

Wendy Gerrard (née Kavanagh)

The schoolgirl had responsibilities on her young shoulders from the age of thirteen, when she was hotly tipped as a future international. That year she joined the Liverpool Harriers & Athletic Club, and was immediately expected to fill the gap which had been left when number one sprinter Carole Carter got married and went to settle in Salford. She went on to meet all the expectations, and be one of the best young sprinters ever seen in this country.

Wendy was born on the 14th of October 1950, and attended Highfield Secondary Modern School, located on the hill over-looking Broadgreen Hospital - curiously, Carol Carter had been a student at the same school. She was encouraged by her PE teacher into joining the club, as a 100 and 220 yards sprint specialist. She was coached in the early days by Club coach Nancy Abrams and then by National coach Denis Watts. Denis set his pupil a particularly tough training schedule, which helped to develop her and give her confidence. Wendy responded with an ambition to do well: not only training hard in the summer, but also on the dark nights in the winter.

Her dedication was to be fruitful, bringing her a string of successes at all levels, even though she was often much younger than the other competitors. In 1964, she finished second at two national championships, and she was sweeping the board at school level. The following year at Ruskin Park, St. Helens, she became the fastest girl in the county at the age of fourteen. In the Lancashire championships in the Under15s, her time of 11.2secs for 100 yards was faster than the Intermediate and Senior winners. It was also a UK best performance at that age.

By 1966, her coach had so much faith in young Wendy that he put her straight into Senior competition. This turned out to be a wise move when she won the Senior Women's Northern Counties sprint double at Warrington, clocking 10.7secs in the short sprint. She was still only fifteen but she was about to make full international level. She was selected to represent Great Britain against France, on September 18th 1966. She ran a creditable third in the 100 metres, clocking 12.0secs, and ran a sound leg in Great Britain's 4x100 metres winning team. She was one of GB's youngest ever female internationals. (The photo, from a local paper in 1966, shows Wendy training at "Wyncote" on Mather Avenue, in her GB vest.)



Her performances during that memorable season won her two trophies. The first was for the best performance at the Women's AAA and for her Northern Counties sprint double, and it was fitting that Nancy Abrams made the presentation, as she played a big part in the youngster's success. The other award, "Girl of the Season", was in recognition of her international debut, and her Lancashire and Northern Counties sprint double.

Although Wendy represented her Club, County, North of England, England and Great Britain, she says that winning the Girls English Schools 100 yards title was her highlight. Her personal bests were 10.7secs for 100 yards, 11.7secs for 100 metres, 24.3secs for 200 metres and 56.9secs for 400 metres. Her advice for being successful: "Work hard and enjoy the sport".

Since retiring from athletics, Wendy has settled in the Chester area and is still in regular contact with several Club members. Her daughter Rachael did not follow her into athletics, but she became a top swimmer instead!

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