

## **Julian Hopkins**

He was the man who put the Club back on the Race Walking map, for the first time since Hugh Meikle retired in 1950. Julian joined the Club at the age of 12 and, after trying a number of events, he chose Race Walking and reached national level both as a competitor and a coach.

Born on the 16th December 1944, he attended Blackmoor Park County Primary, where his interest in athletics started in the sprints and Long Jump, and continued when he went to St Margaret's High School. He joined the Club in 1957 and, while he was still reasonably successful at school, he found the inter-club standard tougher, though he did clock 11.2secs for the 100 yards.

In 1960, a race walker from Surrey working in Liverpool persuaded the Club to have a 2 mile walking event in their championships and, although Julian didn't win it, he felt he had done quite well and his mind was made up: Race Walking was to be his event. The aspiring race walker joined Lancashire Walking Club whilst studying at Liverpool University, and regularly travelled to the Manchester area for training and competition.

Although Julian showed considerable promise when finishing in the top 10 in the National Junior 5 mile Championships in 1963, he was not satisfied. He made the decision to travel to London quite frequently, to compete in the bigger events, with fields of 250-plus, which proved a key factor in improving his performances. He struggled for a time, but his systematic approach to training methods and his dogged determination saw him eventually emerge as a first class athlete. In March 1965, on a hilly course, he finished fifteenth in the Northern RWA championships. The following month he took a bronze medal in the Lancashire 10 miles, clocking 81mins 18secs, and on the Easter Monday finished a creditable fifth in an open 20 mile at York, showing he was improving, and the hard work had been worthwhile. In 1967, his final year at university, he triumphed on the track when he won the British Universities 2 miles title in 15mins 01secs.

After university, Julian became a Physics and Maths teacher. His Race Walking progress was going from strength to strength. He got a lot of satisfaction in giving Olympian Ron Wallwork a real battle in the Lancashire 10 miles championship, clocking 76mins 32secs to take the silver medal, and was just outside the medals in the Northern Area 10 miles with Ron Wallwork winning again. Julian was the Lancashire champion a number of times, including winning the 3000m track title at Warrington in 13mins 39.8secs in 1973. Representing Lancashire, he won a bronze medal at the Inter-Counties as second counter, but it was a team win with Lancashire Walking Club that shines above those achievements: winning gold medals at the National 20km championships in 1970 after a few near misses was something special.

While he never became an international, he did represent the Race Walking Association - England in the 20km race at the Dutch championships. He had personal bests on the track of 13mins 20secs for 3000m and 46mins 42secs for 1000m and, on the road, achieved 76mins for 10mile and 97mins 20secs for 20km. These are times which many runners would not find easy!

Julian was always a thoughtful athlete, who not only researched his own event thoroughly, but became knowledgeable on everything to do with the sport. He was well respected throughout the Race Walking world, and it was natural that he took up coaching and eventually became the National Event Coach from 1974-84. He sat on the British AA Board in 1976, and wrote the B.A.A.B. Instructional booklet on Race Walking. For the last 20 years, he has been the Secretary of Merseyside Schools Athletic Association, and he is also often heard on the tannoy at local tracks, as a highly effective Announcer. The photo shows him checking with "Taff" Williams on the latest situation in one of the throwing events at a meeting in 2011.



On reflection today, he feels frustrated that it took him 10 years to learn how to train properly, largely through lack of good coaching. He believes that the standard today is not as it was in the mid 80's, and that his efforts to modernize the event in his ten years as an National official were wasted: instead he should have continued competing, rather than becoming a frustrated coach! He did however have some success in coaching a number of international race walkers including Steve Barry, who won the Commonwealth 30Km walk in 1982 (representing Wales) and also set a number of UK records.

Julian may not have achieved the international level he craved, but he had many successes and derived a lot of pleasure from his chosen event, and he deserves great credit for what he puts back into the sport.