

David Thomas Fitzsimons: Champion Athlete, Senior Public Servant

Born: 23 April 1950, Victor Harbor, South Australia.

Died: 7 September 2008, North Adelaide.

From his young schoolboy years through to adulthood, athletics was a major focus in David's life. 'Fitzzy', as he was affectionately known, was an outstanding long-distance runner at State, national and international levels, in the 1970s.

His prodigious athletic talent showed early in his school days at Christian Brothers College. As 'The Advertiser' reported (20 April 1959), as an 8 year old he was "carried shoulder-high off the track" at Kensington Oval, after running second in the college Handicap Mile. This was a truly heroic effort and a harbinger of things to come. At matriculation, in 1967, he held nine of the college's athletic records, and was a State sub junior and schoolboy champion and winner of the 800 yards and the open mile in the Combined Schools Athletics Meeting.

At Adelaide University he studied Civil Engineering, graduating with a B.E. in 1972. He combined study and athletics with remarkable success and, as a member of the Adelaide University Athletics Club, then in its hey-day, he formed enduring friendships.

David was selected for many state and national teams, winning fame as a gold medallist, title-holder and record-holder at State and national levels. David won 8 Australian Championships at 5000m and 10000m, including three 5000m/10,000m doubles, and many state Championships. His State Records for 3000m, 5000m and 10000m have stood for over 30 years. He also excelled over 1500metres, and in cross-country events. However, it was the 5,000 metres that became his favourite event - and his forte.



His distinguished international career began in 1974, when he represented Australia in the Commonwealth Games at Christchurch, New Zealand. In 1976 he ran the 5,000 and 10,000 metres in the Montreal Olympics, and in the following year won the 5,000 metres at the Pacific Conference Games at Canberra. For several years he competed on the European summer circuit, often with distinction.

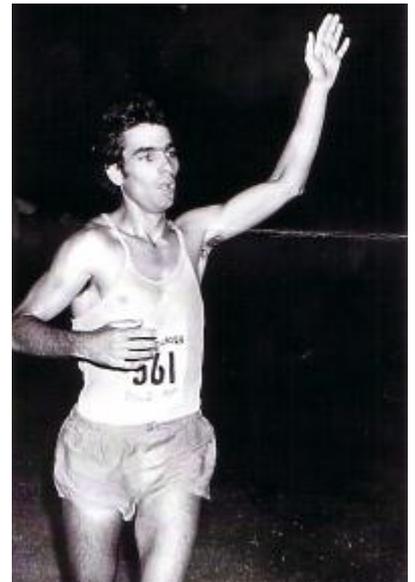
The highlight of David's career came at the World Cup at Düsseldorf (1977), when he won the Bronze medal in the 5,000 metres; his time of 13mins 17.4 seconds remains the sixth-fastest ever recorded by an Australian: at that time only Ron Clarke had done better.

David subsequently represented Australia in the Commonwealth Games at Edmonton (1978), the Spartakiad at Moscow (1979) and the Olympic Games at Moscow (1980). He retired from athletics after the Moscow Olympics.

South Australia was always home for David - and he loved the place. He was delighted to receive local recognition as recipient of the Walter Lindrum Award in 1977, and the News Caltex Award. In 1979 he was named South Australian Athlete of the Year. More recently, in 2000, he had the honour of being inducted into the Athletics SA Hall of Fame, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the sport of Athletics in Australia.

David was not only a high achiever but a warm and unassuming person. His success never "went to his head." Indeed he tended to be self-effacing. These qualities won him the respect and affection of many of his peers. The New Zealand champion Rod Dixon wrote: "he was a great friend ... and as an athlete a totally dedicated runner with enthusiasm and strength to match". Fitzzy showed a genuine interest in other athletes and was happy to mentor others throughout his career.

David was a long-term employee of the Department of Transport, Energy and Infrastructure. His association with the department (the Highways Department, as it used to be) began when he was an undergraduate and continued almost without interruption for the rest of his life. He held various roles: civil engineer, manager, and, more recently, Director of State-wide Operations. David's personal attributes made him an admired leader: he was known for his sense of humour, intelligence, strategic thinking and his kindness and special ability to communicate empathically with people from all walks of life.



David was a loving and dedicated family man. The third son of Colin and Mollie Fitzsimons, he was born at Victor Harbor, the picturesque seaside resort, which he liked to call his "hometown". In 1952 the family moved back to Adelaide, to further the boys' educational opportunities. In 1977 David married Marjorie Dee; they had four children - Alexandra, John, Kate and Julia. David loved spending time with his extended family. Above all, he showed great interest, support and pride in his family's pursuits and achievements.

He was part of a very close family. Colin and Mollie, his brothers Robert, Paul and Bernie, and his wife Marjorie were all dedicated supporters of his athletics career. Colin, in particular, spent many weekends officiating at the old Olympic Sports Field at Kensington, and attended many of David's interstate and overseas competitions.

In the last year of his life David battled one of the non-Hodgkins lymphomas. This proved the longest and toughest race of his life; he met the challenges with courage, humour and a constructive attitude. Even when very ill, he had the interest of his family and colleagues at heart, frequently putting the needs of others before his own needs. He was blessed with heroic qualities of many kinds.

David's family life, sporting and work achievements are a great testament to him, but more importantly it is the esteem and affection he inspired in people that will be his lasting legacy. He is survived by his wife, children and three brothers.