

## **Diane Allahgreen**

Diane was the first Liverpool-resident female athlete to compete in track and field at an Olympic games, when she ran in the 100m Hurdles in 2000 at Sydney. She is a Life Member of Liverpool Harriers.

Diane was born on 21st February 1975 and was brought up in Old Swan and West Derby. At primary school she often beat the boys at running and, when she ran for Archbishop Blanch school in the city championships, she was spotted by a member of Liverpool Harriers, and soon joined the Club. She began training with Mr. Middleton's and Mr. Thompson's junior group, at the Club's summer headquarters of that time: "Wyncote", the University Sports Ground on Mather Avenue. She covered most events. The atmosphere was playful, but competitive, and Diane stood out as she always ran with a smile on her face! It was in Sportshall Athletics competitions where she first started to blossom. Her enthusiastic attitude, pace, and determination soon people taking notice. In July 1992, she won the English Schools sprint hurdles title in 14.32secs. That was but the first step on a long road.

In 1993, Diane represented GB in the European Junior Games at San Sebastian, Spain. She had a great run to come home first in the sprint hurdles, and shortly afterwards ran the first leg of the winning 4x100m relay team. But then she was told that the hurdles race was to be re-run, as there had been a collision. Given that Diane had not been involved in the collision, this seemed a bit unfair! Taking advice from her coach, Bob Birrell, to "run angry", she again won - clocking an even faster time of 13.42secs. Diane's temperament seemed well suited to the "big races". Also that year, she took the Senior English Schools 100m Hurdles title at Blackpool, in 13.50secs, and she finished the season ranked fourth in the World Under 20s.

In the July of the following year, she went to the World Junior Championships in Lisbon. After setting a PB of 13.25secs in her heat, she was involved in a very close final, gaining a Bronze medal but missing Gold by only 0.05secs! As at the European event the previous year, she was part of the GB 4x100m relay team, gaining Bronze medals this time. After such a great season, Diane was looking forward to the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, but in all sports you have your ups and downs, and 1995 and 1996 were a period of downs for Diane, with no improvements.



Working with coach Bob Birrell, she now focussed on beating 13secs, ultimately looking for selection to the 2000 Sydney Olympics. In 1997, at the age of 22, she reduced her PB to 13.03secs in reaching the semi-final of the World Championships. The following year began particularly well, when Diane won the WAAA 60m Hurdles, beating holder Denise Lewis (who had won a Bronze in the 1996 Olympic Heptathlon and would win Gold in 2000). She went on to the European Indoors Championships in good form, finishing third in 8.02secs, just outside the British record.

The 1999 season saw Diane break through the 13 seconds barrier for the first time, with a 12.99 recorded in the World Championships in Seville, so the stage was set for her attempt to make the GB squad for Sydney. The Olympic year of 2000 started well, with wins at the Northern Counties indoors in both the hurdles and the 60m sprint, followed by another WAAA indoors title and a 7.99secs run in Gent which would be her lifetime best. Her form was confirmed with her victory in the WAAA (first of three in a row) and her flight to Sydney was booked! The standard there was immense: Diane just got through the heats, but even her PB would not have got her any further.

On a wet, cold evening in Manchester, at the 2002 Commonwealth Games, Diane just missed out on a bronze medal, finishing fourth in the 100m Hurdles after clocking a lifetime best of 12.92secs when winning her heat. But her athletics career was drawing to an end. She moved to the Trafford club, hoping to still compete at the highest level, and was selected for the 2005 World Championships relay squad. Shortly after that, she retired from the sport to lead a "more normal life", alongside husband Tony. As she said, "A family is on the agenda - I don't want to be the oldest Mum at the school gate."

Diane is still based in Liverpool, with a business in the Allerton area. She still keeps in touch with our Club, and it was great to welcome her to the Senior Awards evening for the 2011 season, where she presented several of the trophies. Her bubbly enthusiasm was still there for all to see, and she still has that smile on her face!

