

Account by Jerry Haire of early days of the UWA Athletic Club.

Prepared after the 50th Anniversary Dinner on 18th August 1978

Just as he has set us off to a perfect start in this "relay" account of the Club's history from its foundation, so did [Griff. Richards](#) work with untiring zeal and industry marked by meticulous probing for detail when he did so much to get the Club "out of the holes." His account barely suggests the amount of organizing he did, the great effort he made to set the U.A.C. going along correct lines. His energy was grenade-like in its explosive scatter. It embraced all aspects of the organization needed for the establishment of a University Athletic Club. He used his many talents as a journalist and as a passionate supporter of athletics in fostering a young club. The Club's eminence in WA's athletics arena today is in no small measure due to the sound foundation so securely laid under his direction.

And so I take up the baton for the second leg of the U.A.C. saga.

Season 1930 At the Club's Annual General Meeting on April 7th 1930, presided over by Griff Richards, [Ralph Honner](#) was elected President, [Bob Nunn](#) Captain, Mick Driver, Vice Captain with Bill Graham Treasurer and Jim Espie, Noel Hampshire and G. Nelson committee men. As Secretary I was lucky in having such a stalwart as Ralph Honner with his keen legal mind and his studious approach to athletics as President. My own natural love for the sport had been stimulated at the Claremont Teachers' College (1928-29) where Gordon Appleton, Bill Potts, Tom Nadebaum, Bill English and Tom O'Shaughnessy had been keen participants. Gordon ("Appy") later was to become a tremendous force in the U.A.C., occupying positions as President and Captain. On the track he recorded brilliant performances as State champion sprinter on many occasions as well as performing with distinction in the quarter mile and quarter mile hurdles - in which latter event he invariably ran himself almost to extinction. Bill Potts, too, later broke the U.A.C. high jump record of the time with a leap of 5'10 1/8."

We began the 1930 season with a scratch meeting on the Esplanade at the foot of Mill Street on an area now largely car park. This was the first of the projected fortnightly Sunday morning meetings. There were no facilities for jumping events, competition was limited to races over 100-880 yards and the shot put. We changed at the St George's Hostel in the Terrace where some of the lads were living. The track was rough and bumpy and the wind strong off the wide reaches of the river, but the spirit, augmented by an occasional whiff from one or other of the neighbouring breweries, was strong. According to "The Pelican" of the time we received "unstinted applause from half a dozen unemployed, sundry lovers concealed by bits of scenery and quite a number of small boys."

[Dr Les Le Souef](#), after winning the event at 34 ft 2ins, gave instructions in the art of shot putting. From those early days through to the present Les has been a friend indeed to the Club. Techniques in shot-putting he passed on to our big men [Harry Wilson](#), [Keith Allen](#) and [Frank Drew](#) while his interest in the Club's development over the years has been a most stimulating one.

Earlier in the year at the invitation of the Y.M.C.A. Harriers Club, we had been represented in a Two Mile Championship at Ascot Race Course. There were only three of us Win McClintock, Bill Graham and myself so we could claim no points (we needed six for a team). But it was significant, the Club was beginning to gird its loins for later competition.

We entered a strong team including one of the best milers the State has known in Geoff Bourne, in the Fremantle-Perth Relay. From the Fremantle Town Hall to the foot of Mill Street there were seven sections - 3, 2, 1, 1/2, 2 and 1 1/2 miles with a 1000 yard dash along the grass verge to the finish. Our representatives, McClintock, Graham, Bailey, Halliday, Haire, Jones and Bourne won fairly comfortably from Y.M.C.A. and Hale School Old Boys. The victory gave us a good lead in the points competition for the Sandover Cup.

The Interclub Competitions were held during the winter season and we often experienced trouble

from wet weather which sometimes necessitated the cancelling of events like the hurdles when the track was declared unsafe.

This year (1930) saw the innovation of club being pitted against club. There were six clubs - Y.M.C.A., H.S.O.B., Western Suburbs, C.T.C., Modern School and the U.A.C. There was no central home ground. We moved on different Saturdays to ovals at Guildford Grammar School, Hale School (Kings Park), Modern School and later the University. Competitors and officials shared the job of marking the grounds and setting up apparatus and materials. Much of the work was done on Saturday mornings with rush jobs impinging on the start of the afternoon programme or even taking up a few minutes between events. Nobody seemed to mind as long as there was a competition. It was not surprising occasionally, when a claim was made for a record, to find a track a yard or so short - but it was all taken as part of the game. The sportsmanship was splendid - and inspiring.

Material and equipment We initially used binder twine for lanes, superseded by white marking or saw-dust. Heavy rain often caused trouble by washing out some of the marks. Indeed, it was not uncommon on wet days, for competitors to run round re-marking a faint lane just before their race.

In the Pole Vault the earliest poles used were bamboo with a steel spike in the end. The spike would be thrust into the grass as the vaulter took off. Our own oval around the edge was soft enough anyhow and landing on the sandy verge wasn't too hazardous an exercise coming down from 8-9 feet. Of course the soft sandy take-off (as in the high jump) became a ploughed area and secure holding was a matter of luck. But with the introduction of the wooden box and more orthodox poles, Bill Buckley was soon climbing over heights of 11 feet plus.

Our hurdles were imposing structures made from stout jarrah. They took some toppling and if you struck the jarrah cross piece plumb centre, it usually shattered leaving the uprights standing in gaunt isolation.

High jump pits presented a problem. At first no pits were used for the high jump or the pole vault. It was not until the introduction of the Western Roll style that the "pit," often a heap of sand scattered on the surface, came into use. Even in 1936 at the Australian Championships on Adelaide Oval, the authorities refused to provide a landing pit of any sort for the high jump and jumpers were forced to land on a hard grass surface. This restriction was not a surprising one, I suppose, since this was the Oval where Sir Donald Bradman was wont to make his dazzling centuries. At Hobart, in the same year a pit was provided but it was sunk through a granite sub stratum so that its edges showed menacing rock clinkers probably crushed from the Mt Wellington quarries.

I vividly recall, in my first jump, scraping the outer edge with my shoe. At the next height I could get no lift at all. Subsequently I discovered that every spike, including even the heel spike, had been neatly and uniformly turned so that the shoe acted as a grappling iron when its "spikes" entered the grass in the approach and take off. So jumpers - look to your shoes!

Another hazard that worried the western roll high jumper was that a foul jump would be ruled if the jumper's head dropped below his body as he crossed the bar. So, in his approach he would get a fleeting glimpse of judges on the far side flattening themselves on their bellies to decide whether the jump was legal or not.

Officials Officials of the period were a hardy and patient lot. They often had to stand out in wet and cold conditions; frequently they helped in preparing the ground. If I tried to name them all the list would be too long. Some names come readily to mind. [Lindsay's](#) father Dr Gray, Les Le Souef, Mr Bourne, Mr Treacy (Theo's father), Mr Pickering and Mr Tyrie were great helpers. Tol Downing (President) and Jim McDonald (Secretary) of the Association were excellent administrators. Tol was a stickler for correct procedure whether at formal meetings or as Referee. His contribution to the correct running of the W.A.A.A. was indeed noteworthy, he encouraged the sport to the limit but he insisted that it be conducted along the right lines. Jimmy Mac was a tireless Secretary - pleasant, co-operative and highly efficient. He certainly set a standard which later was so capably maintained for many years by Theo Treacy.

The Starter The Starter for most of the events both inter-club and for the relays held during the half-time intervals at the football matches on Subiaco Oval, was Lieutenant G. Douglas. On the staff at Guildford Grammar School, he had been an English Army Officer. Dressed in gray, his matching gray handle-bar moustache neatly bristling, tall, erect as a ramrod, he was an imposing figure. In a loud, measured tone - he was precise and militarily correct in all his movements and commands - he called "Gentlemen! On Your Marks! Get Set!" and the **GUN**. I can hear the explosion now. It must have been a Colt .45 for it had a mighty report. There was something about Lt. Douglas's stance and his words of command that inspired awe and confidence. False starts were very rare indeed. (*The Douglas Memorial Shield was later instituted in his memory*).

Friends and Helpers

There were many friends and helpers. Geoff Bourne's father was a fatherly friend to the University athletes. Although directly interested in his son, of whom he had every reason to be proud, he would spend his time generously, especially when we ran at Subiaco Oval - rubbing us down sometimes even when we were competing against Geoff. He was regularly on hand as an official time-keeper or judge.

Cars were scarce at the beginning of the 1930's. We were lucky to have Uni graduates like Jack Hetherington who helped us with transport in the Fremantle-Perth Relays ferrying us between change-over points.

Thus you see we were a happy family. Competition was keen enough. Doubtless we did not specialize to the same extent that present day athletes must specialize if they wish to reach the top. Our methods of training and preparation may have been somewhat haphazard but we had a lot of fun deriving support and inspiration from a wide circle of friends.

Points Competition The Club moved from the the Esplanade to Crawley for our Sunday morning meetings on August 24th. Conditions here were better enabling us to include the hurdles, pole vault and high jump events in our points competition. I can remember the small shed in the corner of the oval. Here we changed amidst all kind of lumber including bags of lime, fertilisers etc used by the ground staff.

Inter-Club Competition During 1930 there were 5 rounds of track and field competitions each club meeting every other team in turn. Unbeaten during the series, the U.A.C. scored 138 points to Y.M.C.A's 59 thus winning the Sandover Cup for that season. We had won a sprint relay, the Fremantle-Perth Relay and gained second place in the 5 mile cross-country teams race conducted in conjunction with the State 5 Mile Championship at Ascot in August. Bill Graham performed particularly well in this event running second.

Our success over the season was due to our overall strength in every department.

University Championships October 11 was a red letter day for the U.A.C. as in the 19 events, 15 records were broken. Engineering (45) won the inter-faculty title from Arts (37) and Law (20).

And H.B. Wilson he was there

A mighty man and all;

He'd hold the disc between his teeth

while flickering out the ball.

Yes, Harry, a huge 18 stone, 6 ft athlete, amazingly mobile, showed his remarkable versatility by winning the 440 yards (54 secs), discus throw (109'8") shot put (34' 11") tied for first in the 220 (23.6 secs) and was second in the broad jump (19' 1 ½").

In the Women's championships [Elsie Tolerton](#), as well as being a member of the victorious Arts team in the inter faction relay, made a clean sweep of the programme, establishing herself as a worthy forerunner of our Olympic representative, the great Shirley Strickland.

Her victories in the 50, 100 and 220 yards, broad jump, hop, step and jump were all records - truly a meritorious performance. Had Life-Be-In-It Norm been on the ground watching Elsie I'm sure he would have been delighted to remain a spectator.

This the Second Annual Meeting on the University Oval controlled by Dr. Les Le Souef, was certainly an auspicious occasion; it marked a big step forward in the Club's history.

Acquiring Techniques Difficulties faced the athlete keen to develop new techniques and better style. Coaches with expert knowledge and ability were just not available. Certainly we were fortunate in having Les to instruct in the shot put - he had had experience and had the skill both to demonstrate and guide tyros. But generally one had to rely on books, periodicals, newspaper articles and photographs of champions in action.

The cinema, at rare intervals, gave a close-up of a runner or jumper in motion. From "stills" it was almost impossible to visualize a complete action. Take the case, for instance, of the Western Roll high jump technique. I was completely baffled as to how the American champion record holder H.M. Osborne got himself into such a complete lay-out position in clearing 6' 8 ¼."

Text book descriptions helped but did not solve the problem. I practised "rolling" over the waves at Cottesloe but found a shifting sand based take-off out of a foot of swirling water a difficult proposition. On my parents' farm I rigged up a sort of gallows - a rope dangling from a convenient overhead tree limb on the approach side of the jump gave support as I grasped it with both hands and hoisted myself over the cross-bar to land on a sack of lucerne hay. Well, I suppose if you're keen enough you'll try anything.

"Getting Out of the Holes"

This expression is out-moded these days. But it meant literally, just what it says. In the pre-starting block era runners actually dug holes in the track to give support to the pressure of their starting thrust. The starter (well equipped with essentials like a cricket umpire) usually carried a trowel which could be used by the runners. However, several top sprinters such as Appy or Bill Hudson both expert in "getting away" would fashion an implement to suit their own particular type of starting hole. It could be a table knife carefully honed and shaped to lift the turf out according to the athlete's particular foot shape. Of course this practice of hole digging posed a problem for groundsmen particularly at Subiaco Oval and you'd be reminded in no uncertain terms to "fill-in" when you'd finished using your excavation. And you can imagine an 18 stoner like Harry Wilson would need quite a fair lump of earth removed to provide a secure foot hold.

Sometimes when couch was sparse, there would be a scarified area behind the starting line which would cause a sensitive groundsmen like Archie of Leederville Oval to call down Scottish curses on all runners.

The State Championships on Leederville Oval concluded the 1930 season. The U.A.C. representatives performed better than any other club, gaining three State titles and seven places out of the 12 events contested. Two state records were set by Harry Wilson.

Season 1931 At the Annual General Meeting (19th March) recognition was given to the sterling service rendered the Club by Dr Les Le Souef and Mr Bourne - they were made an Honorary Life Member and Associate Life Member respectively. The management was now in the hands of Bob Nunn (President) Geoff Bourne (Vice President and Captain) Win McClintock (Vice Captain), Bill Buckley (Secretary) Jim Espie (Treasurer) with Noel Hampshire, Bob Jones, Jack Tolerton and Ken van Raalte committee men.

It is interesting to note that Misses E. Tolerton, C. Humphries and G. Love were also elected to the committee.

An amendment to Clause 7 had been passed at a committee meeting (May 21st 1930) to include 3 women as committee members at the next Annual General Meeting. Misses Pearson, Jackson and Tolerton had been acting as delegates to the committee from June 18th 1930.

The season began for us with a contest at Northam against the Northam Districts Athletic Club. Bill Walker, a club member of the previous year, was a keen supporter of athletics. Wherever he was posted by the Education Department he set about establishing an athletic club. He had performed creditably for the U.A.C. gaining places in the hop step and jump at the University and State Championships. Now he was fostering the sport at Northam where we had a highly successful meeting and an enjoyable day's outing.

With regards to this carnival the Club minutes of June 10 1931 have an interesting note. The Secretary was instructed to write to H.B. Wilson congratulating him on breaking his own State Discus Record at Northam, but at the same time, in a more formal approach, to ask him about the loss of the discus. One can only conjecture at this stage where and how far Harry had tossed that discus. He was forever improving his mark.

These meetings with the country club proved very enjoyable to all of us. The Northam District Association athletes were our guests at a meeting on the University Oval on August 23rd.

On October 4th representatives of several Perth clubs contested the very well organized Northam Athletic Championships on the East Northam Oval. By this time Harry must have salvaged the discus for he again broke his record with a throw of 114' 8."

The club had been greatly strengthened this year by the inclusion of Gordon Appleton and Bill Hudson, both outstanding sprinters. Gordon was rarely beaten "out of the holes" and his fine record of 100 and 220 yard victories is an imposing one. In the Subiaco Oval relay races he never failed to give us a good lead for the second leg. Strong and powerful, beautifully muscled on calves and thighs, he developed a long striding action. From a phenomenally fast thrust covering the first few yards he rapidly gathered momentum to develop tremendous speed over the first 50 yards or so. Bill ("Soapy") Hudson, lighter in build, was also a long striding runner. He was a delightfully graceful mover who revelled in the 220 yard sprints. "Appy" and "Soapy" fought out many close contests in the two sprints. I found training with them an exhilarating experience. We enjoyed many pleasant training sessions together on University Oval when we often claimed to be doing "Athletics 1."

Y.M.C.A., always a close rival, relegated us to second place in the first football relay on June 1st and in the Fremantle-Perth Relay, Western Suburbs, a new club, held us off. Y.M.C.A. had been a power in the land for some years; it had sponsored athletics, especially long distance running, from the late 1920's. It had been a driving force behind the establishment of the W.A.A.A. in 1928/29. A harrier's club originally, it developed all round strength in distance and sprint events so that a tussle with Y.M.C.A. was always a close one. Keen competitors they were but they were fine friendly rivals - chaps such as Andy and Roy Lang, Mick Gamble, Lance Farrant, Dick Horsely and Wally McKerracher were our friends on and off the track.

Our representatives in the Fremantle-Perth Relay were:- [Bert Craven](#) (3 miles), Bill Graham (2 miles), Lew Jones (1 mile), John Clough (1/2 mile), Winston McClintock (2 miles), John Burnett (1 1/2 miles) and myself (1/2 mile). Western Suburbs had a strong team of distance runners including George Ivison, a State 5-mile champion and Charlie Norman a very fine runner and we were defeated by 110 yards.

As the season progressed we gained points in another victory in a mile medley relay at Subiaco Oval. Then, gaining first place in all the ensuing interclub contests, we once again won the Sandover Cup.

The University Championships on October 10th were highly successful. Arts (63) outdistanced Science (36) and Engineering (34). At this meeting Bert Craven indicated that he was developing the endurance that was to prove so useful in the 1932 distance races.

The 1931 State Championships saw Bill Buckley and Bob Nunn respectively Pole Vault and Hurdles champions, while our sprinters Gordon and Bill were first and second in the 100 yards with the positions reversed in the 220 yards. The 440 yards was remarkable in that the two sprinters had to yield pride of place to the shot and discus champion Harry Wilson, who, with a paralysing finish, won in 53.8 secs giving him his third State title. "Appy's" domination in the 100 yards was clearly shown: in the four State Championships to this date he had won three with one second.

1932 Season

At the Annual General Meeting (16th March) Bill Hudson was elected President, J. Haire (Vice President and Captain), G. Appleton (Vice Captain), Ken van Raalte (Secretary), J. Clarkson (Treasurer) with committee members Bob Jones, Sandy Neville, Winston McClintock and Misses B. Brown, D. Pearson and E. Robertson.

A new vote was struck at the committee meeting of March 23rd when it was decided to hold a Fresher's Sports on April 16th. Unfortunately, trophies could not be provided for this meeting. Treasurer Jim Espie had pointed out at the Annual General Meeting that the Club was still struggling for funds in spite of the fact that the annual fee for men had been increased to 5 /-.

We began the competitive season with a win in the Fremantle-Perth Relay. This, our second victory in the annual encounter proved to be a hard struggle all the way. B. Craven (3 miles), J. Hector (2) G. Bourne (1/2), T. Walsh (2), F. Humphreys (1 ¼) and myself (1000 yards) made up the team. Fine performances were recorded by our younger runners Bert Craven and Jock Hector while both Fred Humphreys and Geoff Bourne ran particularly well.

This success was repeated in the 3 quarter mile relay a week later. On this occasion we were able to field a B grade team but it was not strong enough to gain a place.

Unfortunately, I sustained an injury (a ruptured Achilles tendon) during hurdling practice late in August and was forced to quit the athletic field until November 1934. (I have no records of the results of the rest of the 1932 season).

1933 Season Several new members were elected as office bearers at the Annual General Meeting of March 22 1933. They were Bill Potts (President), Gordon Appleton (Vice President and Captain) - the sole remaining representative of the 'old' brigade - Sandy Neville (Vice Captain), [Laurie Jupp](#) (Secretary), Roger Rossitter (Treasurer) with committee members Bert Craven, Jack Hector and [Fred Humphreys](#).

And so I hand over the baton to the next member of this relay team.

In looking back over the years I was associated with the U.A.C. as I have had to do in compiling this section 1930-32, I have re-lived many happy and exciting days. The sport was a grand one and I was privileged to meet many fine fellows and to cement many enduring friendships, many I've already referred to.

Let me just add a note on a couple more:

W.M. (Bob) Nunn Bob Nunn was a most gifted athlete, a quadruple blue, he excelled in rugby, swimming, rowing and athletics. He was strong, swift and as agile and supple as a monkey. A good sprinter and capable jumper his best event in which he showed rare finesse was the hurdles. His muscular control was remarkable - he could, for example, dive over a cross-bar set at 5'9" to land neatly in a shoulder roll on the grass on the far side. He was a grand competitor and fine club man.

Bill Buckley Here was another athlete who performed with distinction for several seasons in the jumping and hurdling events. He excelled in the pole vault and established a mortgage over the State Championship in this event for some years. He was no mean performer in all the jumps. Indeed, he was the first W.A. athlete to make effective use of the Eastern cut-off technique in the high jump and he developed a very graceful and neat action.

Bill Buckley jumped high and long

He hurdled well and all ;

But best of all he led the throng

In vaulting with the pole.

Bob Nunn could do most anything

But hurdled with finesse;

The high and broad - he'd even fling

The shot as well, I guess.

Now when these two opposed were

As sometimes came about

'Twas said of Bob he'd Buckley's chance

When vaulting honours sought

While as for Bill, his chances- Nunn

When hurdling race he fought.

Geoff Bourne

He made the 1 mile his pet race modelling his style on even lap time running. With a powerful, upright action he could always muster a fierce finishing burst. Though a master at the mile he could turn in a good 880 yards. He loved running and now in his 70's still runs regularly as an aid to fitness.

Two other men who gained many points in the distance events were Bill Graham and Winston McClintock. Bill, long and lean, had great staying power. His second in a State 5 mile Championship was perhaps his best performance though he turned in many fine runs over three or four seasons in the longer races, particularly in the Fremantle-Perth Relays.

Like Bill Graham, Winston McClintock was a keen club man who could be relied on to turn in a good effort in any race from ½ mile to 5 miles.

Earlier this year I was privileged to attend the dinner celebrating the U.A.C's 50th year. I was delighted to meet many of my friends of the early 30's and to swap reminiscences with them. It was particularly pleasing, I found, to meet the young athletes of today. They made us all feel so much at home - there was no "generation gap" here and we older members were enthusiastic in agreeing that the Club (as is proved, of course, by its galaxy of State Champions) is thriving and is in very capable hands.

May its success be long-lived and may it continue to foster the spirit which was so much in evidence on the night of the dinner.

Jerry Haire, 1978