongst many honours awarded to Mary Peters, the Queen made her a Dame in 2000 and Northern Ireland's premier athletics track was named after her.

In 2008, the switchboard at Westfields Sports received a call asking could a gentleman please meet with the Principal and do a tour of the school. Initially he was politely declined due to the short notice of the request. He persisted and the Principal agreed to give him 30 minutes. With that the gentleman announced he was the brother of Dame Mary Peters and that he was bringing her to see the school. She was visiting Australia and particularly wanted to see the Sports School she had heard so much about. Back in Ireland, one of her local Catholic schools had been given a small Sport grant and asked her to give advice on how they should use the money. She was aware of the success of Westfields Sports and knew it was achieving results on a shoe-string budget.

So with one days notice we rolled out the red carpet and gave Dame Mary the 'Royal Tour'. Jokingly, it was the closest thing to Royalty that Westfields had ever hosted so it ended up being a 'ROYAL TOUR!' Dame Mary was just fantastic. She was gracious and humble and had time for every student that was lucky enough to meet her. She gave them valuable competitive advise; and all with those famous 'smiling Irish eyes'. Ironically, Australia's greatest heptathlete Glynus Nunn (1980 Olympic Gold Medallist) was a good friend of Mary. Whilst I was escorting Mary around the school my phone rang and it was Glynus. She was asking me about coaching issues when I said "guess who is standing right next to me?" When Glynus realised who it was she was extatic and they arranged a meeting before Mary returned home. For me it was a special moment: I had the 1980 Olympic Champion in my right hand and my other arm around the 1972 Olympic Champion.

Also on the list of famous athletes visiting Westfields are:

Tom Petranoff (USA) – World Record holder for Javelin 99.72 metres set in 1983. He visited Westfields in the late 90's and held a Javelin clinic for our students. He also introduced us to his famous 'turbo javelin' which is a plastic arrow type flying implement about half a metre long used for training. Tom held the record until 1984 when Uwe Hohn of East Germany threw 104.80 metres. Uwe competed in Canberra at the 1985 World Cup. I was there to witness one of his javelins slide across the 200m starting line thrown from the far end of the field. That was the last time that particular specification implement was ever used in competition.



Tom Petranoff

The IAAF had the choice of moving the javelin throw out of the stadium onto a back field or modifying the implement. They chose to modify the implement by adjusting the centre of mass forward. This made the Javelin tilt down earlier in its flight path and fall about 20m shorter than the original implement. The change brought the next World record back to 85.75 (1986) but the problem we now face is it has crept back up to 98.48m in 1996 by Jan Zelezny of CZE, and if it improves again the Javelin may receive another face-lift

Lisa Marie Vizianari (AUS) – 1998 Commonwealth Games Silver medallist in Discus. Lisa visited Westfields just after her Comm. Games success and gave our athletes some throwing tips. Interestingly, only one Australian remains in front of our own Dani Samuels (66.81m) on the All time Australian rankings; Daniela Costian (68.72m) with Lisa-Marie Vizianari on 65.86.

Jane Flemming (AUS) – 1990 Commonwealth Games Champion heptathlon. Jane visited in 2008 to present to Westfields the Balmoral Burn trophy.

Melinda Gainsford (AUS) – 1995 World Indoor Champion 200m and current holder of the Australian Open 100m (11.12) and 200m (22.23) records. Melinda had visited Westfields on several occasions to talk to our sprint squad back in the early 90's when Westfields sprints coach was at the time Jackie Byrnes (Melinda's coach). However it was a special evening when in 2002 she was special guest at our WAC Presentation Night. She presented John Thornell with the inaugural Adhemar Ferreira da Silva Scholarship in front of a star studded audience which included Alan Jones, Greg Hartley, Steve Mortimer and Terry Lamb

Jai Taurima (AUS) – 2000 Olympic Silver medallist long jump (8.49m). Jai was special guest at the WAC Presentation Night in 2001. Always the 'larrikin' in his speech the first thing he said was " my brother dared me for a schooner to swear in front of you all ... so here I go poo, bum, brown"

Peter Burge (AUS) – 1998 Commonwealth Games long jump champion (8.30m). Peter was guest presenter at the 2000 WAC Presentation night.

Kyle Vanderkype (AUS) – 10 x Australian Open Titles in 110m hurdles from 1991 to 2006 and still holds the Australian record at 13.27. At the 1999 WAC Presentation night Kyle preferred to have a question-answer type speech. The question I asked him was did he remember his first ever National Championships. He replied “yes I remember it well ... it was the 1987 Australian All Schools in Brisbane. I was competing against my main rival a fellow Aboriginal athlete by the name of Michael Towns and I just beat him to the finish line”. I asked him had he ever seen video of the race? He said “to my knowledge no-one taped it”. To that I replied “well we have a surprise for you Kyle, I had an athlete running that day so just turn around and watch the big screen”. He was absolutely stunned and at first couldn’t pick which one was he on the starting blocks. Then he said “yeah there I am” as he watched his first ever Australian title for the first time and sharing the moment with a very appreciative audience.