Melbourne 1956 Performances

Australia had 325 athletes competing at the Melbourne Olympic Games. Explore the overviews of the Melbourne Olympic Games to get a sense of the occasion and the quality of the athlete performances under such competition pressure.

Focus

Highlights of athlete performances.

The AOC overviews

http://corporate.olympics.com.au/Games/melbourne-1956

Video (3 min 29sec) http://media.olympics.com.au/index.cfm?objectid=3AE4D43C-5A42-11DE-AD2B005056B05E14&prevCollectionID=802F366B%2D5A43%2D11DE%2DAD2B005056B05E14
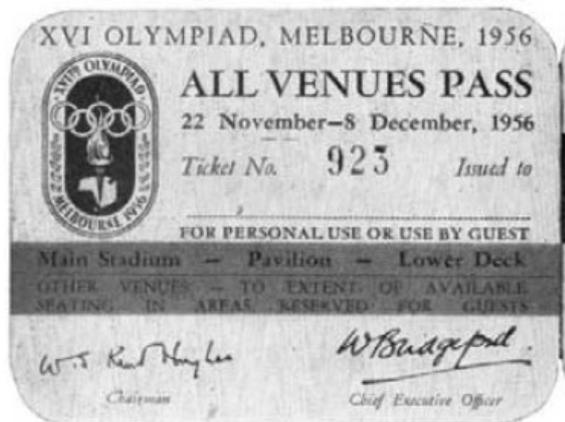
US Overview video (14 min 40sec) - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpszsVffQYk

Activity

You are a part of the Youth Organisation of the Melbourne Olympic Games. As a volunteer you have helped with the collection of medals and distribution to the arenas and to the Victory Ceremony for some events. You have also assisted a lost child to a designated pick up point. Now you have some free time youhave managed to get your hands on an 'All Venue Pass'. You have to choose between the swimming, athletics and cycling.

You want to collect more autographs and photos for your Olympics Album and a school project. You already have Shirley Strickland's autograph and photograph.

For the School Project design a poster that celebrates an individual or team performance. This could be a digital poster.

An All Venues Pass from the Melbourne Olympic Games
Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p112.

Shirley Strickland and fans scrambling for autographs and photos at Melbourne Olympic Games 1956
Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p280.

Murray Rose

Murray Rose had three gold medals at the age of 17. Explore his 1956 Olympic Games experiences.

http://www.olympic.org/murray-rose

AOC profile: http://cp.olympics.com.au/athlete/murray-rose

Golden Nugget (1 min 27 sec.): http://media.olympics.com.au/index.cfm?objectid=63EFDD80-3098-11DE-921800105A855C9C&prevCollectionID=368C464E%2D4F0F%2D11DE%2DA15E005056B05E14

4 x 200 Metres Relay

With eleven nations entered for this event three eliminations were necessary. Of the favoured teams only the U.S.S.R. used its strongest team in the heats. Australia in the second heat substituted three members and finished third. All teams were at full strength for the final.

> Rose won the first of his three gold medals in the relay, an event which
> had been dominated by American and Japanese teams ever since 1912
> when three Australians and a New Zealander, Malcolm Champion, under
> the banner of Australasia, won gold. Australia had a wealth of talent from
> which to select the team, and in fact swam a total of seven swimmers in the
> heat and final. Only Devitt swam in both races. He was partnered in the heat
> by Gary Chapman, Graham Hamilton and Murray Garretty, and the Australians
> were content to be fifth fastest of the qualifiers. In the final Devitt was
> joined by Henricks, Rose and a relatively unknown West Australian, Kevin

O'Halloran. O'Halloran led after the first 200 metres, and Devitt, Rose and Henricks progressively extended the leeway. The quartet covered the distance in world record time of 8 min 23.6 sec to win easily from the United States, which had rested its distance champion George Breen in the heats.

Harry Gordon, Australia and the Olympic Games, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), p218.

Team captain, John Devitt, is tossed into the pool by the Australian team, after their relay win.
Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p588.

Murray Rose and the 400 metres

Harry Gordon describes the 400 metre freestyle event for men:

Breen (USA)was expected to be one of the major threats to Rose in the two races to come, the 400 and 1500 metres. The American won his heat of the 400 well in 4 min 35.7 sec, and other heats went to the Australians O'Halloran (4:36.9) and Gary Winram (4:34.5). In the final heat Rose swam to pacing orders from Sam Herford, and just out touched Japan's Tsuyoshi Yamanaka in 4 min 31.7 sec. When Rose, very nervous before his first individual final, went to his locker in the dressing-room on Tuesday, 4 December, he found a note from Herford. Rose wrote afterwards:

"He was always very emotional, but he wasn't always good at verbal communication. He wrote this letter from the heart about how much our relationship had meant to him and how he knew I was ready and that I was the best prepared athlete at the Olympic Games. It had a big impact on me at a time when I was scared, when my legs felt like jelly and my mouth was dry. I felt like I could hardly walk out on the deck, and I went out with a surge of emotion."

Breen, a bullocking type of swimmer, led early, and on the second 100 metres Yamanaka took the lead. Rose, stroking easily with very little splash, was content with third place until the third quarter of the race, when he took
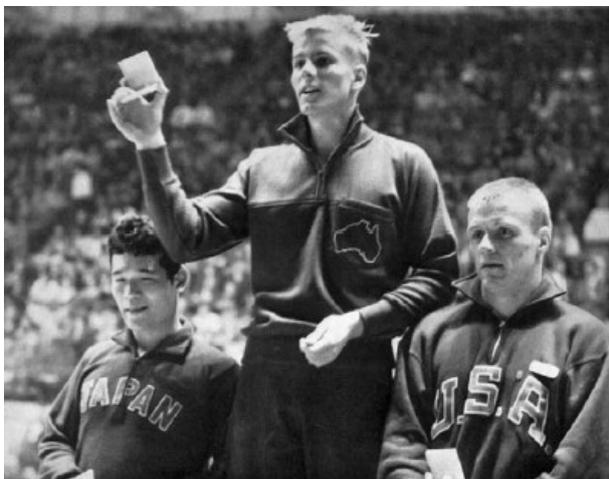
over from the Japanese. The stroking of both Breen and Yamanaka became less tidy as they belted hard over the final 100 metres, and Rose glided in to win comfortably in Olympic record time of 4 min 27.3 sec from the Japanese. O'Halloran was fourth, Winram sixth.

Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), p218.

Murray Rose and the 1500 metres
This was a repetition over the longer distance of the 400 metres.
The same three, Rose, Yamanaka and Breen were favourites.

Rose, Yamanaka, and Breen finished in that order in both 400 *and* 1,500 *metres.*
Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p597.

The 1500 final, on the night before the closing ceremony, thus loomed as one of the significant match races of the Games. Much later, Rose wrote about his own feelings that day, and captured eloquently the sensations of so many Olympians as they await the big test:

> *Every little detail becomes important. There's a heightened sense of awareness, you're more attentive to everything going on. I can remember getting on the bus at the Olympic Village and the sound of the bus doors and the dust on the bus windows and the expressions on people's faces outside. I was thinking, "Lord, they're just walking around like it's a normal day. Don't they know what's going on?" Part of it was the adrenalin pumping. I suppose one could have the same experience walking to his execution.*"

In the final, Breen had Rose and Yamanaka on either side of him, and the three of them cleared out early. Breen took the early lead, as was his fashion, and his two rivals delayed their pounce until the 850-metre mark. As he turned for the last 100 metres, Rose had almost a 4 metre lead from the Japanese, but Yamanaka produced a mighty finishing burst to reduce the gap. With the crowd screaming harder, and more sustainedly, than at any other
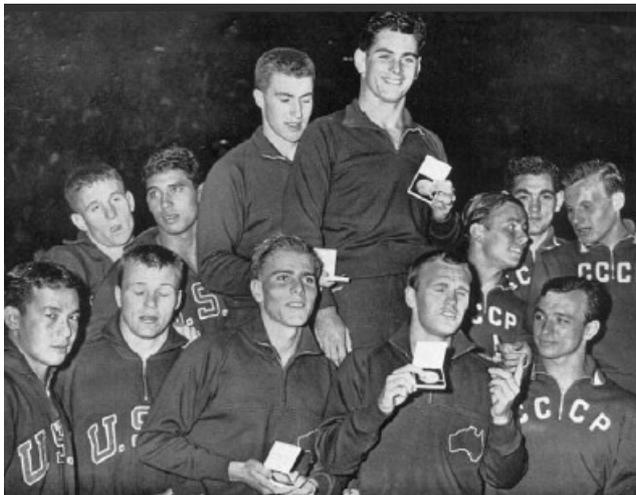
time in the pool, Rose continued to drive smoothly through the water to finish 1.4 seconds ahead of Yamanaka in 17 min 58.9 sec. Breen, who had taken too much out of himself in the heat, finished a well beaten third. Garretty was fourth and Winram eighth.

Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), p219.

Murray Rose's time of 17 mins. 58.9 secs. was 6 secs. slower than Breen's record but he had achieved his purpose and won the Gold Medal.

4 x 200 Metres Relay

And Murray Rose was part of the relay win.

Australia (Gold), USA(Silver), USSR(Bronze) K. O'Halloran, J. Devitt, M. Rose, J. Henricks
Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p604.

Betty Cuthbert

Australian athlete Betty Cuthbert became the 18-year-old "Golden Girl" by winning three track gold medals.

Final of 200 m. From left—Stubnick (2nd), Köhler (6th),Croker (4th), Cuthbert (1st), Paul (5th) and Mathews (3rd).
Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p348.

AOC Profile: http://cp.olympics.com.au/athlete/betty-cuthbert

Golden Nugget: http://media.olympics.com.au/index.cfm?objectid=63D354D3-3098-11DE-921800105A855C9C&prevCollectionID=368C464E%2D4F0F%2D11DE%2DA15E005056B05E14

Athletics Australia: http://www.athletics.com.au/fanzone/hall_of_fame/betty_cuthbert

Books:

Cuthbert, Betty, *Golden girl : an autobiography*, Strand, Sydney, 2000, 173 pp.

Webster, Jim and Cuthbert, Betty, *Golden girl*, Pelham Books, London, 1966, 157 pp

Shirley Strickland

At the London Olympic Games in 1948, Shirley Strickland became the first Australian female to win an Olympic medal in a track and field event.

Shirley had something to prove at the 1956 Olympic Games after making a mistake in the finals of the hurdles for the 1954 Commonwealth Games team selection which cost her a place in the team.

80 Metre Hurdle Final: Strickland leads over the last hurdle. On right is Köhler (2nd) and left, Thrower (3rd). Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p352.

Australian Biography online

Shirley Strickland (de la Hunty) gave a series of interviews for the Australian Biography online series about great Australians. You can read the transcripts and/or download the interviews.

Interview 5 asks her about disappointments as a runner and why she had something to prove at the Melbourne Olympics - http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/strickland/interview5.html

Interview 3 covers the post-world War II period - Transcript :
http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/strickland/interview3.html

All interviews: http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/strickland/

Golden Nugget (1min 19sec) - http://media.olympics.com.au/index.cfm?objectid=63F24E83-3098-11DE-921800105A855C9C&prevCollectionID=368C464E%2D4F0F%2D11DE%2DA15E005056B05E14

Norman May describes Shirley Strickland winning the women's 80m hurdle final and setting a world record of 10.9 seconds.

Women's 4 X 100 Metres Relay

The Australian 4X100 Relay team. From left - Mellor, Croker, Cuthbert and Strickland.
Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p355.

How did this team go in this event? What did they do secretly in training to help their performance?

4 x 100 Metres Relay

Australia appeared on performance basis to be outstanding favourites although the U.S.A. team was considered a serious threat. The excitement started in the first heat with a great race between South Africa, U.S.A. and Germany, but as U.S.A. had three substitutes swimming it was not considered a true indication of ability. Australia won the second heat with one substitute in a time only three-fifths of a second outside the Helsinki record of 4 mins. 24.4 secs.

The final provided one of the best races of the series with the Americans well above their previous form. Australia was only slightly ahead at the half distance and in the third leg the Australian girl Sandra Morgan fell back and the American went ahead, but in the last few yards Morgan produced a surprising sprint and was ahead again to give Lorraine Crapp a slight advantage over Rosazza, but it was only in the last few yards that Crapp was able to get clear and give Australia another victory ; to gain it they had to lower their own world record time by 2.6 secs. to 4 mins. 17.1 secs. The U.S.A. team also bettered the previous record in recording 4 mins. 19.2 secs. South Africa narrowly defeated Germany for third place.

Official Report XVI Olympiad, p588.

In **interview 3** with Shirley Strickland for the Australian Biography online series she talks about the problems the woman's relay team had in London 1948 and Helsinki 1952 and how they solved it at the Melbourne Olympic Games in 1956. What were the problems and how did Shirley say it was solved in Melbourne?

Interview 3 - http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/strickland/interview3.html

AOC Profile - http://corporate.olympics.com.au/athlete/shirley-de-la-hunty

She's Game project - http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/sg/sport-home.html

Dawn Fraser

Melbourne in 1956 was dawn Frasers first Olympic Games. She achieved a gold medal at the beginning of a formidable swimming career.

> Of all the bright new stars of 1956, the swimmer who was to have the most enduring impact on the Olympics - and for that matter on Australian society - was Dawn Fraser, who was eighteen when she went to Townsville. She won the 100 metres freestyle title, and went on to win it again in 1960 and 1964, becoming the first and only swimmer of either sex to win the same event at three successive Olympics. She was the first woman to break the minute for the 100 metres freestyle, she held the world record for that distance for an incredible sixteen years, and she was the possessor of thirty-nine world records (twenty-three individual, twelve team).
>
> Apart from all that, somewhere along the way she transcended all the boundaries of mortal sport and moved into the company of folk heroes — along with Phar Lap, Ned Kelly, Bradman, Burke and Wills, and Kingsford-Smith. This transition owed something to her independence, her rebellious spirit (which evoked echoes of Eureka), her triumph over handicaps, her splash of endearing larrikinism, and ultimately the tragedy of a ban which ended her career. These were all ingredients of legend.
>
> Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), p212.

Women's Register: **http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/IMP0178b.htm**

Golden Nugget: This covers Dawns Olympic career, starting at the 1956 Olympics - http://media.olympics.com.au/index.cfm?objectid=63DA80C0-3098-11DE-921800105A855C9C&prevCollectionID=368C464E%2D4F0F%2D11DE%2DA15E005056B05E14

Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games,* p212-213, has more of the profile of Dawn Fraser.

Lorraine Crapp and Dawn Fraser

Even amongst the Australian women swimmers friendly rivalry occurred.

Lorraine Crapp (right)(Gold) with Dawn Fraser (left)(Silver) and Sylvia Ruuska (centre) (Bronze.
Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p612.

Even amongst the Australian women swimmers friendly rivalry occurred and brought out their competitive natures for the team.

Dawn Fraser and Lorraine Crapp each won two gold medals and one silver in the swimming events at the Melbourne Games. Fraser won the 100 metres freestyle, with Crapp second, and the placings were reversed in the 400 metres freestyle. They shared in the relay gold medal win. Dawn returned the compliment in the 110 yards, outsprinting Lorraine over the second lap to break a twenty-year-old world record with a time of 64.5 seconds.

She then won the 220 yards, beating Lorraine again to set new world marks for both the 200 from the USA third metres (2:2O.7) and the 220 yards (2:21.2). The two had swum against each other many times before, with Crapp the dominant one, but at those national titles at North Sydney, an intense rivalry was born - one that reflected an antagonism between their coaches, but one that would benefit Australian swimming hugely…

When the two lined up among the eight finalists for the Olympic 100 metres title, it was fairly certain they would fight out the finish. It was a classy field - in fact, eight swimmers bettered the previous Olympic record during the event - but Dawn had equalled the world record in her heat, and Lorraine, swimming with obvious reserves, had been only fractionally slower.

They swam in neighbouring lanes, and were dead level with 25 metres to go, swimming stroke for stroke. Dawn wrote later: "Neither of us knew who was the winner, but a moment after we touched we were both watching the tremendous battle for third placing between Faith Leech and the American girl Joan Rosazzo. Faith just made it, to give Australia a one—two—three clean sweep. Afterwards I had a lovely sense of relaxation, even though I didn't know whether I'd won. Then an official winked at me and held up one finger. I'd made it."' Both girls had been inside the

world record, and Dawn had set a new mark of 62 seconds. As Lorraine embraced her, she said: "It makes our relay team look pretty good.

Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), p214-215.
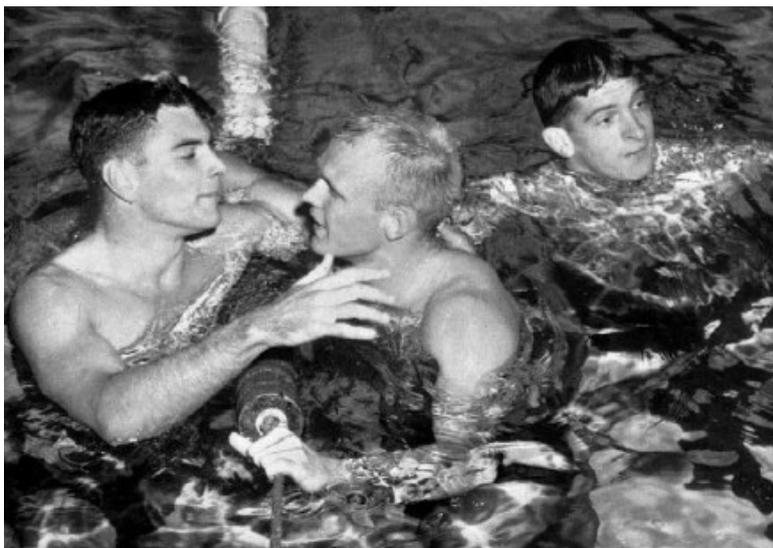

4X100 Women's Relay. From Left -Sandra Morgan, Faith Leech, Dawn Fraser, and Lorraine Crapp .4 min 17.1 sec.
Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p616.

What special performance did this women's relay team achieve?

Hendricks, Devitt and Chapman

The three Australian swimmers below achieved the first men's team result in swimming at the Melbourne Olympic Games.

After the 100 metres freestyle: John Devitt, Jon Hendricks and Gary Chapman
Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p 594.

What were the three Australians celebrating after the final of the 100 metres freestyle for men?

David Theile

AOC athlete profile: http://corporate.olympics.com.au/athlete/david-theile

Wiki profile: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/David_Theile

Here is a description of the 100 metres Backstroke-

The field for this event included 1952 winner Oyakawa and world record holder Wiggins, both of the U.S.A., and with three Australians, Theile, Monckton and Hayres in top form another first-class race was expected. Heat winners were clearly defined, but minor placings were closely contested with three competitors returning identical times necessitating a re-swim for eighth place in the semi-finals, Miersch (Germany) gaining the place from Hurring (New Zealand) and Coignot (France). Only 3.8 secs. divided the eight contestants in the first semi-final and the second was even closer with a difference of 3 secs. between first and eighth. All Australian and American contestants went through to the final. The Japanese were eliminated, one in a heat and two in the semi-finals.
The final became a battle between Theile and Monckton. Theile took the lead and Monckton could make no impression, 1 sec. divided them at the finish. Theile's time of 1 min. 02.2 secs. was 3.2 secs. better than Oyakawa's 1952 record. Third was McKinney (U.S.A.) 1.3 secs behind Monckton.

Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p585.

Harry Gordon adds detail about Theile's winning technique:

> at 50 metres he used a turn he had not been prepared to risk in the qualifying races: a product of his own experimentation, it involved tumbling over the opposite shoulder from the hand which touched the wall. The manoeuvre worked flawlessly, and he churned home in Olympic record time of 62.2 seconds to win the gold.
>
> Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), p219 and 220.

Listen to Norman May about David Theile:

Golden Nuggets: http://media.olympics.com.au/index.cfm?objectid=63D80FC4-3098-11DE-921800105A855C9C&prevCollectionID=368C464E%2D4F0F%2D11DE%2DA15E005056B05E14
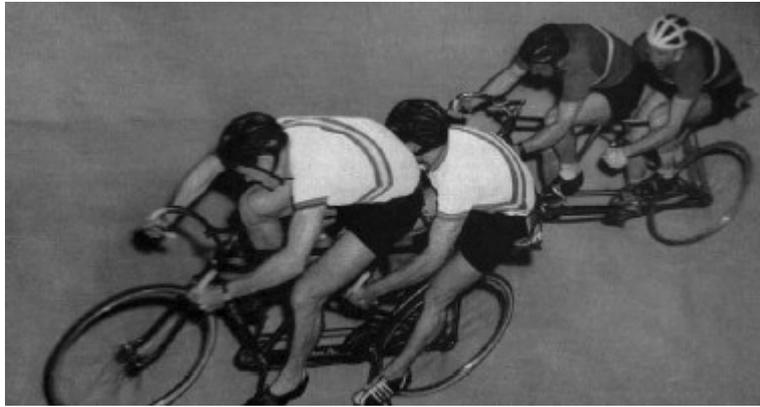
Ian Browne and Tony Marchant in the 2000 metres tandem sprint

Cycling 2000m Tandem (Men) Australia I Browne, A Marchant defeating
Czechoslovakia, L. Foucek-Y. Machek. Time 10.8 sec.
Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p424.

Ian Browne and Tony Marchant had no international experience but had won the Australian championships and a place in the Olympic cycling squad. They were not expected to win the 2000 metres Tandem cycling event. Strategy played a part in the final.

The Olympic final – a triumph of strategy

The Australians' victory in the final against the Czechs Yaclac Machek and Ladislav Foucek was largely a triumph of strategy. They talked often with Young, Cramer and the former professional champion Billy Guyatt about the tactics of the Czechs, who had been winning races with a terrific burst of speed before the last lap. Before the race Young stationed himself beside the point on the track where this burst usually began. The Australians cleared out from the start, and led fast into the back bend before the last lap; at the point where Young was acting as a marker, they took the Czechs high up the bank, preventing them from sprinting past. Then the Australians wound up again, threw everything into a final sprint, and crossed the line a length and a half ahead.

Harry Gordon, *Australia and the Olympic Games*, Queensland University Press, 1996 (3rd edition), p220 and 221.

Other Highlights

34 gold medalists from various countries who between them gained 38 gold medals.
Source: Official Report XVI Olympiad, p108.

- How many gold medals were won at the Melbourne Olympic Games?
- The Australian women are centre front. Can you identify any of these gold medallists?

Great rivalry – Emil Zatopek and Alain Mimoun

French long-distance runner Alain Mimoun had tasted Olympic defeat on the track three times at the hands of Czech Emil Zátopek. However, in the marathon it was Mimoun who pulled away to record a comfortable victory. He waited at the finish line for Zátopek, his old friend and great rival, who trotted home in sixth place.

Alain Mimoun: http://www.olympic.org/alain-mimoun

World records

Only two world records were set in track and field. Mildred McDaniel, the first American woman to win gold in the sport, set a high jump record of 5 feet 9¼ inches (1.759m) and Egil Danielsen of Norway overcame a troublesome wind with a remarkable javelin throw of 281 feet 2½ inches (85.712m).(Wiki)

Water Polo

One of the most memorable events of the Games was the violent clash between Hungary and the USSR in water polo. The Hungarians eventually won the gold medal with the USSR getting the bronze. This issue has been covered in the 'Games' and Historical Context' sections.