

Sedgefield Harriers

AGM 2020

Report of the Committee

General

Covid19 has had a significant impact on Harrier events, membership, training and competition. What an obvious thing to say, but looking back at previous reports of the committee, they contain summaries of Hamminkeln, Neptune Relays, the Serpentine, cross country standings etc, all of which have fallen victim during 2020. Even Race Rundowns have been silenced.

Perhaps the biggest casualty however, has been the continued loss of training and competition for our junior members. Whilst we have been able to return to training and running for the seniors, we have not been able to offer anything for our younger members.

But to be wholly pessimistic about this year would miss the point. The spirit of running in our club has not been extinguished and the many opportunities for senior members to participate in club activities during, and as we have emerged from lockdown, have been super. Senior membership has emerged buoyant and the numbers attending the various training sessions have shown a desire to keep fit and healthy, and also to enjoy the company of amazing friends.

There are 110 recently paid up senior members. This compares to 138 a year ago, and with 7 new members it represents a very healthy re-start. Four older juniors have also re-joined and it has been great to welcome these to our Tuesday and Thursday training sessions.

BC – Before Covid

Socially we enjoyed another Awards night, back at the Hardwick Hall Hotel in November 2019. The autumn and winter did see plenty of very good running too. Collectively Harriers were involved in cross country and also the February Signals Relays. Individually it was great to celebrate Gary Thwaites' 100th marathon on the Town Moor, a fantastic achievement and at the other end of the distance range, to see time trial PBs for Karen Killingley, Mark Chapman, Lynsey Middler and Matt Cooke. Paula Warwick was also back to her quickest, Rob Spink ran his 250th parkrun and Ali Horton smashed her Hardwick best with an excellent time (although missing out on it beginning with a 2 by one infuriating second).

In the Grand Prix, Mike Wood was bossing it in Division 3 with three maximum tens out of three as was Dave Walker in Division 1. The elite women were having to get used to a new kid on the block however with Abbie Walker claiming top spot up to the end of March.

However the single most impressive performance was by Lisa Darby. In late October she smashed the Harriers marathon record at York in an awesome 3 hours 16 minutes.

At a more gentle pace, one January Sunday morning, long run stalwarts John Haycock and Stuart Park suggested a challenge to run 500 Sunday miles in 2020. So was born the 'Proclaimers'. This author said yes out politeness but privately thought no chance.

Into March, something was in the air, quite literally. The Thirsk 10 miler is always a Harriers favourite and as we stood on the crowded, rural start line a few muttered that this might be the last time for a while. How little we knew even then. Matt Cooke ran both the Lambton Cross Country on the Saturday and Thirsk on the Sunday. He wrote a race rundown for both. It was 15th March. There hasn't been a conventional race nor a rundown since.

Lockdown

In that initial period of national concern, lockdown brought a little confusion for athletes. How far were we allowed to run as individuals? Was it just for thirty minutes or could we go over the hills and far away? No-one flouted the rules but individually we made our unofficial groups and tracked each others' efforts. Jane Spink adapted her Spring into Fitness programme really nicely and around the Easter period we were all encouraged and treated to a series of fun and motivating live events. Who can forget new member Vicky Fawcett's home fitness workouts? A family relay around the garden was another favourite. Rob Spink was the Cahoot quiz king around this time too. It was important to be connected.

Running as a means to maintaining mental as well as physical health was never more sharply felt than in lockdown. Similarly, the absolute pleasure of bumping randomly into a fellow Harrier whilst on a Sunday run, for example, cannot be overstated. The Proclaimers never had any set routes but we tended to guess where others might run and we meandered accordingly; on one particular May morning, eight of us found ourselves on the same path, along the stone wall of the handicap route beyond Bishop Middleham, all the better because we genuinely hadn't designed it as a rendezvous at all. Oilseed was in full bloom. We all stopped to chat for a few conspiratorial moments, enjoying actual human company and then allowed quicker runners off first. I hope all Harriers have their own similar fond memories of aspects of this period.

Emerging

And then in June we were allowed to run in groups of six. How exciting was that? We discovered there was an appetite for internal competition through one-off mile and 5k timed events. One morning, Stuart Park said "If I was to organise a summer virtual grand prix with a few local routes, do you think people would be interested?" Were we ever?! 36 Harriers of all speeds and sizes thoroughly enjoyed belting around local paths and roads. Jane Spink (back to her best, has anyone else noticed that?), Paul Weir, Paula Warwick, and Steve Foreman topped their respective leagues, but it was the overall participation that was the real winner. Thank you Stuart.

In June 2019 Harriers took a team to Gibside and won the Marathon Club's 24 hour relay. We were the only entry in the team category but let's not allow facts to spoil a good preamble. In 2020 the event was virtual and several Harrier teams competed, some from Sedgfield, some from Coxhoe. Completing this was ultimately rewarding although it didn't necessarily feel quite so in the depths of the early hours; sunrise over the Amazon was not quite as glorious as it sounds. Like any event that we can compete together, the camaraderie is everything though.

In July, England Athletics announced the next stage in returning to wider participation. We had the enthusiasm and the willingness. All we needed was a covid officer. Cue trumpet fanfare and step forward Mr Feathers! Seriously people, Andy did a great job in turning around the necessary

paperwork and helping to provide the guidance and the critical eye needed for our club. As a result, club runs have been back to their popular best, training sessions have been re-established with great numbers and even the summer Gerry Kearsley Handicap was speedily and successfully installed. There hasn't been a return to competition, but for seniors at least, it feels rather like Sedgefield Harriers. It has been great to see everyone.

Coaching

Scott Hydon stepped away from his junior endurance coaching after many years' excellent service to our club. 'Many years' means there from the very beginning actually, and his expertise and dedication will be greatly missed.

The covid period also allowed Sheree Lyons to reflect and prioritise, and she has given up her Monday night leadership with the Beginners and Developers group to enable herself to remain involved in the junior coaching setup. Sheree leaves a super culture behind because a core of that group immediately volunteered to step up. At the heart of them is the unassuming but excellent Clair Walker who is now taking her first run leadership qualification. The Beginners and Developers group won't be so well known to all members, but they are a committed bunch, proud Harriers and a great welcome point for those looking to first get into running.

Finally in this coaching section, a mention for Ean Parsons, or Mr Sedgefield Harriers as he is known. In the role of chair this author has spent more time with and got to know Ean better than ever before. Ean remains the go-to person for all types of advice and running wisdom. His imaginative training sessions of the most recent months have been a very big part of such a popular return to running for our senior members.

Back the Track

Elsewhere at this AGM we will hear a little more about the track campaign. Ean remains the driving force but the expertise and many hours spent by such as Jonathan Wallace, Mikes Wood and Leakey and Chris Lines really are helping to bring this long term aim towards a genuine reality.

Juniors

Our junior section has not been able to operate since the start of lockdown. Even in a good year we report that the juniors are a potential fragile element of the club and need additional coaching and back-up support. Covid19 has hit the youngsters the hardest. The college is unable to host their Wednesday sessions and the fear is that by the time we re-emerge into something like normality, many juniors will have been lost to local running and our club forever. Imagine having a brand new track and a beautifully written development plan alongside, yet a much depleted junior section to use it. We will talk about juniors later in this meeting. Please think about how you can provide support.

And Finally. Looking ahead

Coronavirus does not appear to be leaving us any time soon and we are currently experiencing additional restrictive measures. It would be easy to become despondent. However the last few months have shown that we are a resilient and optimistic bunch. We enjoy our running and as an affiliated

club we do have the right to practise our sport. We should continue to do so therefore responsibly, but confidently. We are also only as successful as our willingness to take the initiative. The committee is always pleased to support and facilitate. Could you be the next junior coach or race director? Have you got the next idea for a members' competition or a route idea for a local run? Maybe your expertise lies in backing the track or maybe you're the best backing vocalist for a Proclaimers' singalong. Whatever it is, we always need you.

2020-21 will be a good year for Sedgefield Harriers.

Thank you.

Pete King,

Chair, on behalf of the club management committee.