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Title

John Konrads' towel with a map of Australia

Date

1954-1964

Medium

Fabric

Dimensions

Overall: 1443 x 690 mm

Name

Towel

History

John Konrads was born in Riga, Latvia in 1942. After fleeing Latvia and spending five years in a displaced persons camp in Germany, he and his family came to Australia as refugees in July 1949. Konrads' father taught swimming at the migrants camp at Uranquinty in western NSW where John learnt to swim to recover after contracting polio. He trained with his younger sister Ilsa, and teamed up with rising swimming coach Don Talbot at Bankstown pool. Both teenagers followed Talbot's career trajectory as coach, rising to become champion swimmers. John and Ilsa became one of the public images of the 'Beautiful Balts' campaign aimed at dispossessed peoples from Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, as part of the

Australian Government's aggressive 'Populate or perish' immigration policy after the war. At 14 years of age, Konrads was selected as a reserve for the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games. Labelled the 'brilliant schoolboy champion', newspapers and magazines closely followed the rising talent and his sister. The Australian Women's Weekly reported that the 'Konrads' kids' were on their way to becoming 'the greatest swimmers in Australian history'. In 1958 and 1959, John claimed more than twenty world records in six events at distances from 200 to 1500 metres, including both the Australasian championships of 1957 and the Cardiff Empire Games in 1958. With Talbot he cut back his competition program for the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome where he won medals in the three events in which he participated. Konrads won gold in the 1500 metre freestyle, and bronze medals in both the 400 metre freestyle and the 4x200 metre freestyle relay. Konrads, along with fellow champions Murray Rose and Jon Henricks, went on to study at

the University of Southern California on a sporting scholarship. He completed a business degree in 1963. He eventually retired from swimming in 1964, however, followed his retirement by working as a swimming coach and mentor in Sydney and Paris, France. He later worked as Managing Director at L'Oreal Australia and General Marketing Manager for Ansett. John Konrads was swimming during one of the most successful periods for Australian swimmers with champions like Dawn Fraser, Jon Devitt, Murray Rose, Lorraine Crapp and his sister Ilsa. His sporting accomplishments have been acknowledged in the Sport Australia Hall of Fame and International Swimming Hall of Fame.