

A potted history of Athletics South

*(Adapted from speech notes prepared for the Athletics South
50th anniversary dinner held in February 2005.)*

On 16 September 1954 the inaugural meeting of the Southern Amateur Athletic Branch was conducted in the RSL Building, Macquarie Street, Hobart.

The meeting was convened by Mr G. T. Briggs. The minutes of the meeting note that *'a number of persons were present'* so we do not have recorded for posterity all of those who were present. The minutes do, however, reveal some of the names. For example Messrs John Cooper and Max Cherry moved that Mr C A (Froggy) Wise be appointed to Chair the meeting and Bill Barwick the then President of the Tasmanian Amateur Athletic Association (TAAA) – now known as Athletics Tasmania - moved a motion in relation to the naming of the Branch.

Mr Neil Ashdown was subsequently elected as the first President and Mr Graeme Briggs as Secretary/Treasurer. Amongst the officials appointed at the first Committee meeting were Froggy Wise as Starter and George Norris as the Honorary Chronographer (the man who made sure the stop watches were accurate).

Club delegates from New Town, University and Sandy Bay attended the first meeting with Sandy Bay represented by Max Cherry and Froggy Wise. Over time Eastern Suburbs, Northern Suburbs, OHA, AYC, Van Dieman, and Altius were to be formed with varying success.

Registration fees were set at 5 shillings (approx. 50 cents) for seniors, 3 shillings (approx. 30 cents) for Juniors (under 19) and 2 shillings (approx. 20 cents) for sub juniors (under 17). A financial statement produced in December 1954 indicated that the bank balance stood at a very healthy 44 pound and 5 shillings. But all was not well as a special committee was set up at the first AGM to investigate the drop off in athlete numbers.

The early minutes present in part a social history of Hobart. A decision was taken to approach local businesses for donations. These included The Mercury, Electrolytic Zinc Company (now Nyrstar), Cadbury Fry Pascall, Fitzgeralds, Jones and Co., Cascade Brewing Company, Tasmanian Lotteries, Charles Davis, Johnstone and Miller, Bidencopes, T J Cane and Co., A G Webster and Sons, Roberts and Co. and Nettlefolds. Many of these pillars of local business of the day no longer exist.

A number of people have made a significant contribution to the Southern Amateur Athletic Branch, the Southern Athletic Branch and, now Athletics South. Some of them are unfortunately no longer with us while others continue to contribute to our sport. To name them all is an impossible task and would inevitably lead to omissions. Some are highlighted in the following.

There have been 16 Presidents since 1954. Those who have served three years or more include Les Spears, Graeme Briggs, Robin Hood, Ken McNamara, Wayne Fletcher, Gary Sayer, Rene Sluyters and Steve Wass. In the role of Secretary/Executive Director Graeme Briggs added 9 years to his 9 as President. Other names to feature prominently in this role include George Livingston, Don Murray, Irene Lovell, Ted Best and Helen Lee. Helen Lee is currently in her 18th year as Executive Director.

The longest serving Treasurers/Finance Directors have included Noel Ruddock, Owen Colman, Tony Blanton and Greg Hawthorn.

Only 16 life memberships have been bestowed since 1954. Noel Ruddock received his in 1962, some 48 season ago.

The quality of the Branch officials has been quite outstanding. Led by Graeme Briggs and Noel Ruddock local interclub competition has, over the years, been rated as good as any conducted in the country and there is little wonder that local officials have, and continue to play a major role in any major national or international competitions conducted in Australia. Any discussion of officials would be remiss in not mentioning the leading lights of yesteryear, Mavis Ebzery and Doreen Frawley.

The coaching scene has also been characterised by quality and some long term servants. Froggy Wise, Max Cherry, Gordon Weigand, Graeme Stoward, Tony Zito, Albert Johnson, Kevin Prendergast, Alan Barker, Rex Morris, Rita Whitehouse, Peter McDonald, Evan Peacock and Mike Pace have ensured that a constant stream of quality athletes have graced our tracks, field and roads.

Interclub competition was initially held on North Hobart Oval where a Saturday morning program was conducted under the pressure of having to be completed by 12.30 pm to allow the cricket players to take over. The grass track at North Hobart saw two world records. Betty Cuthbert ran 23.2sec over 220 yards in 1960 and Ron Clarke ran 13min 34.8 sec for 5,000m in 1965.

In 1977 the Branch moved its competition to the then brand new synthetic surface of the Domain Athletic Centre. For the first time athletics had its very own home base.

In 2004, as part of the 50th anniversary celebrations, the top ten male and female athletes of the previous 50 years were announced. They were:

Male: Simon Bresnehan, David Chettle, John Denholm, William Hamlyn Harris, Brendan Hanigan, Simon Hollingsworth, Steven Knott, Randal Markey, Justin McDonald, Kent Rayner. Simon Hollingsworth was ranked number 1.

Female: Susan Andrews, Elaine Frawley, Mandy Giblin, Andrea Hughes, Loretta Kiss, Gail Luke, Jocelyn Millar-Cubit, Gabrielle Prenter, Kylie Risk, Donna MacFarlane. Kylie Risk was ranked number 1.

The achievements of these athletes that lead to their selection are appended.

This information reveals that local athletics has produced a number of athletes who have represented Australia in Olympic and Commonwealth Games as well as the World Championships. Since 1954 countless Australian champions have commenced their careers within the Athletics South competition.

While producing elite athletes Athletics South has, however, always been focussed on grass root athletics by encouraging participation by people of all abilities whether it be as an athlete, an official, a coach or as an administrator. The adage that there is a place for everybody in athletics has never been truer than when applied to the operations of Athletics South.

The top 10 male and female athletes who competed as members of clubs based in Athletics South competition during the period 1954 – 2004. The information presented was current at the time of selection i.e. February 2005.

Male

Honourable mentions – David Huxley, Russell Foley, Greg Robertson, Troy Bennett, Murray Bird.

Simon Bresnehan

One of the few state athletes able to successfully combine professional athletics with so called amateurs, Simon earned his place through an extended career at a high level. He is officially our fastest ever sprinter with his state records of 10.56 for the 100 and 20.92 for the 200m.

David Chettle

Marathon man David Chettle was competitive with the world's best of his era and performed at the head of the field in marathons all over the world. He represented Australia in the 1976 Olympics and the 1978 Commonwealth Games. His best time of 2hrs 10min 20sec set at Fukuoka, Japan in December 1980 still sees him ranked at 8 on the Australian All time list. David was also an accomplished track and cross country athlete and represented Australia at the 1977 World Cross Country Championships in a team that included Robert de Castella and our own Kent Rayner. His 28min 19sec for 10,000m set in 1977 still sees him included in the Australian All Time rankings for the event.

John Denholm

John 'Curly' Denholm was a champion middle distance athlete of the 1960's and early seventies. His best distance was the mile at which he was nationally ranked and he had many stirring tussles with his Eastern Suburbs team mate Greg Blake on the grass at North Hobart Oval. His best time for the mile was 4min 01sec. He represented Australia as a member of a 4x1mile team that toured New Zealand. His career highlights included a win over Ron Clarke at North Hobart Oval in a mile race, and being a member of a team that broke the Australian mile medley relay record.

William Hamlyn Harris

Now based in Sydney, William Hamlyn Harris represented Australia at the 2002 Manchester Commonwealth Games and the 2004 Athens Olympics as a javelin thrower. His best throw of 85.60m ranked him 11th in the world in 2004 and at the time placed him second on the Australian All Time list.

Brendan Hanigan

Despite the fact that the late Greg Blake had a victory over the great Herb Elliot over 880 yards in the late 1950's, and a young Bob Annells was world ranked with 1min 48.8sec as a 20 year old, Brendan Hanigan is our best ever 800 metre runner. His best time of 1min 45.03sec set in Finland in 1994 sees him ranked at number 3 on the Australian All Time List. Brendan represented Australia at the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Victoria, Canada where he finished 5th in the final of a very competitive 800

metres event. He also competed at the 1995 World Championships. As an under 20 athlete Brendan won a bronze medal over 800 metres at the World Junior Championships in 1992.

Simon Hollingsworth

Simon represented Australia in the 1990 World Junior Championships in the 400m hurdles and was a member of the bronze medal winning Australian team in the 4x400m relay. In the same year Simon was also a member of the Australian team at the Auckland Commonwealth Games where he contested the 400m hurdles. He also represented Australia at the 1995 World Championships and the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. Simon was a talented athlete who ran 21.6 for 200m and 47.3 for 400m as a 16 year old.

He held the State 400m and 400m hurdles records at 45.99 and 49.26 respectively until broken recently by Tristan Thomas.

Steven Knott

The mercurial Steven Knott first leap to national prominence when competing as a junior (under 20) he won both the junior and senior long jump championships in the same weekend. Steven represented Australia at the 1982 Brisbane Commonwealth Games. His best long jump was 7.76m set in 1982. He also competed with considerable success at the pole vault and high jump. He still holds the state pole vault record of 4.50m set in 1980.

Randal Markey

Randal had a brilliant career as a 1500m runner and was also good enough over 5,000m to still hold the State record at 14.04.0. A young Markey represented Australia at the 1974 Commonwealth games and was a finalist in what proved to be, at the time, the fastest 1500m race ever run. The winning time of 3.32.2 by Filip Bayi broke the world record.

Randal studied on an athletics scholarship in the US. His best 1500m time of 3.39.98 was recorded in Philadelphia, USA in 1976. This is still the Tasmanian record.

Justin McDonald

Hammer thrower Justin McDonald was State Hammer Champion on several occasions and held a number of under age records. Justin's career highlights include representing Australia at the 1998 World Cup held in South Africa and as a 19 year old winning the hammer at an international meet in Singapore with a throw of 64m. He was consistently ranked in the top 3 throwers in the nation. His best throw was 66.98m.

Kent Rayner

Kent represented Australia twice – in the 1973 Pacific Conference Games in Canada and in the 1977 World Cross Country Championships in West Germany. He rates these together with his win in the National cross country championships held at Brighton Racecourse in 1976 as his career highlights. Kent still holds the State 1 hour record which he set in 1979. In the same year he set records in the City to Casino Fun Run and in the King of the Mountain road race event. His best time for 10,000m was 28.44 set in 1976.

Female top 10

Honourable mentions – Lauren Jauncey, Trudy Fenton, Sue Rush, Susan Johnston

Susan Andrews

Susan Andrews had an outstanding career as a 400m, and subsequently, 800m athlete. She represented Australia in the 400m at the 1990 World juniors and was a member of the gold medal winning 4x400m team. She followed up with a silver medal in the 4x400m team at the 1990 Commonwealth Games where she also contested the individual 400m and competed at the Atlanta Olympics in the 4x400m team. In 1998 Susan was a member of the Australian team that won gold in the 4x400m at the Commonwealth Games. She followed this with a silver medal in the 4x400m at the 1999 World Indoors.

Susan moved up to 800m in 2000 with outstanding results. She represented Australia in her second Olympics in Sydney contesting the 800m and the 4x400m relay.

Elaine Frawley

Together with the talented Sue Rush, Elaine dominated local women's sprinting for much of the 1960's and early 70's. Elaine and her family were an integral part of the local athletics scene. Competitive at a national level Elaine's career highlight was a win in the national 440 yards title towards the end of a stellar career.

Mandy Giblin

Mandy Giblin rose to prominence in 1997 when she won the national 1500m title. She was subsequently selected in the 1998 World Cup and 1998 Commonwealth Games team for the 1500m and also represented Australia at the 1999 World Cross Country Championships. Mandy was also a member of the Australian teams that contested the international Ekiden Relays in 1997, 1998, 1999. Mandy's best 1500m time of 4.12.27 set in 1998 is still the Tasmanian record.

Andrea Hughes

Andrea Hughes had an outstanding career as a high jumper winning an Australian title at every age group from under 13 to Senior. Her nonchalant manner masked a very competitive edge as she always seemed to rise to the occasion when it mattered the most. Andrea represented Australia at the World Junior Championships in 1990 and in 1992 and at the Commonwealth Games in 1994. Her best jump of 1.91m set in February 1994 is the current Tasmanian record.

Loretta Kiss

Also an outstanding high jumper, Loretta Kiss was one of 8 Tasmanians chosen to represent Australia in the 1988 World Junior Championships. A mark of Loretta's ability is the fact that, despite Andrea Hughes' outstanding career, Loretta still holds the State Under 20 record at 1.87m.

Gail Luke

Gail Luke was good enough over 800m to represent Australia at the 1990 Auckland Commonwealth Games however making a switch to 400m hurdles proved to be a good move as Gail met with considerable success at this event culminating in her selection for the 1992 Olympic team. Gail's 55.92 set in 1992 is still the State record for 400m hurdles as is her 2.1.57 for 800m.

Jocelyn Millar-Cubit

With her sister Gail, Jo occupies a unique position with both being selected in our top 10 women athletes. Jo had an outstanding career as a multi event athlete earning selection for no less than three Commonwealth Games in the heptathlon – 1982 Brisbane, 1986 Edinburgh and 1990 Auckland. Jo rates these and her gold medal in the 1985 Pacific Conference Games in San Francisco in 1985 as career highlights. A little known fact is that Jo competed at 15 national championships and medalled at every championship – a unique performance in Tasmanian athletics. Jo still holds the State records for 100m hurdles, long jump and heptathlon.

Gabrielle Prenter

Gabby Prenter wins her place as one of the State's best ever javelin throwers and this despite the fact that injury curtailed her career at an early age. Gabby represented Australia at the World Junior Championships in 1988. Her best throw of 49.66m was set in 1987 when she was 17.

Kylie Risk

Tasmania's best ever female distance athlete, Kylie represented Australia on almost too many occasions to detail here. It has included 2 Olympic Games – Atlanta in 1996 and Sydney in 2000, Commonwealth Games in 1998, 6 World Cross Country Championships, the 1995 World Mountain Running Cup and the 1997 World Track Championships.

Kylie's career highlight was her silver medal in the 10,000m at the Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games. Apart from this she also lists her 4th place in the Atlanta Peach Tree Race and wins in the Sydney to Surf and Burnie Ten as other highlights. She holds the State 3k, 5k and 10k records. The 10k record is an exceptional 31.51.71 set in Canada in 1996.

Donna MacFarlane

A young Donna Tyberek made her mark early in her career winning medals at national under age championships before representing Australia twice in the international Ekiden Relays – in Beijing in 1999 and Seoul in 2000. Back in 2005 it was noted that Donna took to the introduction of the steeple for women with zest and had a best time of 10.36.69. Of course subsequent to this, in a well documented return to athletics, Donna MacFarlane won a bronze medal in the steeple at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games and has represented Australia at the World Championships and the Olympic Games in Beijing.