

Colin Hickey

Colin Hickey was a skater who had to leave Australia to participate and compete in his sport. Little did he know, he was at the forefront of a group of Australians who travelled overseas to train and compete in speed skating throughout Europe for the next 20 years. Colin was also the first Australian to win a World Championship Medal in any Winter Sport.

Colin was born in Melbourne in 1931. He was brought up in North Fitzroy and started skating at the Glaciarium and St Moritz. He quickly took to speed skating, and was later to say “to do it well is to feel like a bird.”

Colin won his first Australian Championship in 1949 and continued to win in '50, '52, and '53. Inspired by an English skater, Don McCarthy, living in Melbourne, Colin left Australia to train and compete in Europe. At this time, travel to Europe was by boat and took six weeks. Colin had to pay for all his travel, accommodation, food and training expenses. On arriving in Europe he had to learn new languages, a new skating style, and find employment to support himself. Colin took up many jobs as handyman, builder, and forestry worker to name a few.

Between 1952 and 1967 Colin represented Australia at three Olympic Games and numerous World Championships.

Olympics Games

1952 Oslo (Norway)

1956 Cortina (Italy) 500m 7th & 1500m 7th

1960 Squaw Valley (USA)

In all of his Olympic appearances, Colin received next to no funding and only received a jumper and an overcoat as a team uniform for three Winter Olympic Games, but his results in Cortina were not bettered until 1976 and that was by Colin Coates.

World Championships

1960 Davos (Switzerland) 500m 3rd

Colin's skating style put him above all other Australian skaters of his time, and in his prime his style was described as so smooth and efficient, as to require no effort at all. He was not a tall man, standing at only 165 cm and he had to concentrate on his style and technique to match it with the best in Europe.

Colin continued to return to Australia during the time between northern winters, and he finally returned in 1963 and continued his skating in Melbourne. He was talked back into racing at the 1967 Victorian Championships against the best skaters in Australia and he won the ¼, ½, and 1 mile distances before hanging up his competition skates for ever. Colin stayed involved in skating, taking up a coaching and mentoring role. Colin was a supporter of the training methods of Perce Cerutti. Colin went on to develop women's short track speed skating in Victoria and interstate. Colin also inspired people to coach with his skaters, Pam Cavanagh and Maggie Holland, continuing his coaching tradition today.

He shifted north to Queensland in the '90s and passed away in 1999. Colin is remembered by friends and competitors alike as a great character, but a fierce competitor.

1991 World Champion Relay Team

The Australian 1991 World Championship Short Track Speed Skating Relay Team, made up of Andrew Murtha, John Kah, Kieran Hansen, Richard Nizielski and Steven Bradbury, was one of the most successful relay teams of the early '90s.

This team stood at the beginning of the modern era for short track. The sport was becoming truly international at this stage, with competing nations from Asia, Europe, North America, and Oceania. It was a time when it was not a question of whether the team made the final, but what medal they won.

John Kah was the first skater of the team to represent Australia at the 1985 World Championships, and by 1990, Kieran, Andrew, Steven and Richard were part of a Relay Team that would stay together unchanged for the next four years.

In that time, they would achieve at the World Championships:

1991 1st (Gold) World Championship Relay Team, Sydney AUSTRALIA

1992 3rd (Bronze) World Championships, Beijing CHINA

1993 2nd (Silver) World Championship, Sheffield UK

In 1994 they won Australia's first Winter Olympic Medal when they came 3rd in the 5000m Men's Relay at the Lillehammer Winter Olympic Games.

The barriers and difficulties they faced were enormous. Members of the team were spread out over four states, with Steven in QLD, Kieran and Andrew in NSW, John in SA and Richard in WA. Richard eventually moved to NSW, when Canterbury Ice Rink at the time was the centre of short track in Australia. The individuals kept training at their home rinks coming together once or twice a year to train together as a Relay Team.

Everybody knows about Steven's injuries, but other skaters faced shoulder, ankle, and other blade injuries. Like skaters today, they had to juggle careers or put them on hold whilst competing. Andrew Murtha would work during the day, go to TAFE in the evening to study his trade course and get home to start off-ice training with his brother Colin at 10 pm. Both John and Steven had to train by themselves for weeks in their home states. The team also faced the psychological pressure of continuing to achieve after their great result in 1991. They faced the disappointment of falling at the 1992 Albertville Winter Olympic Games as the reigning World Champions. The 1992 World Championship in Denver was also not successful with two injured skaters in the team.

At the 1993 World Championship in Beijing, they achieved 3rd, bronze, and qualification to the 1994 Winter Olympic Games, behind a World Record Relay performance by the NZ Relay Team. At the 1994 Lillehammer Winter Olympic Games, they achieved 3rd, bronze, and Australia's First Winter Olympic Medal. About four weeks later the team achieved silver at the 1994 World Championships in Sheffield, UK.

John and Andrew retired after the 1994 Championships with Richard, Kieran, and Steven continuing on to the 1996 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan.

Everyone was looking forward to the World Championships in Australia in 1991. Individually our skaters did not have good luck, and sometimes you need luck, or you need an absence of bad luck to succeed in short track. Richard Nizielski made it to the

final of the 1500m only to be knocked out by another skater who was disqualified. John Kah set the fastest time of the Championship in the 1000m before being disqualified in a later race. Karen Kah, the only Australian woman in the individual races, did not get any breaks either.

So after three days, it was down to the Relay and we were not that confident. The World Champion Dutch Team went out in the heats, the Australian Team made it to the Semis, only to have the race stopped half way with a Japanese skater injured, so they had to skate one and half races. Then they were through to the Final against Italy, Great Britain, and New Zealand.

Australia and New Zealand went head to head leaving Italy and Great Britain in their wake. The lead changed every few laps and we held our breath. There was a break with a few laps to go and Australia increased their lead and won, with Richard crossing the finish line to give Australia its first World Championship Relay Title. It was great to be in short track and it was better to be Australian.