

## AUSTRALIAN CENTURION DETAILS

30. *Merv Lockyer (31/08/1931)*  
23:45:51  
05-06 October 1996  
George Knott Athletic Field, Clifton Hill, Vic

Merv was born in 1931 in Perth in Western Australia. He is the great grandson of one of the earliest settlers of the Swan River Colony so can lay claim to be an Australian of longer standing than most of us.

While Merv competed in various sports at school, the opportunities were few in those days and he did not pursue a sporting career at that time. The one sport in which he did compete and excel was boxing. He was a middleweight boxer in his early adult years. In this arena, his greatest moment was in 1957 when he knocked out heavyweight champion 'Nulla' Austin in the 8<sup>th</sup> round in a main bout in Hamilton, Victoria.

Like many veteran athletes, he came into the sport of athletics at a later age and perhaps even by accident.

Due to a very severe automobile accident in 1983 (aged 52) and a second accident in 1987, Merv suffered very severe arthritis in both ankles and knees and was confined to crutches and then a walking stick. His doctor had advised him at this time that due to the arthritic condition, he would be unable to walk in the normal way and might eventually be confined to wheelchair. This was a challenge to Merv who decided that if it was at all possible, he would walk to and from work every day and try to actively rehabilitate. He sold his car and some 4 months later, he was covering the 4 km walk in 32 minutes.

As time went by, Merv found his condition was improving and that he was walking at a faster rate. While watching TV one night in Feb 1990, he saw Australia's top female walker Kerry Saxby in action in a walking race and decided to try it out. He found it very hard to walk with the proper technique due to his arthritic condition. But Merv was not one to give up and he kept at it, gradually getting on top of the pain and improving in his standard. He competed in his hometown Ballarat and in Melbourne in Veteran competitions and was helped to improve his technique. He competed in the Veterans Games in Alice Springs in late 1990 and won gold in his age group. It was a thrill to be awarded the medal by swimming legend Dawn Fraser.

A series of major setbacks occurred when he suffered a mild heart attack in March 1992 and then suffered a mild stroke in September 1993. But not to be put down, Merv was back in light training after only a couple of weeks off in each case.

Now with a new lease of life, Merv competed in the Oceania Games in Auckland and World Masters Games in Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and Alice Springs and has won a number of medals as well as setting a few age records in walks, Javelin and Discus. His repertoire was wide and he competed in walks, Javelin, Discus, Shotput, High Jump Long Jump, Triple Jump, Pole Vault and sprints.

His arthritis eventually caught up with him in the early 90's and he was forced to undergo a complete knee reconstruction, resulting in a new plastic knee joint. This has put an end to his running but he has endeavoured to keep up his walking. Now you would expect that after such setbacks, this would signal the end of any active sporting endeavours. But to his credit, Merv kept at it and started to look to new challenges.

While competing in Adelaide in 1995, he walked a half marathon and found the experience to his liking. Hearing of the 100 mile distance, he approached Centurion Jack Webber of Adelaide for help in preparing for such a distance himself. With Jack advising him by correspondence and phone, he increased his mileage and eventually entered for the **1996** Australian Centurion event which was being held in Melbourne in September of that year.

He started off at a conservative pace of just over 3 mins per lap but just kept it going at between 3 mins and 3:30 per lap for about 80 of the 100 miles. Only in the dying stages of the race did he slow towards 4 min laps but by then, he was safe with enough time up his sleeve. He certainly struggled in the second half but amazingly, he managed to maintain his lap times. This is an indication of his sheer strength and determination. He suffered badly with his plastic knee and was forced on numerous occasions to stop briefly for a rubdown or take some pain killers. But he obviously had confidence in his own ability and his support team looked after him very well. He finished in good spirits and was able to walk from the track, not bad at 65 years of age and after 100 miles of walking. Merv had just become Australian Centurion number 30 with a final time of **23:45:51**.

Aged 65, he became the oldest person to qualify for centurion membership in Australia thus far.



**Merv celebrates his centurion finish**

Merv was keen to explore the limits with his long distance walking and felt that he had a few more good races left in his artificial knee joint. He fronted for the annual centurion walk the following year (1997) but suffered ankle problems early on and was forced to stop at 100 km (achieved in a bit over 14 hours). For most of this distance, he had walked with Carmela Carrassi and the two had certainly helped each other to maintain a good even pace.

In 1998, he was reduced to 50km in the Centurion qualifier and it is fair to say that the chances of emulating his 1996 feat looked to be diminishing.

Merv, who now lives in Redcliffs, just outside Mildura, turns 80 years of age later this month. He still keeps fit and is keen to do one final long walk. We wait to see if it eventuates.

Tim  
9 August 2011