

Masters Feature

GRAEME SAKER

We have some members of our club who have achieved some great things in their athletics careers, yet very few of us know about them. When we were driving up to Sutton Coldfield for the Masters road relays Graeme Saker let slip a few snippets about events and athletes he had raced when he was in his prime. So I asked him to put a few memories and thoughts down on paper for us all to read. Graeme is still running well and has represented England in the Home internationals as a M50, where he won to be British Champion!

Graeme explains as follows:

1. My career began of course at Aylesford school running twice around the school fields one day as instructed - and completing it miles before the rest of the year. I then did the Maidstone District Cross Country and won and it went from there joining Tonbridge – the nearest club at the time in 1972. I recall it well as I met Pete Mason who was joining as well and we have been mates ever since. I was a good sprinter – loved the competition – and then found the competitive urge to run longer distance as I found it easy – at the time!



2. My favourite distance became the 1500m or the mile (after trying different events including steeplechase), as it was an ideal distance in many ways for my build and speed endurance once developed a bit. I had good speed over 800m but never really the speed / power necessary to reach my hopes and aims. The 1500m also suited my concentration levels and I found I was able to break the race down into sections mentally quite well.
3. Best ever race is always difficult if you are lucky enough like me to have been in many great races. I guess to actually win a title has to be the one as this is after all what it is all about and it proved that I could win something significant and not just hang on for a fast time etc. The race being the 1988 Southern Senior 1500m Championships at Crystal Palace. Significant because in those days in excess of 100 entrants meant heats with only winners sure to qualify on a Friday night were the norm. I recall Rob Denmark complaining he was in my heat and in order to win the final I not only had to beat him but the likes of Gary Taylor, Tom Buckner and other sub 4 min milers. Time was 3:47 I believe but it didn't really take off until the last lap.

4. In terms of highlights I have had many. An inter county 800m where Peter Elliott perhaps felt he was turning up for an easy run out over 800m at Bromley and having to grit his teeth to keep me away in the home straight. Can't recall the year though. A 2000m in Norway in 1988 when Abdi Bile (Somalian World 1500m Champ 1987) was overtaken by me at the bell – don't worry he got me back with 150m to go ! and I ran 5:09. I was supposed to be doing a 1500m but got put in with him as Peter Elliott in the 1500m wanted to avoid him early season. Another was passing Coe in 1988 AAA 1500m heats and Olympic trials - leading through the bell. He passed me just in the home straight but himself also failed to qualify. This was the time when the media were printing "Coe must go!" . I was chuffed to read the back of the Mail on Sunday to discover that they were crediting me with forcing the pace that did him in ! There were many others from US collegiate days in relays etc, a Bronze Medal in the UK 1500m which was a breakthrough race really and even in the Southern League's that I used to love as it taught me to "race". I never actually lost a Southern League 1500m race in earnest – although when older running for TAC of course I did.
5. Most memorable has to be that Southern 1500m as it meant so much to me personally to win - and it was a time and a day when I was so confident that I would win. Other races are really memorable of course, but always more so if you won. I always remembered a rather brutal quote Ian Stewart made upon return from the Munich Olympics when congratulated on his bronze he said " First is first and second is nowhere !"

6. PBs as follows:

200m	23.9
400m	50.1
800m	1:50.14
1500m	3:42.66
Mile	4:00.7
3000m	8:12.7
3000m SC	8:57.9
400mH	54.2
10K (2015)	35:45

7. Troublesome injuries – well I have been blessed, extremely lucky with a light frame to have dodged anything major. Trouble with ankles and achilles in general due to too much track work – and in spikes – back in the day, were managed sufficiently to enable me to never miss too much. I think I had 6 months off once with Achilles tendon strain. Nowadays those mentioned and also the calves are a battle to manage, but fortunately I am still going, barring 6 months off in 2010 with achilles trouble. Bear in mind I never did the massive mileage like the Pete Brenchley's of the world so may have escaped some of the wear and tear – although this morning I am not so sure! The most mileage I ever consistently did was 90 – 95 miles per week in Winter.

8. Favourite venue for me I guess is Crystal Palace as being predominantly track man (although not these days), it was a venue we frequented as we were very lucky to be able to use it, and I won 3 Kent 1500m titles on it as well as the Southern Championships amongst others.
9. Targets now are to keep running! as it is all I know - and to maintain a good form. Nothing worries me more than looking like some old twit shuffling around so if I can keep a decent pace and form going then I am happy and of course to win a few aged titles ! (Ed.. To see how fed up you were after running 3 miles at the road relays in 17.25, shows that ambition still burns strongly)
10. Trivia – I have represented my County in the senior inter counties championship at 7.5 miles Cross Country and 400m Hurdles on the track – which isn't the most common double?

You can watch Graeme in action Winning for England in the M50 age group at the home internationals in 2012, when he had already secured the 2012 British Masters' M50 Championships. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QCM77SKYBxc>

