

Photos:

6457 Gerry North running in the 1960 Inter Counties

6450 Gerry North with on a visit back to Blackpool meeting some long established member a few years ago: Ron Bray, John Winters, Gerry North, Norman Greenwood, Peter Singleton and Howard Henshaw

6449 Howard Henshaw and Gerry North

1130 Emily Japp at the Inter Counties Championships in Loughborough

8991 Emily Japp alongside Nichola Jackson of Ribbles Valley in the Lancashire Championship race

4777 Brian Craig presenting a Lancashire 400 metre Gold medal to Brent Starkie in 2016

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At the CAU 2020 Inter Club Championships, held in Loughborough, Emily Japp ran on a tough 11.2Km course, to finish 12th in 45:30, and led the Lancashire team, also to 12th place. Back in 2018 in the Inter Counties Championship Senior Women's race distance, which had been traditionally about 8K, was made the same as the Senior Men's race distance. Japp had not been able to compete in the Inter Counties, mainly due to injuries, since 2017, when the distance was 8k. At the end of this article, there are some reflections and thoughts by Emily Japp's on her return from injury, training, and the Inter Counties race.

This brought memories back to Howard Henshaw, (President of Blackpool, Wyre & Fylde AC) of an old friend and former teammate, Gerry North, who won the Senior Men's Inter Counties Championship, which was held in Brighton. Back in the 1960, (as with many other Championship races then) the Inter Counties Championships attracted National coverage, hence it was sponsored by the Daily Telegraph. In those days, it was before daytime television and, there were only two channels, BBC and ITV.

#### GERRY NORTH AND THE 1960 INTER COUNTIES CHAMPIONSHIP

In the 1958 Inter Counties, held at Stoke, Gerry North, had been leading the race, with one lap to go, when he suffered a stitch, and in the 1959 race, he finished in the first dozen. At the start of the 1959/60 season he was in impressive form, winning all the local Lancashire races. However, shortly before the Lancashire Championship, North was forced to take to his bed with a severe cold, however, possibly unwisely, he still ran the race. North wrote a week before the Inter Counties race, that his chances in the race had virtually disappeared, but that he would run to help Lancashire win the team race. However the day before the race, North looked very fit, and declared he was fully recovered.

Early on he was close to Basil Heatley of Warwickshire, while after 4Km, North's teammate Brian Craig (BF&AC) came storming down the slope to join his teammate, however North and Heatley soon pulled away. After Heatley was hampered with a stitch, Gerry North, pulled away, and went on to win in 35:55, with Heatley 2nd in 36:15 and Brian Craig 3rd in 36:22. Together with North and Craig, Colin Robinson (17th), Geoff North (32nd), David Spencer (45th) and Fred Norris (46th), formed the Lancashire team, which finished in first place. Dave Swarbrick (60th 38:33) of Blackpool & Fylde AC was also part of the Lancashire squad.

Gerry North was born in Chester in 1936. Early on at school, North was a keen runner, but also a talented footballer, who played in the Blackpool FA Junior team with Jimmy Armfield. He went on to enjoy a very successful Cross Country career, winning a unique treble of the Junior English National Cross Country Championship in 1958, the Senior Title in 1962, (at Stanley Park, Blackpool, where in a sprint finish he beat Bruce Tulloch, who later that year, won European 5000 metres Championship),

and the Vet 50 Title in 1987. In a 1975 Athletics Weekly survey, North was voted the most consistent Post War Cross Country Runner. North always considered his best surface was Cross Country, however he ran well on the track, winning an International 10,000m race in Helsinki in 1963, with 29:45.1. On the track his best track times were: 1500m 3:57.2, 5000m 14:06.1 and 10,000m 29:06.2.

After he was at Blackpool and Fylde AC, North was a member, and President of Belgrave Harriers, before moving to the City of Portsmouth AC, where he latterly coached, and also organised several successful Road Races, as well as acting as an England Team Manager in 2005. After a battle with cancer, Gerry North died in April 2014. A Belgrave tribute printed in Athletics Weekly read: "Gerry was one of the All-Time Greats of cross country running, a national champion as Junior, Senior and Veteran, always of a cheerful disposition, he lived for Athletics and was one of the few people of whom one could truly say that nobody seemed to have a bad word to say about him"

#### BRIAN CRAIG

Brian Craig received several cross country International vests in France, Germany and Spain amongst other places. On the track he competed for many years, and set a Club 3000 metre record of 8:03.8 (which still stands) at an International match at the White City track in London on the 22nd July 1961. Craig represented England and the UK primarily at 5000 metres with a best time 13:57, often partnering Bruce Tulloch in International competitions, and also competed internationally at 10,000 metres.

Both Gerry North and Brian Craig were part of the Senior Men's England team who competed in the 1962 International Cross Country Championship, which was held in Sheffield. The 12K race was won by Gaston Roelants (44:40), with Marcel Vandewattyne 2nd (44:46), both of Belgium. However the England team of Mel Batty (3rd 44:48), John Anderson (4th 44:48), Brian Hall (5th 45:02), Gerry North (8th 45:08), Ron Hill (11th 45:19) and Brian Craig (13th 45:21) won the team competition with 44 points, ahead of Spain 2nd with 115 points.

Craig, North and Dave Swarbrick attempted to break the four minute mile, with Brian Craig setting the best time of 4:03. After both North and Craig retired from competitive running, they became rival Inter Counties Team Managers, Craig managing Lancashire, and North, who had by then moved to Portsmouth, Manager of Hampshire.

#### BASIL HEATLEY AND THE TOKYO OLYMPIC MARATHON

Basil Heatley won the England National Cross Country Championship in 1960, 1961 and 1963, as well as the International Cross Country Championship in 1961, and he broke the World Marathon Record with 2:13:55, at the Polytechnic Marathon.

He went onto represent Great Britain at the 1964 Tokyo in the Marathon, won by the famous Ethiopian runner, Abebe Bikla in a then World Record 2:12:11.2. (Interestingly Bikla had run barefoot, to win the previous Olympic Marathon at Rome in 1960). At Tokyo, Heatley was 3rd entering the Stadium, 30 metres behind the tiring local favourite, Kōrichi Tsuburaya, and putting in a tremendous sprint, covered the final 200 metres in 32.3, passing Tsuburaya, to finish 2nd in 2:16:19.2, with Tsuburaya 3rd in 2:16:22.8.

Tsuburaya was mortified, and thought he'd let the Japanese Nation down and, hoped to make amends, by winning at the 1968 Mexico Olympics, however he suffered with lumbago after the Tokyo Olympics, and he committed suicide in January 1968.

After the Tokyo Marathon Abebe Bikla continued to run and win marathons, however he increasingly suffered leg problems. A week before the Mexico Olympic Marathon a fracture of Abebe's fibula was discovered, and although he started, he was forced to drop out of the race at 16K. This was his final Marathon, and in 1969 he had a car accident, leaving him paralysed. He died in 1973.

#### EMILY JAPP'S PREPARATION, AND HER RACE

Since coming back from injury in April 2019, Emily Japp, and her coach Stan Taylor were focused on her making the 2020 Inter Counties Lancashire team, and being as strong as possibly. Japp trained hard, following a plan, which went well, apart from a couple of bumps along the way. The plan at the Lancashire Championship race in January, was to run comfortably, and just qualify for the Inter Counties. Japp was more than happy with third place, with how she ran.

Winter training was very tough, but Japp stuck with it, doing the best she could. She had a lot of confidence to build up, with nothing seeming to click, until the last few weeks of training, but as soon as it did, Japp was raring to go.

On the day of the Inter Counties, she woke early, with everything going to plan on the morning of the race, and she was excited, whilst waiting in the Lancashire pen, talking to the other team members.

She wanted to give the race everything, as at the English National, where she finished 28th, Japp regretted her slow start, and she decided she'd rather blow-up early, rather than regret a slow start again. Afterwards Japp said "I wanted to give the race absolutely everything, because this had been our aim for so long and we had put so much into it. The race felt so long, and a real drudge! Very, very tough. Never ending!"

The ground was very, sticky and gloopy, with strong winds. She was so focused, that she didn't notice the hills, until the cool-down after the race. Japp slowly overtook other runners, receiving great support, and surprised herself, who she was passing, with only one passing her, which she re-passed towards the closing stages of the race.

"I felt euphoric, exhausted and so proud of myself at the end." said Japp afterwards, "I did so much better than I ever expected, and tried so, so hard. I was so happy! It couldn't have gone any better and it was so worth all the hard work we put in through all those tough months. Me and Stan (Taylor) deserved the result, and I was so pleased when Stan told me how well he thought I had done, because that's the approval that matters! If Stan thinks I did well, then I did well!"

THE SEASON AHEAD: A lot of uncertainty at the moment, but Stan Taylor is looking positively on this, because he thinks shorter track season isn't such a bad thing, after such a long winter season.













