

## **My life in athletics**

Athletics NZ wrote to me some months ago about the need to supply information regarding my life in athletics. This was at a time when the NZ Coach Accreditation was being initiated.. This required some thought, as I started running at Primary School , some few decades ago...

### **London**

1. I joined my local club - Romford A.C.- in 1955, competing in Xcountry, jumps, sprints , throws and hurdles. Among my coaches were Olympians John Salisbury (400), Harry Askew L.J.) and Harry Whittle(400H.). I started training with weights, and have developed my knowledge in this area up to the present day.
2. My National Service in the R.A.F. from 1959 to 1961 enabled me to continue training and competing in all my events, and I represented the R.A.F in the Inter Services competitions in the 400 hurdles and relays.
3. After I completed my two years National Service, I joined the Woodford Green Athletic Club, competing in Sprints , Hurdles, Pentathlon, Relays, X country and road races. I represented the Essex County track team on a number of occasions.. I also started to coach club teenagers in track and field events.

### **Wellington**

4. My wife and I emigrated to Wellington, New Zealand in 1964, where I immediately joined the Kiwi Club, and started to compete in the sprints and jumps. I also coached sprinters , jumpers and hurdlers in the club, working with existing club coach Barry Raitt. When Winter arrived I joined the Wellington Harriers club, and started to compete in road races and X country events. This dual club arrangement continued for two years, with the Kiwi club relay teams being very successful. I was a member of the Coaches association and attended courses presented by Geoff Dyson (U.K.)and Gavriil Korbkov (U.S.S.R.)

### **London**

5. I then returned to England, where I re-joined Woodford Green Athletic Club in 1966. I won several Civil Service athletic championships and represented the Service in a number of representative matches. Continuing to compete Summer and Winter, my coaching knowledge expanded to include sprints, jumps, middle distance and hurdles. I also worked with British team coach Ron Bowden, who was a fellow coach at WGAC.. By this time I had been converted to the Lydiard School of distance running, as well as the Percy Cerutti philosophy of tough conditioning , including sand hills etc. ( I ran my first Marathon in 1967,) .I studied for the B.A.A.B. Club Coach qualification, and was examined by National Coach Tony Ward, with some of my athletes (fortunately they all behaved), and was pleased to be awarded the distinctive British badge..

### **Western Australia**

6. In 1969 I travelled to Western Australia, where I was employed by the Mt Newman Mining Company. Working seven days a week did not leave much time for training, but I managed to run in the bush when I could, usually the 8k home from the mine to the cabins where the workers lived.

### **Auckland**

7. When the one year contract was completed , I travelled to Auckland, where I joined Manurewa Harriers, competing for the club, and coaching sprints ,hurdles, ,jumps and middle distance on a regular basis..
8. My wife and baby and I then moved to the North Shore, and I joined Calliope A.A& H Club, competing in track, road and X country, I also continued coaching, and absorbing information

from club stalwarts like Bill Fell , Jack Ralston and Geoff Shaw.. I spent two enjoyable years with Calliope, and was then offered a position with the Waitemata Athletic Club as their club coach.

9. This was a great opportunity and I was able to combine my variety of athletic experiences into a solid coaching programme for athletic events for the Senior Club (14years up)..I was a member of the Auckland Coaches Association and was pleased to be asked to coach at the various school holiday programmes organized by Sylvia and Alan Potts. From these coaching occasions , several athletes were attracted to Waitakere from other outer areas, which did not have the Winter facilities provided by the Waitak club. We were able to train on our own grass 300 metre track. We had our own floodlights which we could switch on any time. We had access to a gym area for Winter High Jumping, as well as a small weights gym. I coached all events , and we were able to supply most of the Harbour United team which contested the Northern League for several years. My club training group gained NZ Colts and NZ Junior Men titles , as well as many NZ Schools titles – track, field and X country. In fact my training squad scored 5 NZ Schools titles at Hamilton one year – ranging from 800 metres to Triple jump. I also organized team visits to the Hastings Highland Games, NZ Schools X country Champs, as well as trips to various road relays, both womens and mens teams. The club had not previously had a Winter section , and I was able to persuade the Club Committee that it would be a success, and it was.
10. After 4 years with Waitakere, I applied for a similar position nearer my home, with the Calliope club. I was again successful with my application, and 1978 saw me installed as club coach. I was able to apply my varied coaching skills to the Calliope athletes, and the training group soon had very successful womens as well as mens teams, who had some exciting wins on the road relay circuit. The squad also provided successful marathon runners , as well as Auckland and New Zealand representatives. Victories in the Owairaka 10k road race, the Wellsford to Te Hana 5K and the Manurewa 10K. were outstanding. Successes were also enjoyed in the track and field events. The club performed well in the League meetings, and there were many fine performances which showed that the “minority” events were also being encouraged.
11. Unfortunately, I had to temporarily retire from athletics coaching in 1982, in order to complete my Accountancy studies at AUT. My son had recently taken up triathlons, and I joined him by starting out with duathlons, and picking up on my swimming training. I maintained my interest in sport, and started to improve my library of coaching books and various material to enhance my knowledge of Anatomy, Athletic Techniques, Strength and Conditioning, Plyometrics etc.,which proved to be very useful in mentoring fellow multi event competitors. I then started trail running, and competed in a number of these events over the years.
12. Fortune smiled on me in 2009 when an old mate – Roy Williams- contacted me , and asked if I would like to do a spot of coaching in tandem with him at the Waitakere City Athletic club, where he had been coaching for a number of years. . I jumped at the opportunity, and was immediately impressed by all the changes that had taken place since I was last at the club. One of the first coaches I met was Rob Davis, who had been an athlete of mine some years previously. The club was growing and I was really happy to work with the other coaches,, and soon had a number of beginner athletes in my care.
13. The excellent facilities at the Trusts Stadium enabled me to gather a great group of young athletes . I responded to the athletes’ requests and spread the choice of events as wide as possible. Over the years we concentrated on the basics, and young athletes like Jamie Speer, Liam Back and Dominic Overend responded with some excellent progress, which has not yet ended many years later.. In 2015 I attended a coaching course headed by Mike Powell with my best long jumper -Jamie Speer. We both were impressed by the great event knowledge of the World Record Holder, and the experience was very rewarding..

14. The group trained twelve months a year, and I used the Indoor track/ weights room to stage sprints and jump tests to gauge the athlete's KPI progress, during the Winter. There were up to 20 athletes involved overall. Because it was a young group we started with the Junior Section, and over the initial seven years we achieved 11 first three places in the Auckland Pentathlon champs. We also featured in the medals in the Colgate Games and the Tran Tasman Champs. As the athletes grew and developed we progressed to Auckland Titles and NZ Schools medals. By 2016 we scored 10 Auckland titles, and six Greater Auckland Schools titles. Our other successes ranged from Sprints, Jumps, Throws to X country and Road races. Plus I introduced the Triple Jump into the club night programme. At the NZ Senior Champs, we placed 5th in the U18 HJ, 6th in the U18 Triple, 6th in the U20 triple jump. Jamie was NZ ranked 3rd in the U18 Triple, and we scored our first success in the NZ Heptathlon Champs.(8th).
15. I attended the Les Gramantik Combined events Coaching weekend in October 2016. One of my Heptathlon athletes was used as a study by Les, and we both had a terrific learning experience.
16. In October 2016, I decided the time was right for me to move on, and after speaking to Russ and Club Captain Paul I joined the Bays club. I was fortunate that several of my athletes decided to transfer with me, and we were made most welcome by coaches and athletes alike. My training group settled at twelve strong, and we appreciated the Millennium facilities, especially the floodlights. We supported the Mt Smart meetings in the new club uniforms, and started to produce some good PB results. At the 2016 NZ Schools Champs we contested, the 400, the 200, the Shot, 80m hurdles, Discus, the High jump, the Triple jump, the javelin and the Long Jump. Ten athletes contested the National event, scoring two thirds, four fourths, and two sixth placings.
17. The New Year of 2017 started well with nine medals gained at the Auckland Champs. The Greater Auckland Schools athletic champs was another highlight, where the group gained 4 golds, 2 silvers and two bronze medals. Other successes were scored at the North Island Schools Champs. The training group had consolidated, and plans were laid for the Winter build up and conditioning.. I started a special weekly session for Steeplechasers (with their coaches permission), and this proved very successful, with a regular group honing their jumping and hurdling skills. The regular Winter training continued with the track and the grass running, weights, plyometrics etc, Most of the work was completed outdoors, only using the indoor Sports Hall when weather intervened.
18. Summer 2017 arrived, and Mt Smart provided the opportunity for several PBs. On 11/11 our group won five of the age groups Triple Jump competitions held. The Steeplechasers were also recording PBs. These competitions led up the NZ Schools Champs where we won one silver, two bronze and a 4<sup>th</sup>.placing. Next up was the Senior North Island Champs, where we recorded two golds and a silver.
19. The new year of 2018 commenced with a very successful Steeples "teach in", featuring Steve Hollings (ex GB Olympian.). He spoke and demonstrated to a select band of athletes –Amanda and Jeremy Holyer, Sam Cadwallader, Cameron de lisle, and guest from Wanganui -Liam Back. Steve was excellent value, and elicited some very intelligent questions from his entranced audience.
20. The North Harbour Schools champs proved quite successful with 9 wins, two seconds and three thirds. Followed by the Auckland Champs which were good value, and the group scored 4 golds, 1 silver and 3 bronze. Next big comp was the NZ Senior Champs where we placed with a silver, two fourths and a sixth.

21. 2018 Winter training was again enjoyed at a variety of venues, running in the bush, across parks, various running tracks, and the ubiquitous hills. All most enjoyable, with forays into the sports hall for exercises, weights, resistance training etc. Because we were covering a variety of events, the training was also varied, and therefore more interesting for the athletes. I became involved with the Club Development group, and enjoyed the experience. I also began to help several Para athletes, and was most impressed by the determination of the athletes, and their parents. I was asked to help the Steeplechasers again, and jumped (pun intended) at the opportunity.
22. The Summer finally arrived and we attended the early Mt Smart meetings. Winter preparation had set up the training group to succeed, and we had two new male sprinters to prepare. Their progress was very encouraging, and the jumpers had come out of their indoor training very well too. The Senior North Island Champs was again a success. WE placed 3rd in the Open Triple Jump, and second in the Long Jump, also placing second in the U18 event. The Inter Provincial Champs were rewarding, with a win in the U16 Triple . Jumps and Sprints were our forte at the Auckland Champs, scoring eight titles, two seconds and a fourth place..
23. Following another productive training Winter, the 2020 Summer has been enjoyable, and I have taken more interest in the Masters athletic competitions, as well as encouraging the teenage athletes in my group.. Group Members contested The NZ Masters indoor champs for the first time and scored three medals. The North Island Masters Champs produced one title and three medals overall. One of my athletes won the The Auckland Masters Pentathlon champs MW40, at her first attempt. The Inter Provincial junior champs produced two medals. Auckland Champs were quite successful with 11 medals gained (including 5 titles). A MW 40 title was won at the Waikato Masters Champs., plus two place medals. Our star Masters athlete also travelled to Hastings for the NZ Masters Champs. She won 3 golds, 4 silvers and 3 bronze medals. She enjoys learning new events, and I enjoy coaching her.
24. I have tried to show my experience as a coach. Initially, my biggest slice of beginners luck has been to be coached by Olympians, and to train with Olympians. Over the succeeding years experiences have made me a good coach who cares about my athletes. Some of my current squad have been with me for a number of years. The group has naturally changed over the years, but I try to keep to the values that have impressed themselves upon me during competing and coaching.  
I am now over 80 years old, but the desire to coach and help athletes of all ages is still as strong as ever. I look forward to an enjoyable year with Waitakere City Athletic Club..

. MJM.

All the best in sport  
Mike Marston.