

78 YEARS OF UTS NORTHERN SUBURBS ATHLETICS*

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Leafing through 78 Northern Suburbs annual reports to compile this thumbnail sketch of the club history, there were several recurring themes.

Since the club began, treasurers have been warning about the need to be careful with the expenditure of club funds. Coaches have been complaining about poor attendances at training. Officials have been bemoaning the lack of support by elite athletes for inter-club competition, Clay Tompkins has been suffering another injury plagued season. And since this great club's 50th anniversary David Archbold and Ross and Peter Douglas have been serving Northern Suburbs in an official capacity. All three men have filled various offices within the club with Peter having been treasurer for an incredible 24 successive years.

Northern Suburbs started in the 1927-28 season and its first great athlete was Frank O'Brien, an all-round champion of the 1930s. O'Brien won Norths' first State title in 1930 when he won the NSW pentathlon championship and he defended it successfully every year until 1937 when he retired. A versatile athlete, he also won the 1935 decathlon championships and the State 440 yards title in 1936. He won the Australian championships over 440 yards that same year, making him our first national title holder. Ross Angus became Norths' first State record holder when he won the NSW 880yds junior championship in 1935.

In that same year legendary athletics administrator ES Marks was elected Norths' president, a position he held until 1940. A former Lord Mayor of Sydney, Marks was a successful businessman and pioneer of track and field in NSW.

In the 1943-44 season one of Norths' most outstanding athletes burst onto the scene. A young John Treloar was unbeaten in interclub competition in the under 16 years 100 yards, 220 yards and triple jump. John later joined the tidal flow of Norths' athletes to the Sydney University Club from where he represented Australia at the 1948 Olympic Games in London. He returned to Norths in 1952 and became the club's first Olympian when selected to compete in the 100yds at Helsinki later that year.

These were the days of segregated sport, with men's and women's competitions run separately - and never the twain shall meet! In fact earlier in the century the no-mingling-of-the-sexes rule had caused great uproar in women's swimming. Women's swimming was admitted to the Olympic Games in 1912 but the Ladies' Amateur Swimming Association of NSW had a firm rule prohibiting its members competing in front of men. When the Australian Olympic selectors pointed out they must see all possible team members compete before they could approve selection, the Ladies' Association finally relented, much to the disgust of its president Miss Rose Scott. She was so ashamed of the association's immodest conduct that she promptly resigned.

Our women's club provided Norths with its next Olympian Helen Frith (now Searle). Helen moved from Bathurst to Norths in 1960 after contesting the long jump and high jump at the Rome Olympic Games. As a Norths competitor, Helen won silver medals in both events at the Perth Commonwealth Games in 1964 and contested the long jump and pentathlon in the Tokyo Olympics. Helen is regarded as one of the greats of NSW athletics, winning six successive State pentathlon and long jump titles from 1961 to 1966 and the high jump championship in 1960. In her later years Helen went on to become a world class veteran in throwing events.

Helen was joined at the Commonwealth Games in Kingston Jamaica in 1966 by another Norths competitor Jennifer Lamy who was to become Norths' most successful international competitor. Jennifer was a member of Australia's gold medal winning and record breaking 4x110yds relay team at Kingston and also won the silver medal in the 220 yards. The high point of her career was to come two years later when she finished third in the 200m behind Poland's Irena Szewinska and Australian great Raelene Boyle in the 1968 Mexico Olympics. Jennifer continued her career with gold medal winning performances at the 1970 and 1974 Commonwealth Games as a member of 4x100m relay teams which both won gold medals and set Games records.

Norths' outstanding long distance runner John Farrington also was selected to represent Australia in the marathon at the Mexico Olympic Games. Injury ruled Farrington out of the 1970 Commonwealth Games but he won selection in the 1972 Olympics in Munich and the 1974 Commonwealth Games in Christchurch. Farrington dominated the early City to Surf fun runs, winning three successive races in 1972 to 1974.

Joining Farrington at Munich was another from Norths' women's club, 400m runner Alison Ross-Edwards. Alison had a mortgage on the women's 400m in NSW in the early 70s, winning three successive State championships from 1971 to 1973.

Jenny Laurendet nee Low continued Norths' Olympic tradition with her selection to contest the 400m hurdles at the 1988 Games at Seoul. Jenny had won bronze at the Commonwealth Games two years earlier at Edinburgh and she repeated the effort four years later in Auckland.

Also at Auckland were fellow Norths' athletes Tim Jackson who contested the 100m and 200m and Kathy Sambell who won gold in the 4x100m team which included a young Cathy Freeman. Kathy left Norths the following year and was later selected in the 1992 team to contest the 4x100m relay at Barcelona. Tim who ran a wind assisted 10.00s for the 100m in 1987, competed at his second Commonwealth Games in Victoria Canada in 1994, winning a bronze medal in the 4x100m relay. He went one better at the World Championships at Gothenburg in 1995, winning a silver medal in the relay and capped off his career at the 1996 Olympics at Atlanta. Tim had also competed in the 1993 World Championships at Stuttgart.

Also at Atlanta was Norths' eighth Olympian Kylie Hannigan who joined Cathy Freeman in the 4x400m relay.

Peter Banks contested the decathlon at the 1998 Commonwealth Games at Kuala Lumpur. And while Norths did not have a representative at the Sydney 2000 Games, several athletes did compete in our colours. Norths came to the rescue of the Kyrgyzstan team whose interpreter disappeared with the cash meant to buy their uniforms. As a result their competitors in the javelin, long jump, hammer throw and marathon sported Norths' red, black and white colours in the Olympic Stadium.

Norths' latest international is Nick Bromley who finished sixth in the final of the 800m at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne.

Several other athletes who began their careers at Norths have gone on to represent Australia, including Gordon Windeyer who went to the 1974 and 1978 Commonwealth Games winning gold and setting a Games record of 2.16m in Christchurch. Melissa Moore, who represented Australia at the 1992 and 2000m Olympics also started at Norths, winning her first national title in 1985. And Stuart Gyngell, who won a bronze medal in the shot put in Edinburgh in 1986, was another Norths' athlete who got away.

Since the 1940s, Norths has attracted a high standard of coaches to its ranks. In 1945-46 Norths invited Jack Metcalfe the former world triple jump champion and 1936 Olympic Games bronze medallist, to join Frank O'Brien and Dr B Dunn on its first coaching panel. In 1948 former 220yd world record holder Jim Carlton the father of 2UE radio personality Mike Carlton took over the club's sprinters until his sudden death in 1951. In 1962 Jack Pross was appointed club coach. Jack went on to become assistant coach to the Australian track and field team at the 1970 Commonwealth Games at Edinburgh. And he returned to Scotland in 1986 as coach of our Commonwealth Games squad. Norths' outstanding coach of the 1980s and 90s was Col Wright. He guided the fortunes of three of our Olympians Tim Jackson, Jenny Laurendet and Kylie Hannigan. Col was named the inaugural NSW Coach of the Year in 1986. He was joined at the club in 1990 by life member Alan Nolan who has achieved remarkable success, chiefly with middle distance runners. Following Col Wright's retirement in 1996, two more Olympians Darren Clarke and Penny Gillies joined Norths' coaching panel. Penny is still a member today, coaching some of our best young athletes including 2005 World Youth Championships representative Charlotte Yeates, 2006 World Junior Championships representative Tristan Garrett and club captain Danielle Senior. Penny was on the Australian coaching team for the 2002 and 2006 Commonwealth Games and 2002 and 2004 World Junior Championships and was head coach at the 2005 World Youth Championships.

Head coach at the 2006 World Junior Championships was UTS Norths member Robert Medlicott whose sprinter Laura Verlinden was a member of that team. Norths' current coaching panel also includes leading middle distance coach John Atterton whose charges include Commonwealth Games representative Nick Bromley and World Junior Championship representative Lucy Staratt.

The late 40s and early 50s was a golden era for Norths' sprinters. In that time the club dominated the 220yds event in NSW with John Forsythe winning the State title in 1948 and 1949, John Treloar in 1952 and Kevin Reade in 1953. Another champion sprinter of that era, the 1956 Olympian Ray Land, joined the club in 1957 and went on to give Norths great service as an athlete and administrator. Success continued to come Norths' way in the metric era with Laurie Toogood winning the very first Australian 1500m championship in 1966, beating a young Ralph Doubell who went on to win gold in the 800m at the 1968 Olympics. Over the years, Norths has had several home grounds including North Sydney Oval, Chatswood Oval and Beachamp Park, Chatswood. A significant landmark in Norths' history was the opening of Rotary Athletics Field by the Governor Sir Roden Cutler in 1967. This was the culmination of five years' blood, sweat and tears by Chatswood Rotary Club members and today it is still the best grass track in Sydney.

In 1970, another of Norths' outstanding athletes Clay Tompkins first came to prominence winning the under 19 years triple jump at the national championships. Clay is still competing and includes among his successes a gold medal in high jump at the World Veterans' Games in Brisbane in 2001.

The 1983-84 season was an historic one for Norths, with the men's and women's clubs finally amalgamating. And in 1987-88 Norths decided to stand alone, voting against amalgamation with the Reebok, Warringah and Manly-Warringah Clubs as membership in athletics clubs across the State began to dwindle. In 1994, largely thanks to the work of former president Toni Dickson Norths linked with the University of Technology Sydney to become UTS Northern Suburbs. It is a partnership that has proved extremely beneficial, with many of our members students at the university. And the sponsorship money invested by the university has allowed the athletics club to develop significantly. The most tangible result has been the construction and equipping of the weights room at Rotary Field - for which former president Col Kennedy and current coach Alan Nolan can take much of the credit.

Since Norths' inception, Athletics NSW's pointscore competition has had many names, interclub, interdistrict and currently club premiership. Whatever the name, Norths' never won this competition until the 2004-5 season when the drought broke. After 77 years, UTS Norths was finally the premier athletics club in NSW. The following season Norths' tied in first place with Illawong on the Club Premiership pointscore but lost its title to Illawong on a countback. Athletics NSW's other major competition is the club championship in which each club selects teams of 14 athletes to contest 11 events (two athletes per event).

In 2006 UTS Norths' tasted success for the first time winning the open men's and under 18 years women's championship and finishing runners-up in the open women's and under 18 men's championships. A month later, UTS Norths' men's team won the national club championship title in Adelaide, the first NSW club to have achieved this feat in the competition's 14 year history. The winning team was: Frazer Dowling, Peter Elvy, Kiel

Mannix, Michael Zylstra, Paul Crowe, Kajtek Kielich, Stuart Paterson, James Roff, Nick Bromley, Tim Conors, Oliver Holland, Robbie Baskin, Tristan Garrett and Jake Holt.

Over the years, Norths has had several changes of uniform from red-and-black, to all scarlet, and back to black-and-red. Following complaints from our distance runners that the previous predominately black uniform was too hot, the current white-red-and-black style was adopted in 1998.

Which brings us to today. In its 78 years, UTS Norths has not only survived but prospered thanks to the stewardship of its past and present office-bearers. It has produced eight Olympians and eight Commonwealth Games representatives. And today's membership boasts a host of outstanding young athletes such as Nick Bromley, Laura Verlinden, Lucy Starratt, Tristan Garrett, Charlote Yeates, Peter Elvy, Jessica Knox, James Roff, Natasha Finlay, Min Jenkins, Oliver Holland, Renee Vandenberg, Danielle Senior, Thalia Amanakis, Frazer Dowling, Kiel Mannix, Michael Zylstra, Kajtek Kielich, Jake Holt and .Robbie Baskin.

Our future is in their hands.

Ron Bendall
Club President
2006