



My athletics life

By

Derek Crowder

My athletics life started as a Junior at Grammar School during the 1950's.

My last race there was as an U17 and I was selected to run for

North East Derbyshire in the County Cross Country Championships.

I never ran as a Senior !

Whilst I can remember watching athletics from White City in London,

I played other sports such as football, cricket, badminton, squash

and cycled and walked mountains, moors etc.

In May 1981, I watched the televised first London Marathon and

decided I would love to take part.

I joined Bridgend YMCA running team and started to train properly for events.

I ran the first Cardiff Marathon in 1981 around the Barry and Vale course

finishing in a time of 3 hours and 33 minutes.

I applied for the 1982 London Marathon and was not accepted

I trained even harder during 1982 and in the September, I paced the first placed

Senior Lady, Sue Martin, to a finishing time of 3 hours and 4 minutes.

I applied for the 1983 London Marathon and was not accepted

I ran the Derby Ramathon in 1983 and achieved a time of 2 hours and 59 minutes.



The members of the YMCA club formed Bridgend AC with Roy Anthony as its first Chairman, and I followed him in that capacity.

Roy and I met members of Cardiff AAC and it was decided at the meeting to start the South Wales veterans track league. With my involvement in the new League, I became more and more involved with both Endurance and Track/Field events. The history of this movement and its development into the Welsh Masters Association can be read on the current Welsh Masters web site.

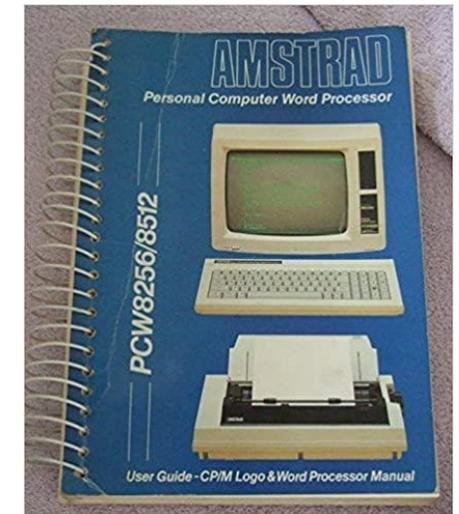
Whilst with Bridgend, I regularly ran with Steve, Stuart, Jacqueie etc and won team prizes.

When my son started at Comp School, he became interested in computing and he and I had our own systems and computers. The first notable one for me was the twin disc drive Amstrad computer. This allowed for integration of data between word processing, spreadsheets and reliable large databases. This was particularly useful to contact all of the 900 members of the Welsh Vets and inform them of events, races etc. I was also able to do label programs when necessary. Older people may remember Word Perfect, Supercalc and Dbase 4. Microsoft Word, Excel and Access took over as later products, but parts of their predecessors can still be found in commands and key strokes. The integrated software allowed me to organise the results for road races, and with Dbase programming language, I was able to do the results for Relay Races etc.

I have a memory of doing the results for a Cardiff 10k race in the cells of the old Cardiff Arms Park rugby stadium. My computer programme was used for the Welsh Championship relay events In Bridgend and elsewhere.

I applied for the 1984 London Marathon, was accepted and achieved a PB of 2 hours and 54 minutes. In 1985, I ran the London Marathon and achieved a time of 2 hours and 54 minutes and 11 seconds which was my life time PB. I ran 7 times in London, the last in 1995.

Altogether I ran 26 miles or further on 42 occasions, the longest being 40 miles.



In 1985, I took the preliminary exams in Field, Track and Time keeping and progressed to a level 4 Official in each discipline.

I had joined Swansea Harriers by this time, and not only officiated for them, I continued my running career also. As I progressed through the levels 4 to 3, 2 as an official, I travelled further afield and at a higher level of competition.

In my job, I was heavily involved in photography and I developed my own black and white films and enlarged, edited and also printed photographs. When Gwilym Jones of the Harriers discovered this, he invited me to join photo finish teams at Morfa Stadium and subsequently at Leckwith, Cwmbran and Wrexham Stadia.

In 1989, a disability match was arranged in Cwmbran Stadium and I was photo finish Chief. After the race, I had to produce forms and prints for records for Chris Hallam, Tanny Grey and others. My assistant at the match was Ros Alterman and John Tanner was in charge of the event.

I was Chief at a Welsh Games in Wrexham when my team was Phil James and Andrew Clatworthy and we needed 2 set ups as the sprints were run on the back straight !

In 1989 as a level 2 Official, I was asked to take on the role of Officials Secretary for Wales, and my first match at the new Leckwith Stadium was a Welsh Masters event on the Thursday evening and each event held set a Stadium record. However, each of these records was broken on the Saturday as a Uk match was held there.

I took the Advanced exam for field events, and on passing, was advanced to a Level 1 Field Official.



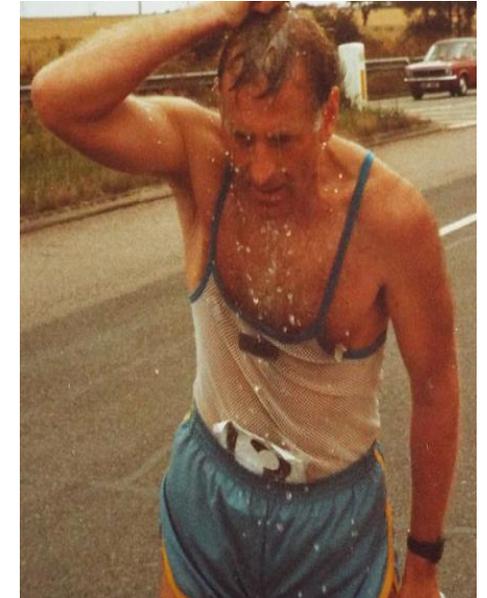
In 1991 as a veteran 50/54, my wife and I travelled to America for a holiday and whilst there I ran in a 10k race. I finished 7th in the race and won the V40/45 and V50/54 age group prizes and also first prize in a raffle. (1st V40/45 prize was a full service on a car, V50/54 prize was an oil change and the Raffle was a huge clock. Needless to say I had a hire car, the clock would not fit in a case so I handed them back for others as I could not make use of them)

I ran the Benidorm Marathon in very hot conditions, but the hottest by far was the Manchester Piccadilly Marathon which was also very humid. The wettest race was from Pencoed to Porthcawl when there was a thunderstorm when I was the tallest item on the course and most exposed.

My officiating had, by now, meant I was travelling to all parts of Wales for all Levels of matches from Championships, Welsh Games and league matches. At UK level, I was travelling more and more with Swansea Harriers to British tracks in the UK Mens league, and received invitations to Young Athlete Finals in Birmingham.

I was also being selected for UK Championships and invited to other matches also. I was invited to Gateshead Stadium for a European Clubs Championship match.

Reports were needed from higher level Officials at that time to progress through the grading system.



I needed a minimum of six good reports to achieve Level 1 Referee status and, of the ones requested, the hardest to be obtained was expected to be from Bob Ivory, alas no longer with us.

A Uk match in Cwmbran Stadium was selected and Bob and I met before the match started and discussed the day ahead of us. From the first event, it was a disastrous match.

Only four men had arrived so it was decided to combine events from that point onwards.

I had to change my duty list continually throughout the day and make major decisions on how the meeting would run.

Fearing the worst, I met Bob after the last event to discuss my performance, expecting the worst and for him to give me an adverse report. However, Bob was very congratulatory and gave me one of the best reports I ever received.

Thanks to him and the other Referee level Officials who had reported on me, I was upgraded to Level 1 Referee status which was the highest level to be obtained at that time. At the new level, I could officiate at any match in Great Britain.

My travels took me to Chrystal Palace, Sheffield, Birmingham, Glasgow, Gateshead, Manchester, Edinburgh and all the stadia in Wales.

At this level, I was acting as Field Referee at matches and also Technical Manager for the field events.

As a separate part of my duties, I was also tutoring and lecturing for new officials.

Indoor athletics were taking place in England, Scotland and Wales, and I attended Kelvin Hall, Birmingham and RAF St Athans. I was also the only Field Referee to have officiated at a Welsh Championships in an Indoor arena in West Wales.



As the 1990's progressed, computer photo finish was becoming available and was obtained for Welsh Athletics. As part of the equipment, a theodolite was purchased and Edm became available for long throws and pit jumps. Whilst at certain stadia, there were fixed areas to set up the equipment, at others such as Brecon and Bangor, I used my caravan and awning to provide the facility. This method was also used for the Match in Redwick for the British and Welsh 100k Championships.



Photo finish at Bangor



Indoor facilities were being constructed in Sheffield, Manchester and Cardiff.

In 1999, a number of Welsh officials were invited to inspect the new facilities at Cyncoed, Cardiff. The facility had been almost completed except for the final laying of the carpet, lining out and provision of equipment.

As part of my duties there as Technical Manager, I set up the actual positions for the Pole Vault runners at the four points that would be available. I also set up zero points for the various pits for the future use of the Edm equipment.

During the year 2000, I was Technical Manager for all events during that indoor season. I also was tutor for Edm indoors prior to events.



I have been involved in Endurance events as an Official since 1983.

I was involved with a 10k series in 1992 and organised the first Porthcawl 10k.

I was also involved at various stages with the Ogwr Half and full marathons

I welcomed the start of the parkrun series with the event in Porthcawl where I have bar code scanned, been a time keeper and also a tail walker.



I have also been responsible for the results for the Bridgend County Running league and for bar code scanning at Welsh Championship events.



Porthcawl 10k during 1992 to 1994



A number of Senior Officials had been invited to previous Commonwealth Games and it was a great honour to be selected for the 2002 event in Manchester by the Welsh Commonwealth Games Committee.

How-ever, in the October of 2001, I had a heart attack. Rather than deter me, it became a challenge to make the event. I attended exercise classes run by Roy Anthony and still maintained my fitness.

The visit to the new facility in Manchester was, how-ever, the biggest challenge particularly when we climbed all the steps to reach the very top of the second balcony level.



Come the event, it was exciting to travel by train, (cost covered by Virgin trains), and meet the other Officials.

Training and duty involvement took place and on the first day of competition, I was on Edm reflector for the Ladies Hammer competition qualification.

It was obvious from the start that the competition was going to be between England and Australia for the gold medal in the final.

The stadium was full on both the morning and the evening sessions and the atmosphere was terrific.

From the first throws, the competition was between Loraine Shaw of England and two Australian women.

As throws were taken, leading throws were shown with markers near the sector lines. The Commonwealth, and other records were also shown.

The evening session started, and as I stood near to those markers, the hammers were landing in my part of the sector and I would place the reflector. The crowd were heavily involved in the Competition and a hammer landed and I marked it.

I involuntarily reacted to my first Commonwealth record and the crowd erupted as Loraine took the lead. The two Australians were trying their best to match and the competition became intense. Loraine excelled in that competition and increased her lead which was not beaten.

What a night !!!! This was by far the best night of my officiating career.

One other memory of the event was when a thunderstorm occurred just before TV coverage started. Four of us were photographed by a national newspaper photographer leaving the arena and my right toe appeared in the paper on the following morning !

In the build up to the London Olympics, all officials were hoping to be selected for the Olympics and the Para-Olympics.

It was my biggest disappointment not to be selected, and had to be a volunteer at both events.

How-ever, each time I was allocated a duty, it was in the main arena or call room. After a 100m men's race, I removed number chips from the competitors who included Usain Bolt.

I sat at the end of the long jump run way with a wind speed indicator for Jess Ennis Events.

As a spectator, I enjoyed seeing David Rhodesia and Sally Pearson winning their events.

At one stage, I was sat on the finish line with a photo-finish camera as part of my duties

How-ever, I have many other memories of the Olympic events including the Golden Saturday.

It was always a pleasure walking through the Olympic Park when attending the event.

My biggest surprise was to be part of the technical team for the Para-Olympics tennis events and to work on the Final of the Women's Singles competition.

I operated the equipment that checked speed of service etc that commentators used at both preliminary rounds and also the Final



This was the view I had from the technical equipment as operating



Whilst still officiating at a high level, my main involvement in Athletics was now concentrated in Wales.

My running had virtually come to an end, but in 2009 my family bought me a bike for Christmas which allowed me to start serious exercising and remind me of my youth when I rode to work and travelled hundreds of miles around Britain. But that's another story to add to my life story

I was involved as Officials Training Officer in West Wales Region from its inception.

I was Welsh Athletics Officials Secretary four times, Training Officer and Equipment Officer prior to my retirement in September 2018.

The Young Athletes league was always a good training ground for young and new officials. However, the Finals were always held in Birmingham and few Welsh Athletics Officials were invited. Similarly, the Chief Officials were always selected from England.

With the help of Stuart Hodson and Joyce Tomala, this was overcome and now the match is both a good training ground and a good match for obtaining reports from high graded officials.

From 2012, there was a need for more officials in all disciplines and many training courses were held at Club level over the next three years.

Similarly, there was a greater need to provide Photo finish at all meetings for Uk Power of 10 ranking.

As Technical Equipment Officer, I was responsible for Edm, Photo-finish and all ancillary equipment.

Welsh Athletics invested heavily in the provision of this equipment over the years and put Welsh Athletics well ahead of other regions in Britain.

The reputation was such that a Welsh Team provided the equipment at Manchester Games.

The Training of Officials had been central to my ethos as Officials Secretary etc, and it gives me great pleasure to see so many of the current crop of Officials, who started at training course I had organised or tutored, being selected in very high positions at Welsh, Uk and IAAf level matches.

They will realise their full potential at the forthcoming Olympics or Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. I hope they enjoy their experience as much as I have.

Officials are still needed at meetings now, but the problem for the future is going to be locating them and training them through to the top level.

With the current involvement of Seiko in matches, it is interesting seeing that some Welsh Officials are involved in both Endurance and Track/Field matches.

Awards

Uk Athletics

Service to Officiating 2007 – Wales



Welsh Athletics

Award of Honour 2016

Meritorious Award 2006



Welsh Athletics
Club Award winner
2007

Carmarthen Harriers
Club Service
Award 2004

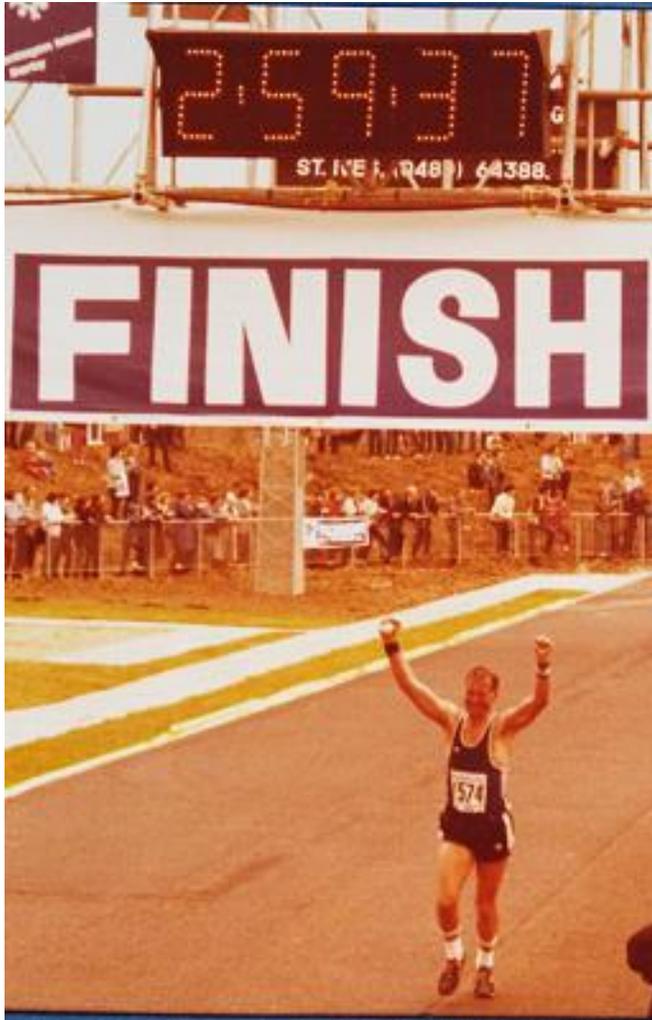


Ties from various Welsh Associations



Just some of my medals, Trophies etc





**The photo that changed my life
Derby Ramathon 1983**

Who knew what the future held when we left school, and what we would make of our life.

Composing this article for Athletics reminded me of many other memories which I have not included above.

I would like to thank all of the Officials and friends who have helped me along the way.

My achievements may sometime seem paltry compared to others, and yet I am proud of what I did achieve :-

Marathon 2 h 54 m and 11 secs as a Master 44

10 miles Sub 61 mins

100m 13.1 secs

Record holder at Field Events at Bridgend A C

My biggest disappointment was not being selected for 2012 Olympic Games and yet still enjoying the magnificent, spectacular event.

Who can tell what the future holds for us.

In 2021 I intend to cycle the Great Weston Ride and beat my time of 6 hours for the 75 mile event which includes Cheddar Gorge and Burrington Combe (5,800 feet of climbing)

With the current restrictions in force, the possibility is that I may not officiate at any match in the future, but only time will tell. I can look back with pride and pleasure at the experiences I have had, the friends I have made, and the chances to help people to achieve their ambitions.

I wish all Officials, Staff , friends and colleagues all the best for the future.

**Derek Crowder
November 2020**