

THE TORCHBEARER

NEWSLETTER 77 - July 2025

"56ers Torchbearers Club Inc"

PO Box 2148, CAIRNS Q 4870

Committee:

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President	Jim Vallely	Tel 07 40532150
Vice President	Paul Eggers	Tel 0412 240 941
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President's Comments

Greetings once again Fellow Torchbearers and Partners.

It is with a saddened heart I inform our members of the passing of Dennis Stevenson, a long serving Vice President and editor of our Newsletter. Dennis has been with the club since its inception and a valued member of the committee. He will be sadly missed. Our sincere condolences to his wife Lyn and family.

A very capable Andrew Cummings will take charge of the Newsletter and Paul Eggers will take over as Vice President.

Best wishes to all members and keep the flame burning!

Kind regards
Jim Vallely
President



ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025

DATE CLAIMER

Saturday 8th November 2025

The annual meeting of the 56ers Olympic Torchbearers Club will be held in accordance with tradition, on **Saturday 8th November 2025**, i.e. close to the anniversary of the original commencement of the 1956 Olympic Torch Relay from Cairns to Melbourne on the 9th November 1956.

The meeting will be held at the Boardroom of the Cairns RSL, Esplanade, Cairns, commencing at 11.30am followed by the annual lunch to which wives and guests are invited to join members commencing approximately at 1PM. Formal notice will be given closer to the date.

Annual General Meeting 2024

Was held again at Cairns RSL Boardroom on Saturday, 16th November 2024. The following office bearers were elected - President Jim Vallely and Hon Secretary/Treasurer Bill Cummings. Paul Eggers was elected as Vice President to replace Dennis Stevenson who had advised of unavailability for the position. Descendent member Andrew Cummings was elected as Co-Secretary and co-author of the Torchbearer publication.

NQ Games Mackay

The North QLD Games Foundation has advised that the next NQ Games will be held in Mackay on the weekend 1st to 4th of May 2026. Let us know if you can be in attendance to help represent the Club at the official opening usually on the Friday night and at the 1500 metre event usually on the Saturday.

Vale Jim O'Brian

Former active member, James 'Jim' O'Brian, late of Nudgee, formerly of Wavell Heights & Balgal Beach, passed away peacefully, surrounded by family 17th of January, 2025, aged 90 years.

Vale Dennis Stevenson

Club representatives attended Dennis Stevenson's funeral at Innisfail in May – Hon Secretary/ Treasurer Bill and Andrew Cummings and wife Janet, Patron Margaret Cochrane and Vern Tomasich and wife Bev from Townsville.

Special tributes were paid to Dennis during the ceremony for his years of service to the Club as Vice President and as Editor of the Torchbearer. Dennis, a keen member of the local Pipe Band was remembered for his symbol in the Torchbearer a man running while playing the bagpipes. Also remembered was his humour and the many great jokes in the Torchbearer.

Dennis grew up in Gordonvale and entered the sugar industry in which he rose to become Manager of South Johnstone Sugar Mill before retiring to a property at Mena Creek. His employment in the sugar industry took him to the Mackay area where he ran his Olympic Torch Mile in 1956.

The Club's deepest sympathy is extended to wife Lyn who gave strong support to Dennis and his involvement in the Club and son Brett who continues to carry the torch as a descendent member.



Kind Regards

Dennis M Stevenson

"The Running Scotsman"

Vale Doug Eales

Doug Eales had the honour of being the second last runner in the 1956 relay and over the years was an enthusiastic member of the Club. His daughter Melinda sent us the following tribute paid to Doug at his funeral that we thought would be of interest to members especially Doug's Torchbearer story.

"I would like to pay tribute to Doug not only for his athletic achievements but also for his contribution to the Mentone Athletic Club.

As the current President of the Mentone Track and Field Centre I can say that we are indebted to Doug and his fellow club members of his era, for the time and effort in achieving the track, the pavilion, storage shed and other facilities we still have today.

Doug was always interested in running and would enter any school event, no matter the age group or specialty - if a competitor was needed, Doug volunteered. He joined the athletic club in 1946 at age 15 when the club had been in existence for only 4 years. Training initially at the Mentone Footy Oval, then to the decommissioned Mentone Race Course amongst the mud and horse dung. He was also one of the first athletes to use weight training as part of his training regimen.

His first cross country season was in 1948 following which he quickly established himself as an outstanding athlete. Not only did he win a number of Victorian State Championship titles but he was a member of the Victorian team that won the Australian Cross Country championship in 1952.

He also excelled as a track runner winning the Victorian open 3000 metres championship in 1952, 1953 and 1954.

His 1952 win in the 3000m steeple was a Victorian record and Australian best on record at that time. It was also the first State Open Championship won by a Mentone athlete

Doug was cross country captain for 7 years, Club president in 1960, having previously served as secretary in 1955/56.

It was during the late 1950s and early 60s, Doug was one of the leaders of the Mentone Athletic Club who were instrumental in getting a track at Dolamore Reserve and helped build the existing pavilion. At the official opening of the Dolamore Mentone track in 1959 Doug presented the Mayor of the City of Mordialloc with an official message of congratulations from the Lord Mayor of Melbourne delivered by a relay team from Melbourne.

Doug continued to compete and studied to become a Trainer after his marriage.

THE TORCH NEARLY DIDN'T MAKE IT DOUG'S TORCHBEARER STORY

One of the highlights of Doug's career was to represent the Victorian Athletics Association as the 1956 Olympic Torch relay runner to hand the torch to Ron Clarke for the opening of the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games.

With his letter of accreditation, Doug was let into the concrete room under the cauldron at the MCG, where he changed and then jogged out to meet the torch in Wellington parade. As he was going to end up in the stadium, he gave his ticket to a young person from Sydney who was in the roadside throng.

Having lit his torch from the incoming runner, the motorcycle police escort travelled with him along Wellington Parade and down Vale Street to the Richmond Cricket Ground – the marshaling area for all the competing teams.

Seeing the flame approach, the guard came to open the gate but it was locked and he didn't have a key!

The canister had only a 2 minute reserve. So setting off along the perimeter, Doug came to a

ticket sales window. First pushing the torch through then wiggling himself in, he then had to jump down over the seats to get to the oval, through the assembled teams and down the race to the same concrete room under the cauldron, where he transferred the flame from torch to torch as the last 4-5 teams entered the MCG.

Finally, Ron Clarke arrived with the ceremonial flame, however, this couldn't ignite another torch, so he used the short fused torch to light the cauldron, resulting in the singeing of his forearm.

It was later that night, watching a replay of the event, that Doug heard the commentator say" . . . and here comes the flame. What organization. What precision. After its 2850 mile journey from Cairns, it's right on time".

But Doug knew, that twice in that very last mile, it very nearly didn't make its destination??



Doug and 56ers at 50th anniversary of the Melbourne games 2006



Both Doug and Margaret also attended the 50th anniversary of the Melbourne games at the MCG in 2006, joining up with the 56'ers group.

When Margaret and Doug travelled to the Mediterranean for their 50th wedding Anniversary, they visited Greece. Apparently at Olympia, Doug lit his imaginary flame at the temple and carried it through the Avenue of Heroes out onto the site of the historic arena. ☺ What a memory!

Doug had previously been awarded life membership of the Mentone Athletic Club.

It was a privilege to know Doug, and the Mentone Athletic Club community is saddened by his loss and extends sympathy and condolences to the family.

Welcome Don Doherty

The Management Committee resolved to accept the application for membership from Don Doherty.

Don was an Olympic Torch Bearer in 1956 in the Mackay region running his mile on a deserted stretch of road between Farleigh and Glenella, in the very early hours of the morning.

"I live on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland, and have put my name down for possible selection to carry the Olympic Torch for the 2032 Games in Brisbane - providing I'm still around and fit enough at the age of 94. I'm in training.....!!!"

"The organising committee say that they will "reach out to me" at the appropriate time. To carry the torch again - 76 years after the first time - would be a dream come true for me."

Don belonged to the Rockhampton-based Torch Bearers Association and attended their commemorative celebrations in 2016. However, at present it would seem that the Association's activities have come to a virtual halt and following the 56ers association, has applied for membership.

Don has kindly supplied to us a press report in the Mackay Daily Mercury of 19 March 1956 of the trials held in Mackay to select the Torch Bearers for that region. (Please see last page)

An Interesting Family Story

Member Trevor Masters who in 1956 carried the torch in around Babinda tells an interesting family athletic story.

"Because I have not heard from you for a long time I can only put it down to the fact that I have moved locations and must not have informed you but at last we have settled down in our new address and this will be our new home till I run my last race.

I carried the torch in 1956 and was number 29 out of Cairns. What a wonderful day to remember for life.

Over the years, life has its challengers and we all meet them in our own ways. Sometimes this leaves a mark and sometimes no mark at all, but through it all something is left in one's memory and my great pleasure is remembering "THE 1956 OLYMPICS."

My Father was a great runner in the 1920-30s. At that time, running was the thing and as my Father was in Sydney from sheep station in Western New South Wales and was very fit and healthy, he took up running and became Australian Sprint Champion winning all the races leading up to the Olympic Games in Germany in the 1930s.

The time was very different to today and money was very hard to come by, and my Dad's mates convinced him to put on some face make up and a false moustache and catch the train down to Victoria and compete in the "Staff Gift foot race"(Stawell). He agreed and won BUT as he crossed the finishing line someone took his photo and sent the film to the newspapers in Sydney for a couple of pounds. My Dad was disqualified for life but the ruling was lifted after a couple of years but by then he was over running.

I have all the trophies, etc., that go with top sportsmen and it is strange to see the difference between amateurs in those days and what sports people get today. In those days, you could not even get a free meal if you were amateur, now sports people quite often are very moneyed people.

So much for the ramblings of an old man of 92 who in 1956 had the best day of his life.

I remain for a while yet (I hope) an old runner, thankful for the privilege of running in the past."

The Second Runner

The story of Doug Eales run as the second last in the 1956 Torch Relay brings to mind the story of the second runner at the commencement of the relay.

His name was Anthony Marks, an Aboriginal man from Mitchell River Mission on the Gulf of Carpentaria now called Kowanyama. Anthony apparently had a reputation as a good athlete and according to a story told to me many years ago by Roy Clarke, who was the manager in Cairns of ANA, he was especially flown into Cairns for the relay.

I was told that Anthony did not want to run in sandals and the sharp edges of the narrow Cook Highway/Sheridan Street concrete road laid by the Americans during World War II gave his bare feet some trouble.

Con Verevis, the son of a Greek migrant, carried the Torch on its first mile (see photo). It was then passed on to Anthony in the presence of Alderman Bill Fulton, then Mayor of Cairns, in a location close to Saltwater Creek where a wrecked plane riddled with bullet holes lay in the swamp – a relic of the dark days in 1942 when the Coral Sea battle was being fought off the coast and one of the allied planes just didn't make it back. Bill Fulton had been a Major in the AIF towards the end of the war but he walked with a limp. Half of one of his feet had been blown off at Tobruk in North Africa when he stepped on a mine, heard a click and told the others around him to get down as he took his foot off the mine. Bill subsequently became Member of Parliament for the Federal seat of Leichhardt.

Mitchell River Mission (Kowanyama) is situated to the south of the main mouth of the Mitchell River on Magnificent Creek, part of the river's giant delta. It was set up as an Anglican Church Mission and its people came from a number of tribal groups that traditionally inhabited the western shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria about 460 km northwest of Cairns.

Anthony had passed away by the time the Club was formed. However, the Club organised a framed photo of Anthony's participation in the event to present it to representatives of his family.



Club President Con Verevis with representatives of Anthony Marks descendent family with photo of Anthony being welcomed off the plane in Cairns.

At the suggestion of Dennis Stevenson, the Club seriously considered putting a photo of the first change between Con and Anthony on the Club's Memorial on the Cairns Esplanade but unfortunately the only photo is awkward looking and was not suitable and the idea was abandoned.



56ers Club Memorial, Cairns Esplanade.

Con Verevis of course was elected as the first President of the Club. During his life he was a prominent contract builder in Cairns who had the idea to form the Club.



Anthony Marks and Con Verevis.



The first change - Australian born of Greek descent Con Verevis lights the Torch held by Kowanyama Aboriginal Anthony Marks.

Bill Cummings

EMAIL ADDRESSES

If you are receiving this Torchbearer newsletter by mail but have an email address, could you please send an email giving that address to us at admin@56ers.org.au

If you don't have an email address, don't worry, the Torchbearer and notice will continue to be posted out to you.

The Club is always happy to receive runners' stories.

JOKES CORNER

The teacher asked little Johnny if he knew his numbers. "Yes," he said. "My dad taught me." "Good. So what comes after eight?", "Nine," answered Johnny. "OK, very good Johnny, and what comes after nine?", "Ten." "And what comes after ten?" "The jack."

A child asked his Mother, "How were people born?" So his mother said, "Adam and Eve made babies, then their babies became adults and made babies, and so on." The child then went to his Father, asked him the same question and he told him, "We were monkeys then we evolved to become like we are now." The child ran back to his Mother and said, "You lied to me!" His mother replied, "No, your Dad was talking about his side of the family."

A man goes into a pub and says, "Could I have a pinth of Guinneth and a packet of thmokey bacon crithpth, pleathe?", "Theartenly, thir!" replies the barman, and serves them up. The customer looks at him suspiciously but doesn't say anything, and he decides to sit down at a table.

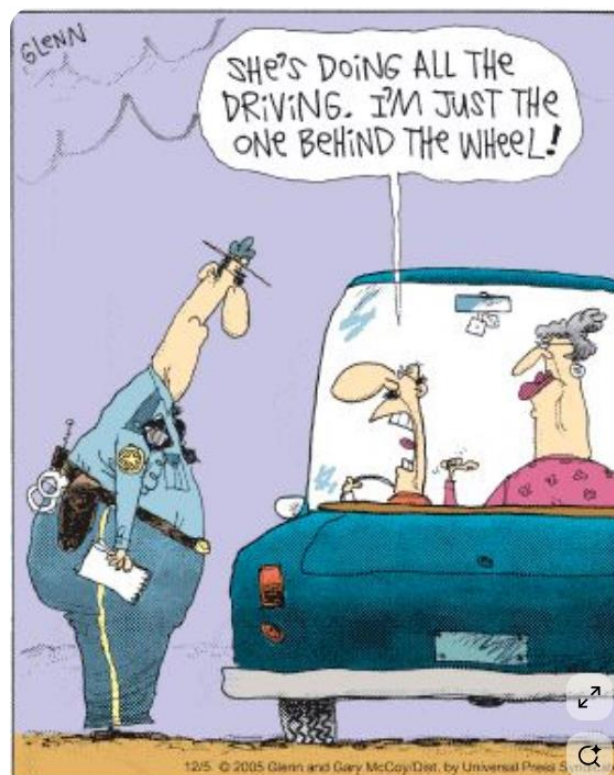
A couple of minutes later another man comes in and in a plummy English accent says, "I say, old chap. Could I have a large gin and tonic, please?", "Marvellous, of course, sir!" replies the barman. "Awfully beautiful weather today, don't you think?"

When the Englishman has sat down, the first customer returns to the bar. "Here, hey you!" he exclaims accusingly, "Were you thaking the pith out of the way I thpeak?"

"No, of courthe not," says the barman. He leans in to the customer and points at the Englishman and says, "I wath taking the pith out of the way *he* thpeakth!"

What do you call a paper airplane that doesn't fly? Stationery. Did you know that an unfolded, flat piece of paper is already a plane?

I told my wife she should embrace her mistakes. She gave me a hug.



Kind Regards
Andrew Cummings



SEVENTY FIVE QUALIFIED FOR OLYMPIC TORCH RUN

SEVENTY five runners from Mackay and district have qualified to carry the Olympic Torch on its journey to Melbourne for the Olympic Games, to be held in November.

The first series of trials were held around Jubilee Park yesterday morning, when 78 runners attempted to run a mile in under seven minutes thirty seconds.

The trials were organised by the Mackay Olympic Torch Committee. Further trials will be held later in the year for those who were unable to attend yesterday, and the three runners who failed to qualify will be given a chance to run in the later trials.

Run in a series of heats, the trials had 12 runners to each heat.

A grand final of heat winners was run after the trials had been completed, with a small trophy going to the winner.

Torch replica

The start of the events yesterday was heralded by the arrival from Farleigh of a replica of the Olympic Torch, made by Mr. J. Sumner, of the Farleigh Fitness Club. Mr. Sumner is also a committeeman of the Olympic Torch Committee.

Nine members of the Club carried the torch over nine miles from Farleigh to Jubilee Park, the last

runner, John Sumner, arriving at the park in time for the commencement of the first heat at 11 a.m.

The Farleigh runners' times were: Cliff Turner (5.45), G. White (5.30), Cec. Turner (6.17½), W. Firth (5.40), H. Reinbold (6.0), D. Doherty (5.55), I. Munro (5.52½), B. Shaw (6.54), and J. Sumner (5.40).

Run on bitumen

The mile course of 2½ laps around Jubilee Park was run entirely on bitumen, a fact which made conditions difficult for runners.

However, despite the surface and extreme heat, some excellent times were recorded.

The fastest time of the day was run by local footballer Dick Matthews, who won his lap in five minutes one second.

Matthews took a slight lead from the start, and gradually drew away from the other competitors until, at the finish, he was a clear 100 yards in front.

High school student Carson Dron also gave a good performance of how a mile should be run.

Dron hung back with the bunch until late in the final lap, when he shot to the front and finished the race still increasing his lead. His time was five minutes three seconds.

Runners exhausted

The final was not such a good race as it had promised, as most of the runners were too exhausted to run again. It was won by A. McEwen, in the comparatively slow time of 5.56.

A trophy was presented to McEwen by the Mayor of Mackay, Ald. J. Binnington.

Timekeepers for the trials were Mr. F. Morris and Constable P. S. Talty, of Farleigh. Starter was Mr. G. R. Matthews.

Results of heats were: Heat 1: A. D. McEwen 1, W. Higham 2, W. Crear 3. (5.17). Heat 2: C. O'Brien 1, R. Head 2, J. Scriha 3. (5.14 2-5). Heat 3: A. Cum-

mings 1, B. Dean 2, H. Morris 3 (5.13 3-5). Heat 4: R. Matthews 1, I. Downes 2, L. Saunders 3. (5.1). Heat 5: P. Barbour 1, S. De Pinto 2, E. McKelvie 3. (5.27). Heat 6: C. Dron 1, W. Kirkwood 2, E. Ross 3. (5.8). Final: A. D. McEwen 1, D. Doherty 2, I. Munro 3. (5.56). (Only starters.)

Recent test row explanation

LONDON, March 18. (A.A.P. - Reuter). — The M.C.C. "A" team arrived back today from Pakistan and went straight to Lords to meet the M.C.C. president, Lord Alexander.

When the team arrived at London airport after its three months' tour, the manager (Geoffrey Howard) handed out a statement.

It said he hoped the adverse publicity given towards the end of the tour would not be allowed to eclipse its success.

"Apart from that incident (the "ragging" of umpire Idris Begh at Peshawar) I believe it is fair to say that the tour has been successful in its object," Howard said.

"The folly of the Peshawar incident had been fully realised and we also appreciate the serious repercussions at home and in Pakistan that resulted.

"I can assure you that our young team is bitterly sorry about it and has suffered a good deal as a result."

The statement made these point about the incident: It was actuated by nothing more than high spirits and sense of fun. It had no connections whatsoever with umpiring decisions made by Begh. Suggestions that players implicated in the affair were under the influence of liquor were unfounded and untrue.

The statement was approved by M.C.C. captain, Donald Carr.

RIDING ACE: Darby Munro, former riding ace, trained his first winner on Saturday when Midswell won the Flying Handicap for him at Newcastle.

