MARK GRAY

1967 -

Discipline: Cross Country Skiing
Olympic Participation: Lillehammer 1994
Medal awarded in: 2021

Born into a family of cross-country skiers - his brother Paul is a two-time Olympian - Mark Gray was ten years old when his family moved from Melbourne to Mt Beauty.

That's where Mark Gray first learnt to ski. His primary school ran a ski program during the winter and Mark started practicing every Tuesday. At the same time, the newly formed Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club (BNSC) introduced the Gray family to the sport of cross country skiing. The club allowed Mark's parents to practice socially and the three young Gray brothers to ski competitively, a support which would last for a number of years and help their international careers.

Coach Paul L'Huillier was one of the most influential people in both Paul and Mark's careers. In particular, he was the coach who sat Mark down at the age of 15 and said 'I think you have talent – if you put in the work, you could go far'. That was the start of a fruitful 10-year-long coach-athlete relationship.

In 1985, Mark's first overseas trip to Norway was an eye-opener. In that year the discipline of skating first dominated the world of cross country skiing, changing the sport forever. 17-year-old Gray would qualify for the Junior World Championships, but when he arrived in Switzerland for the event he found himself vastly out of his depth. Norway was a 'traditional' skiing country, not keen on embracing the technique of skating, and that penalised Gray. The experience taught him the importance of resilience and gave him additional motivation to train hard over the years that followed.

Gray's major breakthrough was the 1990 Australian Ski Marathon - a 42km race which was the prelude to the Kangaroo Hoppet. Winning the event boosted Gray's self-confidence enough to go and live overseas to train and race.

In 1992, after a successful return to racing following a 6-month challenge with Glandular Fever, Gray missed selection for the 1992 Olympics and nearly quit the sport. Gray still holds a special memory of skiing as a member of the Australian Cross Country relay team (4 x 10km) that won the Switzerland National Championship Relay event in 1992 - one of his finest moments as an athlete. Gray had hoped that result would become a ticket for the Albertville Olympics, but that was not to be.

Fortunately, he was encouraged to fly back to Australia and then on to the USA to compete in the American Birkebeiner, the largest cross country ski race in North America. A 5th place finish in that

race motivated him to strive for selection in the 1994 Olympics.

Unfortunately, by the time he got to Lillehammer, Gray was well and truly burnt out. Still, he cherished the amazing experience of representing his country at the Olympic Games, and subsequently tried to use the important life lesson learnt through sport to other people's benefit. After the 1994 Olympics he started 'guest-speaking' at schools around Victoria, also working part time as a Sport Development Officer

Eventually, Gray landed a full time teaching position at an independent girls school, a role which also allowed him to give back to the sport, introducing young people to cross-country skiing as well as coaching a number of junior athletes. Gray now works as a Vice Principal and, with a great team of people, runs the largest girls School in Victoria, MLC, regularly drawing on his skiing career and Olympic experience to navigate the complex world of education.

RETURN TO LIST