

Gavin Mendham

Listening to Gavin reminisce, left me in no doubt that there are fewer more caring people out there. He picked the perfect vocation to be a teacher, albeit stressful as a Head at times. Running turned out to be a perfect antidote when he most needed it. I'm sure that he's left a great legacy of former pupils and no doubt members of WRC, who've benefited from his investment in them.

Gavin was born in Ackworth in Yorkshire into a family with two older sisters. His mum and dad were teachers and the family were interested in natural history and the environment. They enjoyed the outdoor life, often camping and walking.

Gavin was very tall for his age and was always given a big handicap for his height, so it never felt like a positive benefit in sport or otherwise. He liked running and at the age of 12, he won an athletics competition. This spurred him on and whilst he wasn't a member of a club, he trained on his own. At secondary school he was good at cross country and played hockey. He met Sally at school when they were good friends but they didn't get together until she returned home from working in Kenya.

When he left school, he followed in his dad's footsteps studying biological sciences at Newcastle on Tyne. At university he was very committed to his studies and didn't do much sport but he did buy a bike and do some cycling and enjoyed the social fun of English Folk dancing. After University, there wasn't much going in environmental studies, so he went into Retail, joining the M&S management scheme. After 18 months, he joined the Civil Service until he had three years earning under his belt and could qualify for a grant to go back to studying, this time in teacher training.

He did his teacher training at Manchester University and whilst his intention had been to teach biology and sciences in a secondary school, he changed his mind and started working as a primary school teacher in Holmes Chapel. From there, he moved to Poynton, then Wilmslow, teaching at Gorseley Bank for seven years. He got his management qualifications through Open University and was promoted Head Teacher at The Grange in Handforth, where he stayed until he retired at 59. However, retirement didn't last for long as he was tempted back into full-time work for a further 2 years, operating as the link between head teachers and local authorities.

Looking back, he's proud to have had a career in education, being able to see the positive impact he's had on generations of kids. Gavin takes delight in the simple things you can teach kids to master, like multiple division. He loved to see "a light go on when they enjoyed subjects like history and art." He always encouraged sport and fitness, personally becoming a netball coach bringing his team from "low beginnings to a good competitive team."

In terms of his own sporting career, he completed several triathlons in his early twenties, including the Slateman and the Sandman. Twice achieving second in his age group. In 1985, he entered the Wilmslow Half Marathon, which he describes as a "local fun run". At that time he would follow the training guides that Tony wrote for the Wilmslow gazette. He recalls the old course of David Lewis and Alderley Edge, finishing on the Rugby Club grounds. My jaw dropped when he bashfully mentioned that he completed his "fun run" in 1 hour and 27 minutes! It was either the long legs coming positive or Tony's training sessions. Gavin thinks the 130 miles a week he was clocking up by commuting to work on his bike.

Whilst he was interested in running, he had little time to devote to it, wanting to support Sally with their two small kids: Peter was born in 1979 and Claire in 1981. He ran the Wilmslow Half the following year in a similar time and then went on to run the Macclesfield Half a couple of years later. After the race he overheard two guys discussing doing another 8 mile run the following day. "Really?"that was Paul Saunders and Rob Dunkley! He soon joined them at the Handforth Club, which was in the process of transitioning to become Wilmslow. He recalls the "famous AGM" about changing the name and deciding who would be of influence in the new adult-focused club. The new club first met at the High School, then the leisure centre and soon made an agreement with the Rugby Club.

In the early nineties Gavin found his stride at cross country, with his long legs giving him an advantage and weight training giving him strength on the hills. He enjoyed being a strong member of the Wilmslow team. One of his best racing memories at this time is of Grindleford Gallop, a race of about 23 miles. In spite of losing his way and having to back-track, he finished in 2 hours 51 minutes, in the top 20. Another is the Neolithic marathon, which he ran with Ian Smallwood, a tough course on a beautiful day, just beating Ian to the finishing line at Stonehenge. He also recalls the Sandstone trail as a favourite. He enjoyed the 16 mile course on a fresh autumn day, running hard but unaware that he was winning his age group. A bonus was that his sister was also there as part of the Deeside Orienteering Club, who organize the race.

Over his peak running period, he achieved a PB of 36.10 for the 10k and a PB of 60 mins for 10 miles.

For the Half Marathon he had a PB of 79 minutes for the old Four Villages, paced by Geoff Quinn, a rebel from Handforth!

He's run the London marathon five times, Stratford twice and Manchester, with his best time 3 hours and 1 minute! Can you imagine the frustration looking back!

Reminiscing, Gavin sounds most proud of winning his age group for the Manchester Cross Country Series as a V55.

The "most weird" race recollected was one in the summer series across Morcambe sands. It was a Half Marathon starting from the airfield, only a plane was coming in to land as the race was setting off. The race officials had to clear the runway of runners to allow the plane to land and then start the race again. The runway was followed by country lanes, then a long stretch of sands, where the route was not clearly marked and required runners to avoid channels of water. "The possibility of losing runners seemed real, so we only included that race once in the summer series!"

And by the way, Boggart Hole Clough needs to be mentioned for smelly trainers afterwards!

FOR GAVIN TRAINING HAS ALWAYS BEEN STRAIGHT FORWARD, RUNNING WITH THE CLUB ON TUESDAYS AND THURSDAYS, SOMETIMES ON SUNDAYS, DOING EXTRA DAYS TRAINING ON HIS OWN AND WITH IAN SMALLWOOD. HE RECALLS DOING SOME "GRUELLING SESSIONS ON ALDERLEY EDGE" WITH THE CLUB WHEN IT WAS SMALLER.

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On diet, he's always hungry and eats healthily, especially veggies from his own plot.

He recalls 2014 being a particularly good year, with the Welsh Castle Relays being a highlight. "I was congratulated by a really good younger runner, who just pipped me on our 10 mile leg and that felt like a good compliment!"

After that, he had some good training sessions and some tougher ones. He knew something wasn't right when he felt no energy and was unexpectedly out of breath.

He got himself checked out and a heart problem was identified, which was resulting in a combination of fibrillations and a very low pulse rate. The solution was a pacemaker, which picks up his heart rate when it drops below 50 bpm.

Since then, Gavin has continued to enjoy running but gone more softly. He's highly active in other areas, cycling about 50 miles a week with the South Manchester Cycle Touring vets group and a further 50 miles on his own. Tuesday nights have been swapped from interval sessions with WRC to singing with the Barnby Choir. Over the years, he's enjoyed "Singing for Fun" at the Wilmslow Guild and a couple of years ago about twelve of the guys formed an off-shoot called Hullabaloo, who entertain at care homes and private functions.

MEDALS
AND
MEMORIES



TOP ROW:

Cheshire Cross Country Champs, Tatton Park Triathlon,
Cheshire Cross Country Champs, Whitley 10K

MIDDLE ROW:

Woodford 10k, Brathay Windermere Marathon, Stockport Triathlon,
Wilmslow Half, Conway Half Marathon

BOTTOM ROW:

Slate Man Triathlon: Man V Horse Marathon, Llandudno 10 mile,
Etape Calaedonia Bike Ride,

GAVIN'S ADVICE FOR RUNNERS

1. Be nice to yourself. Don't get too hung up on being 30 seconds down. It only matters to you.
2. Try to keep consistency in training as much as possible
3. Support club training nights, even in horrible weather. The team turn out to train you, so you should turn out for them too.
4. Be truthful to yourself about injuries. If it really hurts pay attention and do the right thing.

LOOKING AHEAD, GAVIN MAY HAVE ANOTHER GO AT TRIATHLONS, STARTING WITH WILMSLOW BUT HE WON'T BE LOOKING AT HIS WATCH, HE'LL JUST BE DOING IT FOR FUN AND BECAUSE HE CAN!