

# DAVID TODD AWARDS - HISTORY OF RECIPIENTS

by Kev Morrissey, April 2010

In the 26 years that I have been Peninsula Cross Country Coach there have been times when Cairns runners dominated and times when the mantle was taken over by Tableland Runners.

When I started as coach it was Brad Beven's last year as a student. He came second in the Queensland 17-year cross-country at that time. This was followed by a period of almost ten years when Cairns runners dominated. There were four national champions in that time

- Ben Callum in 2,000 metre steeple,
- Travis George in 3,000 metres,
- Andrew Messina in 3,000. ( Andrew ran 31 minutes for 10,000 as a student) All of these runners including Wally Plath and Bevan Tobler broke 16 minutes for 5,000 in our road racing series.
- Karen Nissen was both Australian cross country champ and triathlon champ in the same year (1993) All of them made it in the Queensland cross country team. At one point a quarter of the Queensland Cross Country team came from the Peninsula. Hardly a year went by when our runners did not win a medal at the state steeplechase. This was in large part due to the local Council's installation of a steeple facility around lower lake in Centenary Park.

Since then domination has passed to the Tableland. Katie Johnson from Malanda was Queensland Cross Country Champion on at least two occasions. After this there was the Mareeba push – Matthew Hawke was Qld cross country champ on at least three occasions and Thomas Briggs was runner up.

We should not forget that just prior to that Megan Mansfield was Australian Cross Country Champ.

I am happy to say that the Cairns region has now regained its position and is now the dominant force in distance running again. The three winners of last year's David Todd Award which we presented at Holloways Beach on 27 March 2010 are responsible for this:

They are:

- Bini James
- Jarrod Ahern
- Rory Hunter

Bini is the current 14-year Queensland cross-country champion. He was the fastest 14 yr runner in the National Titles over 3 km recording a time of 9.14

Jarrold is the winner of this year's 3 km Holloway's Beach series. He is the 14-year Peninsula Champ over 800 and 1500. He placed 3rd in the 14 year cross country behind Bini and was unlucky not to be picked for the state team. But his great achievement was being pipped by 2 hundredth of a second in the 14 year Queensland 1500. His time was 4 min 11.

Rory had a great win finishing 1st in last years 16 year Queensland 1500 metre title. He ran a time of 4.04. More recently at a national meet he has run 4.00 flat. That time puts him up there in the pantheon of great Cairns 1,500 runners. (from memory Wally Plath and Wayne Hellmuth are the only school boys to have pipped four minutes.)

Each of the above runners received \$350 as encouragement and in recognition of their achievements. The David Todd Bursary System was set up in 1987. It is in memory of a much loved athlete who was killed in a car accident on the Bruce Highway. Since then every distance athlete who has made the Queensland state or track team has been a recipient of the award.



The picture above is one of our running group. They are quite an informal bunch. Kids just turn up, stretch, run the Red Arrow and then do some serious training usually around Centennial Lakes. About 15 weeks before the QSSSS Cross Country our leading runners come together to write their own program. I like to stay in the background as a kind of consultant. The program is printed and is followed pretty closely right up to the state cross country. Some years, when the levels of enthusiasm are high, the group continues with another program specifically written for track. Training days are Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday from 4.00 pm to 5.00 pm

I kind of fell into training kids in 1984 when I became Peninsula Cross Country Coach, a position I have held for 25 years. In that time the group has produced quite a number of spectacular performers. Brad Bevan was training with me when I was a teacher at St. Augustine's and before I became Peninsula Coach. He was inspirational. He had a kind of aura and the group expanded and times improved just because of his inspiration. In those days our club did not put on 3 km races so our group concentrated on the 5 km. Quite a few runners in those days broke 16 minutes which is a kind of a benchmark - an indication that they are potential state and national champions. Among them were Wayne Hellmuth, Wally Plath, Travis George and Andrew Messina. Wayne Hellmuth never won a national title but he won the state 800 metre title three times, each time running without shoes. Travis George, Ben Callum and Andrew Messina won national titles on the track. Ben Callum and Wayne Hellmuth won scholarships to USA universities on the back of their track and cross country performances.

In the early days all the runners were boys. This was probably a legacy of me being a teacher at St. Augustine's. But these days the girls far outnumber the boys as you can see from the picture. The two most outstanding girls were Karen Nissen, who in 1992 won national titles in triathlon and cross country and Leanda Cave who won the World Triathlon title 2002. I was state coach in 1992 and seeing Karen win the national title was the highlight of my life. As for Leanda, she is still going strong, and has ambitions of Olympic Gold in triathlon and a win in the Hawaiian Iron Man. Her best year was 2002 when she placed second in the Manchester Commonwealth Games triathlon and later when she won the world triathlon championship in Cancun.

Over the years the group has fluctuated. Sometimes it gets as low as one and none when I have to accompany myself over the Red Arrow. At the moment the group can vary from 15 to 6.

The most outstanding runners at the moment are Adaline Storch who has been a stalwart and dedicated trainer for over five years. Most inspirational is Jarrod Ahern (14) who has been scorching the figure eight course in times that have not been seen for 20 years. He will be one to watch. He is very fast and is getting stronger every day.