

History of the NSW All Schools Championships

By David Tarbotton

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In 1936, for the first time a NSW All Schools Championships was on the summer program of the Amateur Athletic Association of NSW. Almost fifty years earlier, in 1887 and 1888 some schools had been part of the Association. Various school groups conducted track and field carnivals for some years.

The Great Public Schools (GPS) athletics carnival was first held in 1892, the Combined Associated Schools (CAS) origins date back to 1929. The first Independent Girls Secondary Schools Athletics (IGSSA) carnival was also held in the 1920s. The Combined High Schools carnival (CHS), initially separated into the girls carnival (GSSSSA) and boys (NSWCHSSA) started as early as 1921.

'30s and the '40s

In the 1930s the Amateur Athletic Association of NSW (AAANSW, later to become Athletics NSW) saw the need for a carnival open to athletes from all school groups, government and independent. At that time AAANSW conducted athletics for men, while the women's athletics was administered by the NSW Women's AAA.

At the last AAANSW Council meeting of the 1935/36 season, a recommendation by the executive for the introduction of a Schoolboy's Championships of NSW was approved.



St Joseph's hurdler Kinnar

The first Annual NSW Schoolboy's Championships was held at the Sydney Cricket Ground on the 26th September 1936. The star of the meet was St Aloysius athlete, D. B. Dunn, who won the U16 100 yards (10.5), 220y (23.4) and long jump (6.51m). Age divisions were U18 to U12 with eight events offered to the U18 athletes. Events were conducted over imperial distances including the 100 yards and mile.

The carnival continued to be conducted on the first Saturday of October. The 1937 to 1941 carnivals were held at the Sydney Sports Ground (SSG) the then current home of track and field in NSW. This would remain the home of women's athletics in NSW for the next 40 years. But the NSW Schoolboy's carnival moved to the Sydney Cricket Ground with the 1942 carnival. The SSG was demolished in 1986 to allow the building of the Sydney Football Stadium which opened in 1988.



View of the former Sydney Sports Ground, as it appeared in 1937. That venue was demolished in 1986 to allow the building of the Sydney Football Stadium which was opened in 1988.

At the 1945 carnival, a future star of NSW sprinting, North Sydney High's John Treloar competed at the carnival, clocking the outstanding times of 9.7 (100y equal to 10.6 for 100m) and 21.7 (220y equivalent to 21.6 for 200m).

By 1946 the competitor numbers had reached impressive totals with 1032 entries from 69 schools. Morris Curotta, Olympic 400m finalist, was beaten in the All Schools 440 yards by Sydney Technical High athlete George Gedge who won the long jump with a leap of 6.80m. Gedge and Curotta both ran in the 1950 Empire Games.

Over the next eight years the carnival was mostly held at the SCG or SSG and even at the Showground in 1950, where current IOC Vice President, Kevin Gosper (Newcastle High) won the 100y, 220y and long jump. But in 1954 there was controversy with the venue selection. The carnival was moved to the then home of men's athletes in NSW, the ES Marks/Sydney Athletics Field at Kensington. The track surface was the superior cinders surface, but some schools who held their carnivals the following week on grass, choose to boycott the carnival, considering they would be muscle sore for their carnivals (GPS, CAS) the next weekend.

'50s, '60s and '70s

By October 1954, the NSW WAAA was conducting Schoolgirl's Championships, held in October at the Sydney Sports Ground. It is unsure if the first carnival was held in 1953 or 1954. An early star was Helen Frith (Lithgow High), who would go on to compete at two Olympic Games and win Commonwealth Games medals. She was also a leading sports administrator with UTS Norths club. Her mother, Ruth, who recently celebrated her 100th birthday, will compete at the Master games.

Over the next 20 years many future Olympians emerged, including: Jenny Lamy (Forest H, sprints), Diane Pease (Belmont H, jumps/hurdles), Alison Ross-Edwards (Wenona, sprints), Cheryl Peasley (Fairfield H, sprints), Angela Cook (MIC Sutherland, distance), Lyn Tillett (Jacenko, Jannali H, sprints/hurdles/jumps) Penny McCullum (Gillies, North Ryde H, sprints/hurdles), Sue Culley (Bulli H, throws), Margaret Sargeant (Malvina H, sprints), Debbie McCawley (Merrylands H, high jump), Maureen Caird (Pendle H hurdles/sprints) and Marilyn Black (Vassella, Fort St H, sprints). Tamsyn Lewis' mum, Carolyn Wright (Newcastle H) a talented high jumper was also prominent.

At the 1956 carnival, the leading schools were the Wollongong Home Science School, who defeated MLC Burwood, the strongest school in this period. At the 1960's boys carnival, lesser known schools competing were: Cleveland St H, Captains Flat, Marist Bros. Bondi Beach and Fort Street H. The leading schools at the 1961 carnival were: Sydney H, Epping H, Manly H, Marist Bros. Mosman Wollongong H and Marcellin College Randwick.

Outstanding athletes at the schoolboy's carnivals included: Dennis Tipping (Lithgow, sprints), Denis Joliffe (Sydney Tech, jumps; a future official at the St George club), Jim Penfold (North Sydney H, shot), John Cann (South Sydney H, sprints/jumps), Peter McInnes (SPS, sprints), Denis Wilson (Canterbury BH, distance; a future IAAF official and world record holder), Paul Bowman (Marcellin College, sprints/jumps/hurdles), Manuel brothers John and Paul (Wyong H, distance), Don Bursill (Scots C, sprints; Commonwealth junior record holder), Jim McCann (St Joseph's C, sprints/hurdles/jumps), David Prince (Barker C, hurdles; AA President) and Ian White (Canterbury H, sprints/jumps; still a leading competition official).

During this period, the range of track and field events for women and hence at schoolgirl competitions, was very limited. For ages 10 to 13 years only the 50 or 75 yards and high jump events were offered. In the high school years, athletes could compete in the 100y, 80 hurdles, relay, high jump, long jump, shot, discus and javelin. While for boy's there were more events on offer, ranging from seven events in the U14 to 13 in the open.

While the schoolgirl's carnival was going strong, the schoolboy's carnival was dropped after the 26th annual carnival was held in 1961. Although the 1961 carnival attracted 661 competitors from 84 schools,

there had been a steady decline in participation since the carnival was moved from the Sydney Cricket Ground to the Sydney Athletics Field in 1954. The decline had mainly been from the CAS and GPS schools. The NSWAAA decided to replace the carnival with a NSW Age Championships for divisions U12 to U16. This carnival was held late each summer.

The age of students at school increased in the mid-60s. The Intermediate Certificate (to year 9) was replaced by the School Certificate (to year 10) in 1965, while the Leaving Certificate (to year 11) was replaced by the HSC in 1967.

NSWAAA continued to conduct Schoolgirls' carnival until 1979.

In 1976, a three state, inaugural 'Australian All Schools Championships' was held in Melbourne. The conduct of this meet and some publicity that NSW did not have a boy's schools championships, forced a major change in NSW who rejuvenated the NSW All Schools Championships, which for men had been abandoned 17 years earlier. The driver behind the carnival was Waverley College's Gary Judd who led a schools committee. The meet also had a sponsor and for the years 1978 to 1980 and was called the Coca Cola Games. The meet was held at Hensley Athletics Field in October. A really talented group of athletes were on show, including:

Steven Box (Waverley College sprints)
Chris Jackson (Coonabraban, horizontal jumps)
Guy Watson (Albury, 400/800m)
Peter Scocco (Liverpool, sprints)
Alan Ozolins (Nowra, 400/800m)
Simon Iliffe (Caringbah, horizontal jumps)

During this period, NSW school girls was also at an all-time high with many good athletes emerging, including:

Debbie Wells (Emmaville, sprints)
Stacey Atterton (St Scholasticas, 400H/400/800m)
Margaret Hamley (Cheltenham H, jumps)
Sue Clarke (St George GH, sprints)
Kim Thorley (Muirfield H, sprints/jumps)
Carolyn Beales (Pennant Hills H, throws)
Diane Holden (Peakhurst H, sprints)
Liz Rose (Kambala, distance)
Maree Holland (Castle Hill H, sprints)
Kerry and Sharon Saxby (Ballina H, distance)

A winner of the discus at the 1979 carnival was Beverly Hills Girls H student, Jacquelin Magnay, who would go on to become a prominent sports journalist with the Sydney Morning Herald.

80s and the early 90s

By 1982, the NSW women's and men's athletics associations had amalgamated and the NSW All Schools continued to be a very key development event for track and field in the state.

John Atterton's company Seiko became a major sponsor which lasted nearly 10 years, with the event becoming known as the Pulsar Quartz Games.



NSW has been a leading race walking state. Future internationals left to right: Cheryl Webb, Jane Saville and Linda Coffee.

The former cinders track, Sydney Athletics Field/ES Marks Field, was reopened as a synthetic track in 1980 and from then into the 1990s the NSW All Schools were held there. Following on from the Seiko Pulsar Quartz sponsorship was the Milk Marketing Board and its product Moove milk. The Games were now known as the Moove Games. Some stars in this era were:

- Suzy Walsham (Ravenswood, distance)
- Rachel Links (Engadine H, hurdles)
- Natalie and Jane Saville (Randwick GH, walks)
- Cheryl Webb (Cambridge Park H, walks)
- Nicole Boegman (Strathfield South, jumps, sprints/hurdles)
- Nicole Gale (Northlakes H, multis & hurdles)
- Fred Martin (Belmore H, sprints)
- Paul Greene (Shoalhaven, sprints)
- Rebecca Vormister (Corrimal, sprints)



Leading NSW sprinter/hurdler and multi event athlete – Nicole Gale.

In NSW, following on the heels of Darren Clark's rise in the 1980s was the emergence of a powerful wave of men's 200m/400m sprinters from western Sydney. Miles Murphy (Evans H), Stephen Perry (Whalan H) and Mark Garner (St Marys H), would all eventually go on to represent Australia at an Olympic or World Championships.

The men's high jump was strong through this period, with nearly every athlete being country based, originating from towns/areas: Gunnedah, Tamworth, Colo, Goulburn, Warren, Wollongong and Newcastle.

A trio of distance runners from Newcastle, Martin Dent, Clinton Mackevicious and Wayne Bristow, all coached by David Rundle emerged on the national scene.



Leading distance runner in the '90s was Martin Dent. In 2009 he competed in the marathon at the World Championships.

Some of the finest athletes to start their careers off in this period included: Grant Cremer (North Sydney BH, 800m), Matt Beckenham (Queanbeyan H, hurdles/jumps), Nick A'Hern (Airds H, walks), Rob Hannah (Richmond H, long jump), Glenn Carroll (Kotara H, jumps), Anthony Hough (Richmond H, multis), Clay Cross (Waverley C, shot), Andrew Currey (Wee Waa, javelin) and Stephen and Matt Dwight (Epping H, discus, hammer).

Mid '90s to the present

In 1994 athletics in NSW moved home to the brand new Sydney Olympic Park Athletics Centre at Homebush. The Moove Games sponsorship was still in place, but would end soon with the privatisation of the Milk Marketing Board.

Sports Schools also grew in prominence during this period. The first and most competitive was Westfields Sports High, located in Fairfield. But there continued to be strong presence from the GPS, CAS and IGSSA groups. But many more school group carnivals were held including CCC, CIS and CGASSA.

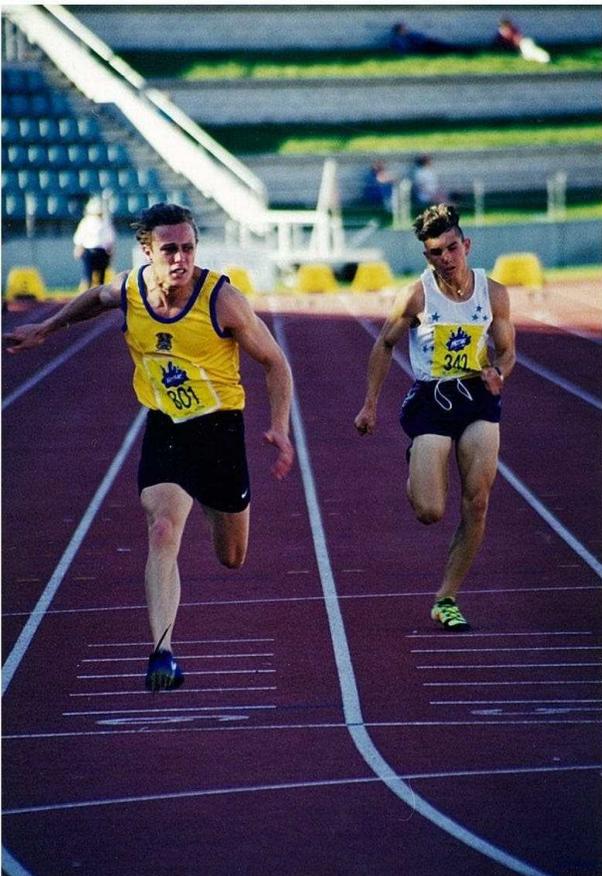
A major highlight for the championships during this period was the opportunity of a lifetime for our school age athletes to compete on Stadium Australia, venue for the 2000 Sydney Olympics. In August 2000, in conjunction with the trials for the Australian Olympic team, the NSW All Schools 16-19 years age divisions were conducted between trail events for the Australian team. The 12-15 years events were held at Campbelltown.

A group of sprinters, many located in the Central Coast/Newcastle area emerged together in the mid-90s. They included Mindy Slomka (Hunter Valley G), Rosemary Hayward (Corpus Christi), Josephine Fowley (The Entrance H) and Michelle Dalrymple (McLean H).

Dozen's of future stars emerged including today's stars. Jana Pittman (Mt St Benedicts) who arrived in the late '90s Eloise Poppett and Dani Samuels (Westfields SH) who was prominent from 2004. At the 1997 carnival Matt Shirvington (Marist North Shore) clocked a staggering 10.29 in the 100m and backed that up with 20.97 in the 200m. One of the finest all round athletes, Fabrice Lapierre was also emerging at this time. Lapierre, won hurdles, sprints and his speciality jumps,



Jana Pittman (Mt St Benedicts) won sprints, hurdles and jumps at the All Schools.



Matt Shirvington (Marist North) defeats Stephen Hatfield (Kingswood)

In recent years a very talented generation have emerged. Coming out of the GPS system, Nicholas Hough (The King's School) broke over a dozen records at the GPS, while emerging late in his teens, from the CAS, was Steven Solomon (Cranbrook) who initially was a 400m hurdler before concentrating on 400m. Others on the rise have been: Amy Pejovic (St Leo's Wahroonga, jumps), Taylah Sengul (Erskine Park, throws), Michelle Jenneke (Hills Grammar, hurdles), Ben Jaworski (Samantha Geddes (Caringbah H, sprints/hurdles), Tepai Moeroa (Newington, shot), Elliott Lang (Kings, throws) and Jenny Blundell (Cherrybrook, distance).

Seventy-five years after the first NSW All Schools Championship, the event is still encouraging and developing the largest talent pool of track and field athletes in Australia.

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