



Athletics: *Athletics Australia*

*'For as long as sport has been a part of Australian culture, athletics has been a significant part of sport.'*¹

Athletics is sport stripped back to its barest essentials; to run, walk, jump or throw are basic human activities. To run the fastest, jump the highest or throw farthest is both sport and athletics at its most pure.²

From inscriptions found in Cyprus about athletic games dating back to the second Century B.C. to the original event at the first Olympic Games back in 776 BC – where the only event held was the stadium-length foot race³ – athletics is a sport that spans time and civilisations.⁴

In the modern era, the world governing body for the sport of athletics – the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) – was founded in 1912 in Stockholm by representatives from 17 national athletics federations.⁵

Athletics has now evolved to include a wide range of athletic challenges for men and women of all ages, including track and field events, road running races, cross country races, mountain running and race walking events.⁶

Athletics in Australia

Evidence shows Australia's Indigenous people engaged in athletics events based around survival skills, such as spear and boomerang throwing, mock fights, a form of soccer and hockey and tree climbing.⁷

However, the earliest record of formal athletics competition in Australia dates from 1810 in Sydney, when Dicky Dowling won a sprint race over 50 yards. Professional athletics grew considerably around this time, and stories of huge crowds placing enormous bets on the success of athletes paint a picture of the sport in these early days.⁸

The first amateur athletics club in Australia was formed in Adelaide in 1867. As more and more athletics clubs began to be established there became need for a governing body. This was first recognised in New South Wales in 1887 when the Amateur Athletics Association of New South Wales was formed to take the management of amateur athletic sports in the colony. Other states followed suit.

In 1897, the Australasian Athletic Union was established to coordinate the activities of the states. It encompassed New Zealand and catered only for male athletes. New Zealand separated in 1928 and the name changed to the Amateur Athletic Union of Australia. In 1932, the Australian Women's Amateur Union was formed.

In 1977, the men's and women's unions amalgamated to form a united body. The organisation changed its name to Athletics Australia in 1989.⁹

Over the past 100 years Australia has produced many athletics champions. At the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896, Australia's Edwin Flack won the 800m and 1500m – Australia's first Olympic gold medals.¹⁰

Since then the sport has provided many household names including: Herb Elliott, Betty Cuthbert, Shirley Strickland, Marjorie Jackson, Ron Clarke, John Landy, Raylene Boyle, Robert de Castella and Cathy Freeman.

Athletics Australia

As the Australian member of the International Association of Athletics Federations, Athletics Australia is responsible for fostering the development of athletics in Australia and for ensuring that the rules and regulations of the IAAF are applied to sanctioned athletics events in Australia.

Athletics Australia is responsible for national age events such as: the Australian Open and Under 20 Track and Field Championships; the Australian All Schools (under 14, under 16, under 18 and under 20) Track and Field Championships; the Australian Youth (under 16 and under 18) Track and Field Championships; the National Schools Knockout competition; Australian Clubs Championships; and the Australian Cross Country Championships.

Athletics Australia is also responsible for the elite Telstra A Series meets, which are held at capital cities around the country in conjunction with the particular state or territory association. These meets see the cream of Australia's athletes compete against a number of international stars and has helped lift the profile of track and field events in this country.

Athletics in Australia is delivered through multiple national and state associations, many with overlapping roles and interdependence. Each state and territory athletics association are responsible for the conduct and development of athletics in their particular locality, however there are also regional associations who look after the sport in their specific area.

Historically athletics in Australia has relied on a club system to support and develop athletes from secondary school ages upwards. Primary school age children are supported in their development through Australian Little Athletics (ALA) and its network of local centres. There are separate organisations for walks clubs, mountain running, schools sports and coaches.¹¹

In broad terms the track and field season runs from October to March/April and the cross country and road season from April/May to September. While some fun runs and marathons are conducted outside this latter period, organised weekly competition in road and cross country tends to be limited to the winter months.

Who participates in athletics?

The Little Athletics movement in Australia claims a national membership of over 95,000 children. In contrast, Athletics Australia's national registration is approximately 16,000, down from its peak of 25,000 in the late 1970s.¹²

There appears to be some problems, however, with recruitment and retention of participants, with most member associations reporting that there is significant turnover in those registered from year to year.

Athletics Australia does not produce any census or data on membership or participation. Therefore there are no figures on the number of Indigenous people or those from CALD backgrounds taking part in structured athletics competition.

Developing the sport

In January 2005, Athletics Australia released its corporate vision, titled '*Planning for the Future – Strategic Plan (2005–2008)*', which is based on five key themes: High Performance, Development, Brand, Governance and Structure, and Financial Stability.

When it comes to development, there have been significant changes over the last few years to Athletics Australia's projects, priorities and funding levels. The organisation has refocused its development objectives in line with its National Development Program to target, in particular, schools and secondary school age athletes and to develop a productive and lasting Indigenous program.

Schools and junior development programs

The STAR program

Launched in November 2004, the STAR resource was produced in conjunction with some of the country's best coaches and athletes and is aimed at secondary school teachers who may have never taught athletics before or who want a greater understanding of the sport.

The electronic resource, which was sent to every secondary school in Australia, covers all disciplines of athletics, including less popular events such as pole vault, hammer throw and walks. Each event is covered in detail with sequential photographs of event drills, sample training programs, lesson plans and a self assessment certificate allowing coaches and students to chart their progress.¹³

Athletics Australia has recently updated the original STAR program to incorporate it into the STAR Award format. This is a comprehensive athletics program designed to teach everything required to know about grading, teaching and scoring the events involved in athletics, and how to set up and stage a school athletics carnival.

The STAR Award program is an integral part of the Athletics Australia development pathway, which also includes the Schools Knock Out competition.

The Athletics Australia development pathway is linked to their education website which is found at www.athletics.org.au/education. The education website features areas for both primary and secondary students and teachers.¹⁴

Schools Knockout competition

The Schools Knockout competition is the premier secondary schools athletics competition in the country. It provides schools with a track and field competition which promotes team spirit and participation.

The modified team-based competition is open to all Australian schools, with only eight to ten students required to compete in the event.

The competition starts with regional rounds throughout each state and territory, with successful schools progressing to the state final where they have the opportunity of becoming the premier athletic school in their state and representing both their state and school at the national final.¹⁵ 45 schools contested the Athletics Australia Schools Knockout national final in December 2005 at Sydney's Olympic Park.

Indigenous athletes

Indigenous athletes have a long and rich history of involvement in athletics. In fact Bobby McDonald, a professional runner in the late 1890s to early 1900s, is co-credited with inventing the crouch-start which is used by runners to this day.¹⁶

Indigenous runner Bobby Kinnear won the prestigious Stawell Gift in 1883, followed by Tom Dancey in 1910 and Lynch Cooper in 1928. Bundjalung man, Joshua Ross, became only the fourth Indigenous athlete ever to win the event, when he won in 2004. He became only the third person to win a second title when he won the following year.¹⁷

Percy Hobson was the first Indigenous athlete to win a gold medal for Australia at the Commonwealth Games when he won gold in the high jump in 1962. Cathy Freeman was the first Indigenous woman to win a track gold medal for Australia at the Commonwealth Games, in the 4 x 100m relay in Auckland in 1990. She went on to become one of Australia's greatest ever athletes winning World, Commonwealth, and Olympic titles, including her famous 400m victory at the Sydney Olympic Games.

She was made Young Australian of the Year in 1990 and Australian of the Year in 1998 – the first person to receive both awards.

National Indigenous Sport Development Program

Athletics Australia aims to increase Indigenous participation in athletics through its Indigenous Development Program.

One of the objectives of the program is to engage in athlete talent identification and investigate how this talent can be fostered. This may entail encouraging local Indigenous people to become qualified coaches and providing the support mechanisms for this to happen. It might also require discussions with Elders from the local Indigenous community to discuss the best means by which participation in the sport can be achieved.

Athletics Australia conducts education programs in areas where there is a high population of Indigenous people. Community members are encouraged to take part in coach education courses to assist them in running year-round athletic programs which promote healthy lifestyles.

Athletics Australia and the Indigenous Sport Program also supply athletics equipment to Indigenous communities, and encourage training teachers and leaders in the community to motivate kids to keep using the equipment regularly.

They also work with Indigenous students in regional and metropolitan centres to link them with existing clubs and carnivals in the area.¹⁸

Assisting Indigenous athletes

Each year the Indigenous Sport Program awards numerous *Indigenous Sporting Excellence Scholarships* to Indigenous coaches, athletes, and officials. Each scholarship is valued at \$500 and can be spent on anything which will further the recipient's participation in athletics. Athletics Australia allocates its share of scholarships to developing athletes.

In addition, the *Elite Indigenous Travel and Accommodation Assistance Program* provides travel and accommodation assistance to Indigenous athletes competing at a National Championship or representing Australia internationally.

Another scheme called the *Sport Leadership Grants Program for Rural and Remote Women* provides women in country areas with an opportunity to undertake accredited sport leadership training in the areas of coaching, officiating, sports administration and sport management. The program provides successful applicants with a grant of up to \$5,000 for individuals and up to \$10,000 for incorporated organisations. One of the program's specific grant areas is for Indigenous women.¹⁹

The *Accor Indigenous Employment Program* aims to increase Indigenous employment within the hospitality industry by providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with employment and training opportunities at Accor hotels and resorts across Australia. Running since 2000, the program has resulted in the employment of over 140 Indigenous people.²⁰

As part of the partnership, Accor has agreed to provide opportunities for participants in Athletics Australia's Indigenous Development Program to apply for employment within the company. In return, Athletics Australia actively promotes the Accor Indigenous Employment Program as part of its Indigenous development initiatives.

Athletics for the outback

The '*Athletics for the Outback*' program was launched in 2004 by Ambassadors Cathy Freeman and former national and Olympic hurdler Kyle Van der Kuyp.

The program provides education, participation opportunities and equipment to remote areas, and promotes athletics as a viable option for young people to compete and progress to an elite level.

The program pays particular attention to Indigenous athletes, but it is not its only purpose. Cultural awareness and career education options are discussed with students, as well as encouraging them to attend school and complete their education and aim for a higher level of competition in athletics.²¹

Respect yourself – respect your culture

Athletics Australia and Little Athletics New South Wales recently joined forces to attend the 2006 Croc Fest in Kempsey, New South Wales, for a two-day promotion of athletics.

Croc Fest is a youth program held annually in eight locations in rural and remote Australia. A principal goal of Croc Fest is to motivate and inspire Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people to live healthy lifestyles without tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. The festivals engage young Australians in education, careers, health expos, sporting events and performing and visual arts.

Over 250 students aged from 8–17 years participated in 45-minute sessions of athletics at the Kempsey festival, where they were shown the fundamentals of events such as hurdles, javelin and long jump. Elite Indigenous athletes Kyle Van der Kuyp, Benn Harradine and Robbie Crowther ran the different activities.²²

First inclusive Indigenous track and field camp

Scotts Head in NSW was the venue for the first inclusive Indigenous track and field camp ever held in Australia from 17–20 August 2006. A total of 31 athletes (16 boys and 15 girls) aged between 12–17 years were taken through training sessions with a variety of coaches, including the 2004 Indigenous coach of the year, Jacko Whitby, and Indigenous Commonwealth Games discus finalist, Benn Harradine.

As well as participating in training sessions, the young people also attended education programs on topics such as alcohol, nutrition and athletic pathways. The camp included an athletics competition with non-Indigenous athletes from local clubs in the area. Athletics Australia hopes to hold similar camps in other states to encourage Australia's talented Indigenous youth.²³

Member Protection Policy

In July 2005, Athletics Australia amended its By-Laws and adopted a Member Protection Policy, which aims to ensure that every person involved in the sport is treated with respect and dignity, and is safe and protected from abuse.

The policy reaffirms Athletics Australia's commitment to eliminating discrimination, harassment, child abuse and other forms of inappropriate behaviour from the sport and ensuring that everyone is aware of their legal and ethical rights and responsibilities.²⁴

Codes of Conduct

Athletics Australia's general Code of Conduct affirms the need to 'treat all persons with respect and courtesy and have proper regard for their dignity, rights and obligations'.²⁵

The Athletes Code of Conduct requires all members to 'respect the rights, dignity and worth of fellow athletes, coaches and officials' and 'abide by the rules and respect the decision of the officials, making all appeals through the formal process and respecting the final decision'.²⁶

Anti-Discrimination and Harassment Policy

Athletics Australia recognises that people cannot enjoy themselves, perform to their best, or be effective or fully productive if they are being treated unfairly, discriminated against or harassed because of their sex, marital status, pregnancy, parental status, race, age, disability, homosexuality, sexuality, transgender, religion, political belief and/or industrial activity.²⁷

The organisation aims to provide a sporting environment where all those involved in its activities are treated with dignity and respect, and without harassment or discrimination. As such, they have adopted the ASC's Harassment Free Sport policy.

Under the policy, discrimination is defined as ‘treating or proposing to treat a person less favourably than someone else in certain areas of public life on the basis of an attribute or personal characteristic they have, including race or religious belief/activity’.²⁸

Discrimination is not permitted in the areas of employment (including volunteer and unpaid employment); the provision of goods and services; the selection of any person for competition or a team (domestic or international); the entry of any player or other person to any competition; obtaining or retaining membership of an organisation (including the rights and privileges of membership).²⁹

Harassment is defined as ‘any type of behaviour that the other person does not want and does not return and that is offensive, abusive, belittling or threatening. The behaviour is unwelcome and of a type that a reasonable person would recognise as being unwelcome and likely to cause the recipient to feel offended, humiliated or intimidated’. Unlawful harassment includes ‘targeting a person because of their race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, sexuality or other characteristic’.³⁰

Vilification is described as ‘a person or organisation doing public acts to incite hatred towards, serious contempt for, or severe ridicule of a person or group of persons having any of the attributes or characteristics within the meaning of discrimination. Public acts that may amount to vilification include any form of communication to the public and any conduct observable by the public’.³¹

Complaints

Athletics Australia provides an easy to use, confidential and trustworthy procedure for complaints, based on the principle of natural justice. All complaints are dealt with promptly, seriously, sensitively and confidentially.

A complaint should be reported to a Member Protection Information Officer who is trained to be the first point of contact for a person reporting a complaint. This officer provides confidential information and moral support to the person with the complaint or who is alleging harassment or a breach of their policy. A complaint may be reported as an informal or formal complaint.³²

Endnotes

¹ *Re-creating a culture for athletics in Australia: a report into the high performance, development and governance of athletics in Australia*, Herb Elliott, July 2004.

² <http://www.athletics.org.au/insideaa/history.cfm>.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athletics_%28track_and_field%29.

⁴ <http://www.athletics.org.au/insideaa/history.cfm>.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Association_of_Athletics_Federations.

⁶ <http://www.iaaf.org/theSport/whatisathletics/index.html>.

⁷ <http://www.athletics.org.au/insideaa/history.cfm>.

⁸ <http://www.athletics.org.au/insideaa/history.cfm>.

⁹ <http://www.athletics.org.au/insideaa/aboutaa.cfm>.

¹⁰ <http://www.athletics.org.au/insideaa/history.cfm>.

¹¹ *Re-creating a culture for athletics in Australia: a report into the high performance, development and governance of athletics in Australia*, Herb Elliott, July 2004.

¹² *The State Of Domestic Athletics Competition In Australia: A Report by Brian Roe to Athletics Australia – November 2002*.

¹³ *Athletics Australia 2004–05 Annual Report*.

¹⁴ <http://www.athletics.org.au/education/secondaryteachers/resources/>.

¹⁵ <http://www.athletics.org.au/education/secondaryteachers/schoolsknockout/>.

¹⁶ ‘Joshua’s Gift’ by Jodie Patterson, *The Koori Mail*, 7 May 2003.

¹⁷ ‘Joshua’s Gift’ by Jodie Patterson, *The Koori Mail*, 7 May 2003.

- ¹⁸ <http://www.ausport.gov.au/isp/nisdpath.asp>.
- ¹⁹ <http://www.athletics.org.au/checkthisout/index.cfm?ObjectID=21>.
- ²⁰ <http://www.athletics.org.au/education/secondaryteachers/news/article.cfm?ObjectID=3026>.
- ²¹ <http://www.athletics.org.au/education/secondaryteachers/news/article.cfm?ObjectID=2853>.
- ²² <http://www.athletics.org.au/education/secondaryteachers/news/article.cfm?ObjectID=3025>.
- ²³ <http://www.athletics.org.au/education/secondaryteachers/news/article.cfm?ObjectID=2973>.
- ²⁴ <http://www.athletics.org.au/insideaa/pdfs/member%5Fprotection%2FMember%5FProtection%5FPolicy%2Epdf>.
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- ²⁶ <http://www.athletics.org.au/insideaa/pdfs/member%5Fprotection%2FMPP%5FPartD%5FCodeofConducts%2Epdf>.
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- ³¹ <http://www.athletics.org.au/insideaa/pdfs/member%5Fprotection%2FMember%5FProtection%5FPolicy%>.
- ³² <http://www.athletics.org.au/insideaa/pdfs/member%5Fprotection%2FMember%5FProtection%5FPolicy%2Epdf>.