

Roger Harrison

Being brought up in Widnes, it is not surprising that Roger started off as a rugby player at primary school. But when he went to senior school, his sporting interest changed to athletics. He subsequently represented his university, and Lancashire, but was primarily a loyal and consistent Club runner over the country, road and track. Nevertheless, his rugby roots stayed with him through his teaching career and, in 2008, he was deservedly honoured with an MBE for services to schools rugby league.

Born on the 17th of October 1949, Roger was well aware from an early age of the sports going on all around: people running races on the wasteland, boxing, golf, football, and especially rugby league. And there was a sporting family background on his mother's side: his grandfather and great-uncle being good distance runners, and his Uncle Paddy doing long distance walks.

When he started at St Maries RC Junior School in Widnes, the tall slim youngster spent hours playing with a rugby ball at the back of his house. He only competed in athletics at the Annual Town Sports, but was one of the fastest 80 yards runners in Widnes, and was the favourite for the 'Junior Four' sprint. However, the night before the competition, he went a long run with his best friend - twice around the estate - and the next day, could only move "like a tin soldier"! Roger continued his education at St Edwards College, known for its sporting pedigree, and was soon drafted into the rugby team, enjoying playing and training. However, the annual school cross-country run, which was held around Christmas, was to start him on a successful running career. Everyone in each year group took part - there was no choice! Roger won, was directed to the cross-country team, and never looked back.

His school had links with Liverpool Harriers & Athletic Club, and he soon came into contact with two influential Club officials: Tom O'Mahoney and Charles Rice. He listened to them, and was impressed by their knowledge - not just of the sport, but of people, of hard work and of competitiveness. He was later guided by many talented people such as Mike Turner, Frank Davies and Pete Waddington. There were other important individuals, but the key feature for Roger was the "group ethic". With all the support and expertise at the Club, he felt he didn't need a coach. The famous Tuesday evening sessions from Waddy's house were the most intense experiences that he had been involved in: "it was eye balls out!" He learnt at the Club that, while being physically fit was obviously important, it was also about being mentally fit and mentally tough, and he took that into his coaching of youngsters throughout his teaching career.

Loving athletics, he dabbled in all events. He competed on the track for his school, university and Club at anything from 400m to 10,000m, with his favourites being Steeplechase and 1500m, or even being part of the 4x400 metres relay team. He was proud to represent his Club in the National League for many years, making 22 appearances, mainly at 1500 metres, 7 of them consecutive.

However, Roger always felt that cross-country and road running were his strengths, and he enjoyed the team aspects especially. As a lover of relay events, it is not surprising he was a member of the Club's 1970s road relay elite squad, where his determination and his sheer pride in representing the Club added strength to the team. The photo shows him receiving his prize alongside Frank Davies and John Woods (keen-eyed readers will spot it is a £25 voucher!) as part of the winning team in the TSB Relays which our Club organised at Sefton Park. He won gold medals as part of the Club teams on numerous occasions, at District, Lancashire, Northern and National levels. He also represented the University of Wales, the British Universities, and Lancashire at cross-country, and Lancashire on the road.



One victory that gave Roger special pleasure was the Lancashire 20 miles title: the "Red Rose 20". As well as being probably his first major achievement on the road as an individual, it was an honour to win the historic race which his uncle had told him about many years earlier. He also has happy memories of winning the Rossendale Half Marathon, where he beat his hero, the legendary Ron Hill, over "Ron's own course", although he admits that Ron was a bit past his best! But Roger considers that the greatest highlight was winning the National Six Stage Road Relay Championship in 1974 (the first of three consecutive victories). At the time he didn't appreciate the full importance, until he saw the pride in Tom O'Mahoney's eyes and spoke with Charles Rice later.

Roger has spent all his working life as a school teacher, at junior and high schools, eventually as Head of a small Roman Catholic Primary and Nursery School in Widnes, from where he retired in July 2010. He has remained totally involved at a local level in school sport, and on a National level with Schools Rugby League. In 2008, he received the MBE for services to school sport and education: an award which was due to the partnerships and team spirit which he had nurtured. He lives with wife Michelle, not far from his beloved Widnes, and son Paul is an active Harrier. Roger is currently recovering from receiving a replacement knee, and doing a bit of "jogging".

What stands out about Roger is that, whatever he gets involved in, he gives total commitment.

November 2011