

Robert de Castella

Marathon Champion & Businessman

Four times Olympian Robert de Castella (Deek) is Australia's first World Champion in Athletics, winning the marathon in Helsinki in 1983.

He is the only Australian runner to have placed in the top 10 finishers at three straight Olympics in the toughest event the marathon. He dominated the world marathon scene throughout the 80's, set the world marathon record in 1981 and was voted the world's best marathon runner for that decade.

'Deek' has earned a revered place in the history of Australian sport, at Olympics, World Championships, and twice winning gold at the Commonwealth Games in the famous Brisbane marathon in 1982 and the again in Edinburgh in 1986.

An Australian cross-country champion at 22, Rob took up marathon running in 1979 and made his Olympic debut one year later at Moscow at age 23, finishing tenth, behind the reigning champion. Two years later, he claimed his first victory and the world record, at the Fukuoka Marathon in Japan.

In 1982, Rob won gold at the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane and the following January he was voted 1983 Australian of the Year and honoured with an MBE. He went on to win two Rotterdam Marathons, the World Athletics Championships in Helsinki, the Boston Marathon in 1986 smashing the course record, and several other major city marathon and races.

As Director of the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) for five years in the early 1990s, Robert repositioned the AIS as a centre of excellence after the drugs in sport debacle of the late 80's. He was also involved in establishing the elite sports system used leading into Australia's most successful Olympics in Sydney in 2000.

In 1995 Robert established his first charity, SmartStart for Kids! SmartStart worked through schools to encourage children to be healthy and active. It especially targets escalating obesity, poor nutrition and inactivity and has resulted in large improvements in child fitness and health. The SmartStart longitudinal database of children's health and fitness statistics has enabled valuable reports to be generated and a range of follow up services for students, parents, schools and government.

In 2004 SmartStart launched its adults and corporate health service, SmartStart for Life!.



SmartStart has worked in the corporate sector and mining industry to profile and report on organisational and individual health and fitness and implement programs to address and monitor identified physical health fitness and medical issues.

In January 2003, having lost his family home and belongings in the infamous Canberra bushfires, Robert became heavily involved in the Government's recovery programs, working with the five person ACT Task Force to plan and implement the process of healing and rebuilding.

He worked with the ACT Government to design and build a purpose built 2.5 kilometre grass cross country running circuit on the slopes of Mount Stromlo now named, the de Castella Cross Country Circuit. Robert was acknowledged as a "pillar of strength" for his family and the community.

In 2005, Rob launched a new gourmet grain and gluten free bakery and café, Deeks Health Foods, a health-focused bakery that specialises in quality artisan grain and gluten free breads, cakes, pizza bases, pasta, pies and deserts.

In 2010 he established another charity, the Indigenous Marathon Foundation that uses running, and especially the New York City Marathon, to showcase and celebrate Indigenous achievement and strength, and creates leaders to inspire and change the lives and futures of Indigenous Australians.

Since 1999 Rob has become a passionate and dedicated martial artist. In 2023 he graded to Go-dan (5th dan black belt) with the Traditional Okinawan Goju Karate Federation (TOGKF). He and his wife, (also Go-dan) have a dojo and karate club in Canberra.

Client testimonials

“ Brilliant; inspirational & motivational from a great Australian.

- *CPA Australia*

“ Excellent. A consummate professional and a tireless worker. Deek is a model example to us all. Rob was not only an inspiring and interesting speaker, he made it relevant to our conference/business and to the theme of the conference. We couldn't have had a better speaker for this event!

- *StorageTek*

“ Rob spoke really well about his success and his key drivers. He gave it a context that fitted the business environment as well as the sporting environment.

- *Sunrice*

“ Rob was a very good speaker and tied in our performance management theme beautifully.

- *Systems Union*

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