

THE TORCHBEARER

NEWSLETTER 72

"56ers Torchbearers Club Inc"

PO Box 2148, CAIRNS Q 4870

Committee:

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President	Jim Vallely	Tel 07 40532150
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President's Comments

Greetings once again fellow Torchbearers and Partners

This being our first newsletter since the North Queensland Games, I am pleased to confirm five of our trusted members, Andrew Cummings, Vern Tomasich, John O'Donoghue, Ian McCubbin and daughter Kim stepped up to the plate and handled the organising and presentation of cheques to the successful 1500 metre runners as both Secretary Bill and myself were unable to make the trip to Townsville.

It is comforting to know we have torchbearers dotted along the eastern seaboard when called upon.

Montana McAvoy granddaughter of 1956 torchbearer Joe McAvoy is back to her winning ways taking out the female section of the gruelling Pyramid Race. Look for her bobbing up on the national scene in the near future.

Our suggestion to the Queensland Government the 2032 Torch Relay duplicates the 1956 running rather than the Sydney Games has been acknowledged and the committee yet to be formed will handle such matters.

All the very best of health to our members and their families.

Kind regards

Jim Vallely
President



ANNUAL MEETING

Saturday 12th November 2022

As usual, the Club will hold its Annual Meeting at the Cairns RSL commencing at 11.30am on Saturday 12th November (being a Saturday close to the anniversary of the original run in November 1956). (Please see Notice of Meeting attached.)

If unable to attend, you may nominate a proxy to attend to vote on your behalf and ensure there is sufficient representation for a quorum (see Proxy Form attached).

The meeting will be followed by the Annual Anniversary Lunch commencing at 12.30pm at which wives and guests are welcome.

NORTH QUEENSLAND GAMES

As in previous years, the 56ers Olympic Torchbearers Club sponsored the 1500 metres event (closest to one mile), at the North Queensland Games held in Townsville over the weekend 29th April to 2nd May 2022.

To commemorate the 1956 Olympic Torch Relay featuring 2831 young athletes, each running the torch one mile on its journey from Cairns to Melbourne in November 1956, the Club provides \$2,000 as prize money for the men's and women's 1500 metres event.



Vern Tomasich, John O'Donoghue, Ian McCubbin at the North Queensland Games Opening Ceremony (Left to Right).

In recognition of the Club's support for the North Queensland Games, representatives of the Club were invited to participate in the opening ceremony. Original runners Vern Tomasich, Ian McCubbin, and John O'Donoghue symbolically were involved in passing the torch through to ex

Cowboys star Matthew Bowen who lit the cauldron to open the Games.



TSV Councillor Maurie Soars, Ex. Cowboys Mathew Bowen and 56er John O'Donoghue.

On behalf of the Club, John O'Donoghue presented a short address as part of the opening ceremony with assistance in composition from Vern Tomasich. Full text of John's address is given following.



Speaker - John O'Donoghue, present - Ian McCubbin and Vern Tomasich on stage.

Descendent members Andrew Cummings and Kim McCubbin and partner Bev Tomasich were also present at the opening ceremony that was held on that Friday night.



Kim McCubbin and Bev Tomasich.

Special thanks goes to the organisational committee of the North Queensland Games for their efforts to make every one of the 56ers feel welcome and comfortable. A great time was had by all in attendance on Friday night with many memories and laughs shared.

The 1500 men's and women's events were held on the afternoon of Saturday 30th with Vern Tomasich making the presentations on behalf of the Club to the winners at a prize giving ceremony that evening.



Vern Tomasich with Councillor Maurie Soars presenting trophies and cheques to winners of the 1500m of the North QLD Games 2022.

Ian McCubbin represented the club at the games closing ceremony on the Sunday night 31st.

The next North Queensland Games is scheduled to be held in Cairns in 2024.

The Club currently holds sufficient funds to continue donating \$2,000 in prize money for the

event through to 2032, the year the Olympic Games will be held in Brisbane.

More photos and a video of the speech is available on the 56er's website <https://56ers.org.au/>.

ADDRESS TO THE NORTH QLD GAMES OPENING CEROMONY

Delivered by John O'Donoghue.

Good evening everyone, I am Jim speaking tonight, with other members Vern and Ian on behalf of the 56ers Olympic Torchbearers Club.

The 56ers Torchbearers Club is proud to be an on-going sponsor of the NQ Games' 1500 meter race for male and female. The \$1000 prize money is split between 1st, 2nd and 3rd for each of the male and female events.

A brief history of why our Club was formed.

When the Olympic Games were held in Melbourne, it was decided to have the Olympic torch relay from Cairns to Melbourne. Each runner in the relay had to run the mile, 1.6 km, with torch alight, then lighting the next runner's torch at the end of the mile. The event went day and night, rain, hail or sunshine, a runner's feet on the road over 13 days and nights.

At the time it was the longest relay in history with 2831 runners from Cairns to Melbourne going through most of the towns down the east coast ending at the MCG.

The Olympic flame arrived in Cairns from Greece on the 2nd November 1956. The torch was lit by Cairns Mayor, Bill Fulton from the miner's lamp.

Con Verevis was the first runner from the Cairns airport with Anthony Mark, a First Australian, from Kowanyama on the Cape the next runner, and continued changing runners every mile.

As mentioned, the relay went all day and night with runners having to contend with all the different road conditions, like running in the dark with lights of the army truck behind, then to flooded rivers and roads around Mackay.

Vern, ran through rain at Innisfail and as usual it was raining cats and dogs in Innisfail. Myself I ran

near Cluden Racecourse with a cattle dog chasing me for the full mile. Ian's mate had to run across the Burdekin River which at the time was flooded, so they put him on a railway carriage and he held the torch a loft until he got to the other side to continue his run. So it went through all sorts of conditions.

Through all of these conditions the torch arrived in Melbourne about 20 minutes early after just over four and a half thousand kilometres, where Ron Clarke ran the last mile to lighting the cauldron to start the Melbourne Olympic Games.

It was a long time ago, but we all remember it well.

Good luck to all the competitors for the weekend.

Thank you.

56er's Corner

In attendance at the North Queensland Games, John O'Donoghue provided to the co-author Andrew, some newspaper clippings he had kept, reporting on the 1956 Relay which we thought we would share with you all.

The 1999 newspaper article, "Sweating with Pride" featuring John O'Donoghue and the events that took place can be found at end.

There are more clippings provided by John from 1956 which we will share in future episodes of the Torchbearer.

WE SHOULD NEVER FORGET THEM

Vladimir Kuts

Double Olympic Gold in 1956

Vladimir Kuts (February 1927 – 16 August 1975) was born in Oleksyne, Ukraine, USSR, a rural farming community. His father died due to alcoholism when Kuts was five years old. Kuts completed only six years of school before the start of World War II where he falsified his age and served two years with the Soviet Army as a courier.

He took up running after the war, while continuing his military service as a navy sniper. In 1951 he won his first national titles, in the 5,000 and 10,000m.

His first international success came in 1954, when he defeated the favourites, Emil Zatopek and Christopher Chataway in the 5,000m at the European Championships, setting a new world record. He lost the world record months later to Chataway (who beat him narrowly), only to take it back 10 days later.

Having lost his world record again in 1955, Kuts was still one of the favourites for the 1956 Summer Olympics in Melbourne. His chief opponent in the 5,000m was British runner Gordon Pirie, who had broken the world record earlier that year. However, Kuts had set a new 10,000 metres world record shortly before the Games. In the first track & field final, the 10,000m, Kuts, as always, led from the start, he would employ quick varying pace, sprint & slow tactic, making others follow his style from the front and finally breaking Pirie's spirit attack 4 laps from the end and winning by a wide margin. He broke away from Pirie with a final, desperate sprint, and admitted later that had Pirie stayed with him on that sprint, he might have dropped out due to fatigue. Pirie exhausted then faded badly, Jozsef Kovacs of Hungary took Silver and Australian Alan Lawrence from Punchbowl, Sydney, finished 3rd taking Bronze.



Vladimir Kuts, Gordon Pirie and Australian, Alan Lawrence.

The 5,000m final 5 days later ended in a similar fashion, with Kuts leading from start to finish and once again battling Gordon Pirie. His winning margin of 11 seconds was the largest ever for this event in Olympic history.



[A good recap of the 2 runs available on YouTube linked here.](#)

Kuts was the first Russian athlete to win a gold medal in track and field.

Kuts improved the 5000 m world record in 1957 to 13:35.0 minutes, a time which would remain unbeaten until 1965, when it was bettered by Australia's Ron Clarke. Although he was only beaten on a couple of occasions, Kuts retired at the age of 32 in 1959. He had often suffered from pains in his stomach and legs, which he once froze while serving in the Navy. These problems severely hindered his training in 1957–1959 and followed him for the rest of his life.

Kuts was married twice. He met his first wife in 1953, when she was taking his interviews as a journalist. She later taught him Russian grammar because of his missed schooling. They had a son Yuri, who became a scientist.

After retiring from competitions Kuts worked as an athletics coach preparing Olympic athletes and not long before the start of the 1972 Olympics, Kuts tragically suffered injuries from a car crash which through complications would take his life only 3 years later in 1975.

Jokes Corner

A guy is sitting at home when he hears a knock at the door. He opens the door and sees a snail on the porch. He picks up the snail and throws it as far as he can. Three years later there's a knock on the door. He opens it and sees the same snail. The snail says, "What the hell was that all about?"

A customer walked into the post office wanting to mail a package. "Two-day shipping will cost \$12.95 to get it there by Friday," co-worker Billy told the customer. The customer, clearly looking to save a few dollars, said, "The package doesn't have to get there till Saturday. Is there any way to make that happen?" Billy nodded, "Sure. You can bring it back tomorrow."

Brenda and Terry are going out for the evening. The last thing they do is put their cat out. The taxi arrives, and as the couple walk out of the house, the cat scoots back in.

Terry returns inside to chase it out. Brenda, not wanting it known that the house would be empty, explains to the taxi driver, "My husband is just going upstairs to say goodbye to my mother."

Several minutes later, an exhausted Terry arrives and climbs back into the taxi saying, "Sorry I took so long, the stupid idiot was hiding under the bed."

Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson went on a camping trip. After a good meal and a bottle of wine they lay down for the night, and went to sleep.

Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his faithful friend, "Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see." Watson replied, "I see millions and millions of stars."

"What does that tell you?"

Watson pondered for a minute, "Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Theologically, I can see that God is all powerful and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow.

Holmes repeats, "What does it tell you?"

Holmes was silent for a minute, then spoke, "Watson, someone has stolen our tent!"

"Once, my father came home and found me in front of a roaring fire. That made my father very mad, as we didn't have a fireplace."

"I feel bad for the homeless guy, but I feel really bad for the homeless guy's dog, because he must be thinking, "Man, this is the longest walk ever".



The official sports drink when I was a kid..



Kind Regards
Dennis M Stevenson
menafalls1@bigpond.com
"The Running Scotsman"

Take the Torch

17.3.99

Sweating with pride

By CHARLES BOSTON

BLOOD, sweat and dog bites went into organising the 1956 Olympic Torch Relay in Townsville.

"The cattle dog chased me and bit me on the heels," former torch bearer John O'Donoghue said.

"And that was only the trial run."

Mr O'Donoghue said a Townsville committee was given the job of organising the relay to Proserpine, but first it had to find fit young runners.

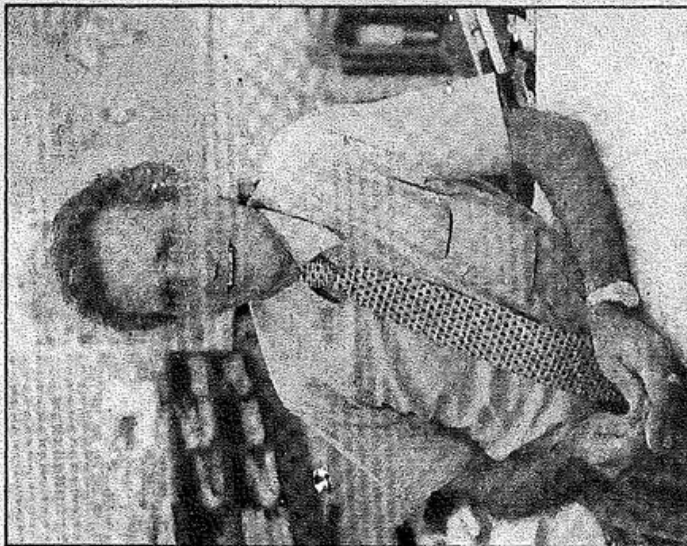
They invited the fastest feet in the North to try out for a mile dash at Cluden racecourse.

Mr O'Donoghue ran the mile in four minutes and 45 seconds to beat a field including Bowen's famous "Flying Dutchman", John Noort, said to be a former Olympian.

Back then Mr O'Donoghue was a champion runner and swimmer.

After the trial came the meetings and practice runs, and then the big day when North Queenslanders were entrusted with the sacred Olympic flame.

"The idea was you never let the flame go out," Mr O'Donoghue said. "Supposedly they got it from a magnifying glass or mirror in Greece."



FLEET FOOTED ... John O'Donoghue

Mr O'Donoghue was shocked at the suggestion the torch could always have been re-ignited with a cigarette lighter.

"That's sacrilege," he said. Mr O'Donoghue said organisers had to drop runners at mile intervals along the route.

The fresh runner had another torch, fuelled up and ready to receive the flame.

And the old torch had to be re-fuelled and rushed to the next runner.

Another torch bearer veteran, Herb Spilsbury, said the plan in going came seriously unstuck at the swollen Burdekin River.

The bearers could get across on the rail lines, but not the support truck.

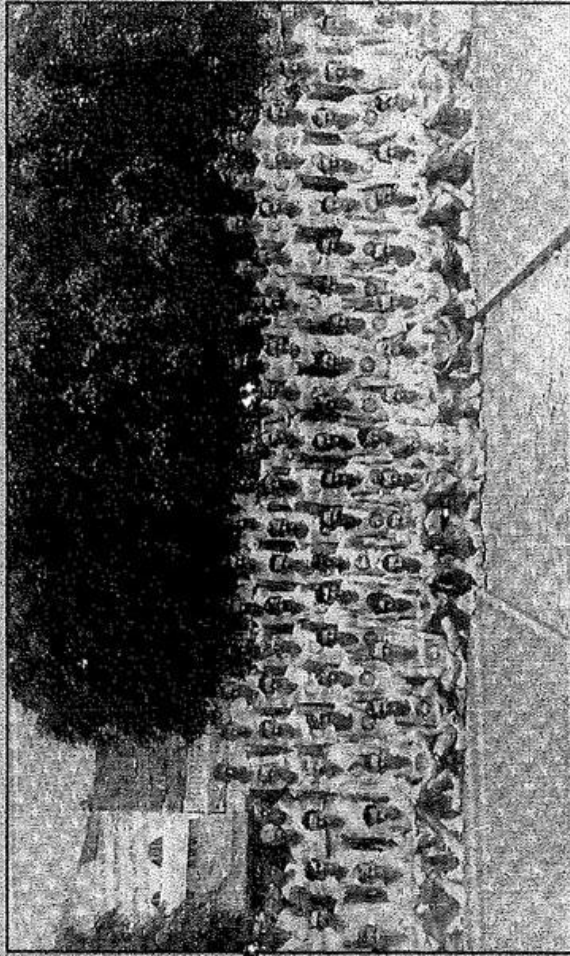
"The first aid, the oranges and the water only got to Ayr," Mr Spilsbury said.

The authorities had to commandeered a tray-top truck on the other side of the Burdekin, and Mr Spilsbury said it

was a hot, crowded, thirsty ride to the run area. But Mr Spilsbury remembered the run itself was magic.

"The southbound mail train pulled up, tooted, and kept pace with me. People were hanging out of the windows taking photos," he said.

Of course the torch made it safely to Proserpine — then to Melbourne for one of the most successful of the modern Olympiads, the "friendly Games".



RUNNERS ... northern torch bearers who participated in the 1956 Games relay

TO CARRY THE TORCH...

The nominee must have:

- Performed major feats of individual accomplishment against the odds,
- Made outstanding acts of generosity and kindness,
- Contributed to the benefit of his or her community,
- Been a role model or mentor, or made a special contribution to the lives of others,
- Undertaken voluntary work or contributed to schools or youth groups, or
- Embodied pride and community values.