

THE TORCHBEARER

NEWSLETTER 39.

“56ers Torchbearers Club Inc”

PO Box 2148, CAIRNS Q 4870

Committee:

Patron	Con Verevis	Tel 07 40914283
President	Jim Vallely	Tel 07 40532150
Vice President	Dennis Stevenson	Tel 07 40653223
Secretary/Treasurer	Bill Cummings	Tel 07 40312888

THE ROCKHAMPTON REUNION

Two members of our club attended the 2012 Rockhampton reunion of the wonderful 1956 Olympic torch relay - Bob Chester and Vern Tomasich. Their report is as follows:

1956 TORCHBEARERS REUNION ROCKHAMPTON NOVEMBER 2012

After driving 1022 kilometers and numerous road work stops (some up to 15 minutes in length), we arrived at the David Motor Inn in Rockhampton in the late afternoon on the 8th November. On arrival we found 15 torchbearers who had arrived ahead of us. Included in this group were Toby Morrell and Keith Jurgens from Bowen accompanied by their wives.

On Friday 9th 61 people including Vern and Bev Tomasich boarded the bus in front of a Win TV camera and local press reporters. Anne Marsden of ‘Carrying the Torch’ fame was also one of the 61 passengers en route to Croydon. We were greeted by a number of young school girls from the Clark River school, looking very nice in their school uniforms and waving Australian flags and wearing big smiles for us.



The Rockhampton district torch monument with Bob Chester the photographer in the background..

PRESIDENT’S COMMENTS

Greetings Fellow Torchbearers and Partners,

With a successful AGM combined with an enjoyable luncheon fresh on our minds and Christmas around the corner, Dennis has managed to script a final newsletter for 2012.

Possibly the most notable decision to come from our meeting was a unanimous vote to add the Ladies 1500 metre event to our sponsorship for the ongoing North Queensland Games lifting our contribution to \$2,000 for the bi-annual event.

May all members and their families enjoy a happy, healthy and safe festive season and I look forward to keeping the flame alight for our special club.

Regards
Jim Vallely
President





Students from the Clark River State School who welcomed torchbearers to Croydon.



Anne Marsden and Vern Tomasich at Croydon.

Many photos were taken and we all enjoyed smoko which was provided for us at the memorial park. On our way back we enjoyed a lunch at the Marlborough Hotel. The steaks were beautiful and tender and not like some shoe leather steaks at some barbeques.

On Saturday morning 10th November 53 people took part in a bus tour of Rockhampton, where we saw many historic buildings and river sites that most of us had not seen before. We then returned to our accommodation to indulge in a rest or a nap to prepare for a big dinner that night at the Frenchville Sports Club with 119 taking part. In attendance were Anne Marsden and also a surprise guest, 1956 athlete Norma Croker Flemming accompanied by her husband. Norma carried a photo of our monument taken

when she was in Cairns for the unveiling of our monument on the Esplanade.

Anne Marsden was guest speaker and spoke of the trials and tribulations Marcus had in compiling the book 'Carrying the Torch'.

As one can imagine the yarns and exaggerations flowed well. The prizes for the best yarns went to one bloke about the 18 inch snake that crossed the road and by the time the torch reached Melbourne grew to a few metres in length. The other yarn related to the mile distance on the Marlborough stretch being longer than an ordinary mile because running up and down the corrugations added another half mile. On Sunday we made a later start and 47 of us were taken by bus to the Rockhampton Botanic Gardens where we observed one minute silence at 11am at the monument in the park there. At the zoo Anne was able to spot a cassowary. This was followed by a farewell barbecue at the Bowls club-house adjacent to the gardens.

We thank the Rockhampton Torch Bearers for their hospitality and organizing such a professional event. We are sure that everyone who attended had a marvelous time.



Torch bearers pictured at Croydon reunion.

Bob Chester and Vern Tomasich

56ers STORIES

Newsletter no 38 reported upon Bob Chester's Olympic Torch run. Bob was one of the lucky runners who ran in day light hours and he has supplied the newsletter with photographs taken at the change over point near the QR railway crossing in Gordonvale. Bob and Roy Goss were welcomed and farewelled by many local Gordonvale people including a friend of mine (mid picture left).



Bob Chester about to depart south with his freshly lit torch with the previous runner Roy Goss and the old National Bank in the background. Note the familiar army truck in the rear holding spare torches and fuel canisters.

Torch Memorabilia.

At the AGM John Sheppard (25 miles South of Tully) indicated that he had donated his mile peg to the Olympic Museum located at the MCG. He suggested that should any 56ers who had any other memorabilia may wish to offer it to the museum. The item would be registered and the torchbearer's name and location affixed.

FORMER OLYMPIC GAMES

No doubt 56ers will be aware that the Olympic Games originated in Greece some 3000 years ago. A comparison of these games with say the recent London Olympics bears some significant differences.

The Ancient Games.

History records that the Ancient Olympic Games were first held in 776 BC and dedicated to the Olympian gods. These games were held on the ancient fields of Olympia and continued for twelve centuries until Emperor Theodosius decreed that all such pagan cults be banned.

Olympia the site of the ancient Olympic Games is in the Western part of the Peloponnese which according to Greek mythology is the island of Pelops the founder of the Olympic Games. The site was covered by imposing votive buildings and temples together with elaborate shrines and the sporting facilities. Olympia functioned as a meeting place for worship and other religious practices. The central part of Olympia was dominated by the majestic temple of Zeus.

The games were closely linked to the religious festivals of the cult of Zeus. They had a secular character and were aimed to show the physical qualities and evolution of the performances accomplished by young people and encouraging good relations between the cities of Greece.

The competitors had to be male free born Greeks. The circumspection of women spectators was lifted overtime. The first games had one event over one day- a race over the length of the stadium (about 210 yards). Over time the length of the games were extended to five days to include a race over the length of the stadium, one over two lengths, a long distance race over 2.75 miles and a race in armour. Combat sports included boxing and the pentathlon- a no holds barred event that only excluded biting and gouging. Further elaborations include a chariot race with four horses and a pentathlon. The pentathlon was thought to be an elimination contest with long jump, javelin, discus and a sprint. The fifth event was wrestling but only relied upon if the competition was not already decided.

Gradually the games lost their reputation especially when the Roman Emperor Nero entered and was allowed to win the chariot race in 66AD and finally abolished by decree in 393 AD. The buildings were gradually demolished and in time through earthquakes and floods buried below about 20m of soil.

In the 19th century archaeologists began excavating the temple of Zeus and by 1881 most of the Olympia complex was uncovered. This led to international discussions aimed at reintroducing the modern Olympic Games.

Acknowledgments; I wish to credit the editors Martin Tyler and Phil Soar of the book 'The History of the Olympics' for the historical information in this article.

WE SHOULD NEVER FORGET THEM

In this newsletter I wish to review the significant contributions made to Australian Athletics by Kevan Gosper, Shirley Strickland, Marlene Mathews and Fleur Mellor.

KEVAN GOSPER.

Kevan Gosper was a popular athlete who qualified for membership of the AOC in various positions. He was a champion 400m runner who was part of the Australian team that was placed second in the 1956 400m relay final and ran second to the American team. Gosper teamed with G Gipson, L Gregory, D Lean to anchor the relay and the Australians crossed the line in 3.06.2.2.



Kevan Gosper, Lean, Gipson, and Gregory with their silver medals from the 400m relay in Melbourne.

Gosper won the gold medal in the 440 yards run at the Vancouver British Empire Games and the bronze medal in both relays. He studied in the United States and improved on his 400m times to be a real medal hope in Melbourne but was surprisingly eliminated in the semi-finals. At Cardiff Games he won bronze in the 440 yard run and bronze in the 440 yard relay. He attended the Rome Olympics but did not reach the final.

In his business life Gosper became a senior executive as well as contributing to the management of sport and the Olympic movement including positions as President of the Australian Olympic Federation and vice president of the Sydney Organizing Committee for the games.

In 1986 he was created an officer of the Order of Australia for services to sport and sports administration. He was inducted to the Sports Hall of Fame in 1989.

56'ers who attended the 2006 50th anniversary of the Melbourne Games were fortunate to meet Kevan Gosper and receive congratulations from him for the manner we all welcomed the Australian team in the march past. His jubilant thanks and smile will not be forgotten.

SHIRLEY STRICKLAND (de la Hunty)

Shirley Strickland won seven Olympic sprinting medals—three gold one silver and three bronze over games in 1948, 1952 and 1956. However she should have won one more. In 1948 in London she was incorrectly judged to finish fourth in the 200m final. A photo finish—not consulted at the time but discovered in 1975—showed beyond doubt that she finished third. Strickland's haul of medals remained a record until 1976 when Irena Szewinska of Poland and Merlene Ottey of Jamaica also reached seven medals.

Strickland was born at Guilford, WA the daughter of a Stawell gift winner and was a woman of exceptional spirit. Following the London 1948 games (she won a silver and two bronze medals) she was told by her coach that she should retire. Being only 23, dedicated and defiant she continued to compete and won the 80m hurdles in the Helsinki games in 1952, setting two world records and beating her London conqueror Fanny Blankers-Koen.

At the Melbourne games Shirley was a mother of two she won gold in the hurdles and was a member of the winning relay team.



Shirley Strickland and son Phillip following breaking the Olympic record and retaining the 80m hurdles title in 1956.

MARLENE MATTHEWS.

I have been reluctant to report on Marlene because I have a great deal of sympathy for her in not being selected to be part of the women's relay team at Melbourne.

Apart from her pre games record her performances in the 100m and 200m events where she was placed third in each event with times of 11.7 and 23.8 respectively in my mind qualified her for the relay but alas she was not selected. Matthews performances prior to the games gave her the strongest claim to the relay. She had run the fastest 100yards (10.5) and the fastest 100m (11.5) in the world. In 1956 on nearly every occasion they met she defeated Betty Cuthbert. However an improving Cuthbert beat Matthews by a four feet margin in the Olympic trials. In the first round heats of the 100m Matthews equaled the Olympic record with 11.5 In the 200m final Matthews was challenging Stubnick for second place at 120m but was almost equal to Stubnick at the finish. Norma Croker was a gallant fourth.

Marlene Mathews was the unluckiest girl in the Australian team. She had good reason to hope for three gold medals at Melbourne. She rejoiced as much as anyone with the improving Betty Cuthbert but some enthusiasm seemed to ebb from her.

In the writers long held view Marlene was wronged by not being selected for the relay but to her eternal credit she has not been outwardly bitter about it. She attended a pre Sydney Olympic Games fundraiser in Cairns with Herb Elliott and Norman May in 1999 and the editor was fortunate to obtain her signature over a Melbourne photograph with Betty Cuthbert and Christa Stubnick.

Marlene also attended the 50th Anniversary celebrations in Melbourne in 2006.



Marlene Mathews (right) with Betty Cuthbert and Christa Stubnick. The photo was counter signed by Marlene in 1999 at an Olympic fund raiser in Cairns.

FLEUR (WENHAM) MELLOR.

Fleur Mellor ran in one event in Melbourne. She joined Betty Cuthbert, Shirley Strickland and Norma Croker to claim gold from Great Britain and the United States and create a new world record of 44.5 seconds.

I wish to acknowledge reports by historian Harry Gordon for some of the information in this coverage also the book 'Olympic Saga,' by Keith Donald and Don Selth for other key data and photos.

CARRYING THE TORCH by MARCUS MARSDEN

We have acquired a number of copies of Marcus' book from Anne which are available to members and newsletter recipients for an all up price of \$25 each. Please email Bill Cummings at cummings@cummings.com.au should you need a copy notifying your forwarding contact details.



JOKER'S CORNER.

Secrets to a Long Happy Marriage

An old woman was sipping on a glass of wine while sitting on the patio with her husband and she says, "I love you so much I don't know how I could live without you". Her husband asks, "Is that you or the wine talking?"

She replies, "It's me talking to the wine."

How's It Going?

A man and his wife were spending the day at the zoo. She was wearing a loose fitting pink dress, sleeveless with straps. He was wearing his usual jeans and t-shirt. As they walked through the ape exhibit they passed in front of a large silverback gorilla. Noticing the wife the gorilla went crazy. He jumped on the bars and holding on with one hand and two feet he grunted and pounded his chest with his free hand. He was obviously excited at the pretty lady in the pink dress.

The husband noticing the excitement thought this was funny. He suggested that his wife tease the poor fellow more by puckering her lips and wiggling her bottom. She played along and the gorilla got even more excited. Then the husband suggested that she let one of her straps fall to show a little more skin. The gorilla was about to tear the bars down. Now show your thighs and fan your dress at him the husband said. This drove the gorilla crazy and he started doing flips. Then the husband grabbed his wife, ripped open the door to the cage, flung her in with the gorilla and slammed the door shut.

Now. Tell him you have a headache.

With those corny jokes out of the way, I would join with the president and committee and wish all our members and newsletter recipients a very happy Christmas and a wonderful New Year.

Long may we all reflect on the mile we ran in November 1956.

D M Stevenson

menafalls1@bigpond.com