

Valerie Rutter née Harrison

It is said that if High Jumping had divisions like boxing, but based on someone's height, Val Harrison would have easily been world champion! While only 5ft 5ins tall, she won many titles and represented Great Britain on several occasions, including Commonwealth and European Games.

Val was born on the 30th October 1954 and was brought up in Huyton before moving to Knowsley Village. Her brother Rob was born five years later and followed Val to international athletics stardom, but as a middle-distance runner.

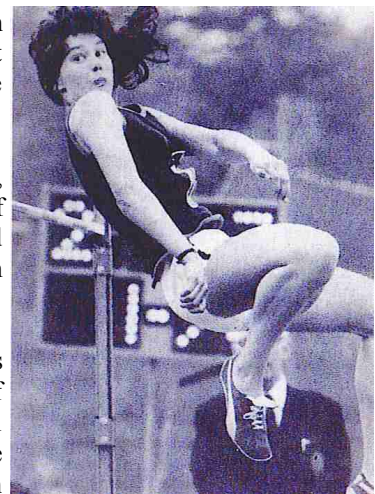
She attended Longview School, then Kirkby FE College. Val was always keen on sport, be it netball, gymnastics, volleyball, or even trampolining. But athletics soon had her full attention. She joined Liverpool Harriers in 1969 and, despite showing talent in a range of events, began to concentrate on High Jump, with Pam Lunt as her coach. It was a formidable combination: Pam was a lecturer from Kirkby College who contributed both sound advice and excellent coaching, adding to Val's innate talent and determination.

As a 17 year old she won the 1972 Northern High Jump Championship, beating the former Olympic High Jumper Dorothy Shirley, with a height of 5ft 5ins (1.65m), which was not only a new Club record but also equalled her own body height! As if to emphasise her all-round ability, she also won the Lancashire Pentathlon.

The next year she improved massively, winning the Senior English Schools High Jump title with 5ft 10ins (1.778m), which set up this energetic youngster for what was to be a seven year successful international career. She also finished a credible third in the 1973 Women's AAA Championship with 5ft 9½ ins.

Val set a new Championship Best when taking the Northern High jump in 1974, then had a splendid victory in the WAAA, beating the famous Debbie Brill of Canada, and took part in her first of three appearances in the European Cup. And the year got even better when she was selected for the Commonwealth Games in New Zealand (where she came 5th) and the European Championships in Rome.

1974 was also the season Val set the Club High Jump record of 1.83m, which was to last 37 years, until Katarina Johnson-Thompson edged ahead with a leap of 1.84m in 2011. For Val, her PB was equivalent to jumping 6ins above her own head! She took the Northern title for the third time in 1976; curiously, all three victories happened at Kirkby Stadium, which was Val's regular training location. In 1978, she was second in that event, but equalled her 1.83m PB.



On retiring from competition, Val, who was by this time a school teacher based in Runcorn, turned to coaching at club level and eventually became involved in the management team for England and for Great Britain. But those of us who saw Val jumping at her best will always remember watching her in amazement and thinking "How can someone of that height possibly jump so high?"