

John Woods

The Liverpool-born Evertonian always knew of his Irish connections, but had ambitions of running for England and Great Britain. However, after competing in the Hollymount road race in Ireland, it was to all change, leading to a successful international career representing his mother's homeland.

John Frances Woods was born on the 8th of December 1955, and first lived in Grove Street (now a car park). The family moved to Dovecot, where John attended St Dominic's RC school and, like most lads, joined in sports like football, cricket and athletics.

A female teacher was impressed with his athleticism and introduced him to Liverpool Harriers at their summer base at the time, the University ground on Mather Avenue. He started in Tom O'Mahoney's junior group, but eventually started training with the seniors and taking his running more seriously. He took part in the famous 'Tuesday Training Sessions' which included the likes of Frank Davies, Dave Evans, Pete Waddington and Roger Harrison to name a few. Despite being a keen follower of Gordon Lee's Everton at that time, John found a cold Saturday afternoon could be profitably spent in other ways, and progressed to finish third in the Northern Junior Cross-Country Championships at Burnley in 1975. After he moved into the senior ranks, John raised his performances to another level, an improvement he puts down to his coach, John Butler, who played a big part throughout his successful career.

On the track, he competed initially at 800 metres and 1,500 metres, but couldn't wait to move up through the distances. After all, this was the time of Dave Bedford's legendary exploits. He made his British League debut in 1975, going on to make 41 appearances, and one of his highlights was the meeting at Birmingham in 1981, when he won the "B" 1,500 metres in 3mins 49.6secs and came 3rd in the 5,000 metres in 13mins 58.7secs, with little rest between the events.

In 1974, as a Junior, John was a member of the Senior team which won the Northern 12-stage Road Relay for the first time, and he won a AAA Gold Medal in the 6-stage team at Southport in 1976. But John's greatest successes were over the country. Locally, he was a member of the Club team which achieved thirteen consecutive wins in the Liverpool & District event, and he won the individual title six times between 1980 and 1986. He was not daunted by competing at higher levels, and showed a consistent quality at national and international level.

In the Club's 1982 Centenary Year, he played his part in the celebrations. He won the Northern 10,000 metres track title and represented Ireland in the European Games 10,000 metres in Athens but, prior to that, he won the Liverpool & District CCC, the Northern CCC, and finished eighth in the English National CCC, which would have earned him an England selection had he not chosen Ireland instead.

Dr. Tom Riley had shown interest in John's Irish qualification, and soon the scene was set for the young scouser to make visits across the seas. He finished second to Gerry Deagan in the Irish 5,000 metres and second again in the Irish Cross-Country Championships. His loyalty to his chosen country was shown when, at short notice, he took a 12 hour flight to Ohio USA and, despite the jet lag, won a 10km road race for the Irish AAA. In all, John represented Ireland in eleven World Cross-Country Championships, which is another tribute to his consistency.

John singles out finishing fourteenth in the World Cross-Country Championships in New Zealand as his finest achievement in athletics: there were only two Europeans in front of him, the others all being Africans. In contrast, he describes his marathon appearance at the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games 'as a bad day at the office'. Having clocked 2hrs 11mins 30secs on his marathon debut, he was hoping for a good performance on the biggest stage of all, but an injury sustained during the warm-up meant it was a big effort just to finish.

John is married to Pam, who was a good sprinter with the Club. They have three daughters and three grandchildren, and now live in Great Sankey, Warrington.

He retired from racing in 1993, and is now again able to spend Saturdays watching Everton. But he still runs socially most weeks, spends time in the gym, and plays golf when time permits. Looking back on such a successful time in athletics, his advice to youngsters is "Listen, take notice of your elders who know more, and get a good coach".

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