

PART FIVE

The first priority was to find employment in Lowestoft. Luckily I WAS to find work at the C.W.S Canning Factory in Waveny Drive, working in the office. Before leaving London I had found out from the A.A.A's that the nearest athletic club to me would either be Norwich or Ipswich. I had been given the name of John Daniels as a contact in Lowestoft, who was a member of the Norwich club. I arranged to meet with him at his house in Pakefield one Sunday morning. John told me he belonged to Norfolk Gazelles for road and cross-country, and Norfolk Olympiads for track. Knowing how keen I was to continue my career in athletics he suggested I go with him to Lakenham the following Tuesday, which I readily accepted. The cinder track at Lakenham was located in the grounds of the Hewitt School. As it was winter I can remember them having a oil lamp on each corner of the track, enough light for you to do a training session. At first it seemed rather tame than London, having been used to the hustle and bustle of city life to the tranquility of the countryside. Now a member of both Norfolk Gazelles and Norfolk Olympiads, my first race was in the Norwich Union ring road relay. I believe the Gazelles finished third but you will have to forgive me as my information up until Lowestoft Athletic Club was formed in November 1970 was very limited. What I do know is from memory only. One event that does remain in my mind was being in the winning team in the Eastern Counties road championship held at Diss over 15 miles, finishing 15th in a time of 1hr-28mins-28secs.

THE track season of 1969 I competed for Norfolk OLYMPIADS, although not improving on my London times, I had a satisfying season. After all I was still getting used to my new life in Lowestoft and making new friends. It was about the time driving back to Lowestoft John dropped the question about the possibility of opening an athletic club in THE TOWN. Both Lloyd Woolner, another Lowestoft based athlete, and myself were rather caught off guard by the idea, and at first we were not too keen. John then told us that a schoolteacher, Tony King, from Kirkley High SCHOOL HAD approached him on the matter. However, John persuaded us both to hear what Tony had to say. A meeting with him was arranged the following Friday. Tony told us he had been keen for sometime to have a club in Lowestoft. He had sounded out many of the schools in the area about the idea, and the response had been very ENCOURAGING. I must say at this juncture both Lloyd

and myself were showing more enthusiasm towards the idea, but John was now having second thoughts. He said he thought it would be better to not rush things in case things did not plan out. After a lengthy discussion, it was agreed the club for the time being would be for senior athletes, i.e., for Lowestoft based athletes who belonged to Norfolk clubs, allowing them to compete as a team in Suffolk championships. The question of junior members would be put on hold to a later date. It was to be over a year later before the matter of junior membership would be raised.

We then took the next step to elect a committee, John took on the chairmanship, myself as secretary, Lloyd would become treasurer and Tony as school representative.

For the remainder of '69 and into '70, we continued to compete for our Norfolk clubs, the exception being the Suffolk cross-country and track and field championships running under our new banner as Lowestoft A.C. It was left to Lloyd to come up with a design for the club vest. It was a simple one. A plain blue vest with a yellow round disc sown on the front.

Since the meeting in '69, Tony King had kept up the pressure on *forming* a junior section. He promised if we went ahead with the idea, he would get as much support from the Education Department, and he had many contacts within the town he could rely on. It was in late September '70 that a meeting was called. Everyone now agreed the time had come for juniors to be accepted into the club, although John did have reservations about the numbers. Membership fees for juniors was set at 2/6d (12½p) and seniors at 7/6d (37½p) for the coming year.

A few days later Tony brought us the news that he had 'pulled some strings' with Harris Middle School headmaster and he had agreed we could use Corton Road playing fields on a Sunday morning from 10am until 12noon, free of charge! So on the 8th of November, 1970, Lowestoft A.C. became a first claim club for all ages.

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PART SIX

I can remember quite well that cold November morning making my way to Corton Road, all sorts of thoughts going through my mind. Would there be anyone there at all? How would I cope if too many turned up? The 'Lowestoft Journal' had been informed of us inviting juniors eleven-years upwards but only a few lines appeared, just saying Lowestoft A.C were looking for boys & girls from eleven-years-old to join, and just the time and place we were training. Reaching Corton Road, I turned left into Station Road, my heart in my mouth, hoping my worst fears were unfounded. I need not have worried. Standing outside the playing field gate stood four shivering figures all waiting patiently in anticipation. After introducing myself, I then asked them their names and ages. There were three boys and one girl, Steven Norman aged 17, Nigel Quince, 13, Stephen Westoby, 14, and his younger sister, Carol, 13. They certainly turned out to be very enthusiastic, and showed good potential. The first junior training session that morning could not have gone better.

Over the rest of '70 and into '71 the numbers of youngsters joining the club increased, and by the end of '71 the junior section had grown to nearly thirty members.

The track season of '71 was nearly upon us, and our juniors were ready to have their first taste of competition. It would be Ed Comber, secretary of Norfolk Olympiads, who came to our assistance. He allowed our dozen or so young athletes to guest at home meetings held at the Lakenham track. This act of generosity by the Norfolk club proved very successful. It gave our athletes the experience they needed.

In the June of '71, Mick Enfield, a serviceman in the Royal Anglians, joined the club. He had excelled as a sprinter in the army, representing his regiment on numerous occasions. Offering his expertise as a coach, Mick soon was putting the youngsters through their paces. When on army duties, he had left the sprint group in the hands of Keith Garrod, a useful sprinter a few months off his fifteenth birthday, to carry on the good work. Mick's involvement had been a godsend to me. I could now concentrate on the middle-distance athletes who were showing good promise for the future.

I must tell you a amusing story about Mick. One I was at home watching television, when the telephone rang. When I answered, I was taken back by the sound of what seemed like gun shots

and loud explosions in the background. I can remember saying to myself at the time: "What the hells going on?"

It was then I heard a voice, which I immediately recognised as Mick's speaking as loudly as he could above the din.

"Is that you, Brian?"

"Yes, Mick", I replied, "Where the hell are you ringing from?"

"I'm in a telephone box on the Falls Road. The 'natives' are a bit restless tonight".

I then found out Mick was on duty in Belfast and had taken the opportunity to slip away for a few minutes to ring me to find out how things were going with the *SPRINT* group. Our conversation was to last all of five minutes, both of us finding it hard to hear each other over the mayhem. I still ask myself now. How could Mick have been so calm in such a dangerous situation?

In the June of '71, twelve-year-old Gary Baxter joined the club. His father, Brian, fortunately for us worked for the 'Lowestoft Journal', and within a few weeks had become Publicity Secretary for the club. Brian had many 'strings to his bow', and soon the reports and photographs of our athletes in action were filling the 'Journal's' sports pages. This welcome publicity began attracting more new members to the club. At the end of the track season of '71, the problem arose of where the club could train in the long winter nights. We needed somewhere indoors, cheap and large enough for our needs. It was then I had a stroke of luck. At work at the C.W.S Canning Factory one tea break, I happened to mention our predicament to my colleagues. To my surprise, Paul Gooch, who was secretary of the C.W.S Sports club, said: "You could use the Co-op hall on a Thursday evening. As long as you don't wear heavy shoes or studs to damage the floor. You could use it from 6-30pm until 8pm. It's yours if you want it".

"Thanks, Paul", I replied grateful for the offer, "But how much will it cost?"

"Nothing. Employees are free. Of course you would be responsible for any damage".

So at the beginning of October '71, we started training indoors, which would continue until the end of March '72.

We had now decided as a club it was time for us to go on our own. So at the beginning of the track season of '72, we took the bold step and began competing in earnest against other clubs in the

region.

My own form this point in time was still holding up. I was approaching my thirtieth birthday and had settled down to life in Suffolk. The club was now growing in numbers week by week, and it was not long before we reached the hundred mark. It came as a great relief when many of the parents offered their services to the club, otherwise it would have been a nightmare situation. Robert Cheverton's mother, Thelma, took on the task of raising money from raffles, jumble sales, cake stalls and numerous other activities. John High, father of Gary, also took it upon himself to help the club in anyway he could. One instance was when he went to see the headmaster of Roman Hill Middle School and asked him if he could help the club in anyway. After a fruitful discussion, Mr Whitlow offered the club the use of Barnard's Meadow, the school's playing field, which had a six lane grass running track, jump pits, throwing areas and the pavilion for changing. Added to that, he offered us the use of the school's gymnasium through the coming winter on Tuesday evenings. The

further icing on the cake was to be when asked how much the club would have to pay for the facilities, we were told there would be no charge as we were catering for children of school ages. What a difference to present day. All what authorities do today is 'milk' every penny they can from you!

We now had a membership secretary, Pat Jeffries, mother of Sally, and Mary James, mother of Wendy, who had taken on coaching the younger girls. The extra help was very appreciated, I can tell you.

I had been coaching youngsters for middle-distance nearly two years now, and I thought it was about time I got some qualifications. Making enquiries with the A.A.A's, I was sent a form to complete and return to them. A couple of weeks passed before I received a letter giving me a date and venue for my exam. Fortunately for me it was to be held at the Lakenham track in Norwich. The exam itself tested on various aspects of running. After about an hour of questioning, the examiner told me he was satisfied with my knowledge of distance running, and a week later I received a letter and certificate confirming I was now a assistant coach. The letter also mentioned I could take my full coaching award after twelve months. There was no C.R.B nonsense in those days. And the cost to me for my exam? One pound!

By the end of '72 Lowestoft Athletic Club was well and truly

recognised by not only the town itself, but by the county as well.
The future was certainly looking up.

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At the AGM in '73 John Daniels relinquished his role as chairman, and was replaced by Dennis Cullum, a local councillor, who's eleven year-old son was showing great potential as a middle-distance athlete. Both John and Lloyd Woolner thought the club was going too fast for itself, a view I disagreed with. Members parents were now coming forward to help in anyway they could. It would be a step backwards if we were to restrict membership now. One disappointment was Tony King, school's representative, who had disappeared from the scene, not keeping his promise of help to the club.

In the winter of '73 the senior distance runners had their first success representing Lowestoft Athletic Club in the Suffolk County cross-country championships winning the team event and receiving the 'Southgate cup'. The team of four were myself, John Daniels, Lloyd Woolner and John Wright. I have no records available of our positions that day, but I do remember we all finished in the top dozen and represented the county in the inter-counties the following March.

By now I think everyone was looking forward to the coming track season. Expectations were high in the club to do well. We would find out if all the training our athletes had put in during the winter was about to pay off. One notable meeting that summer

took place at Diss in a *INTEC*-club match in which 17 teams and 600 athletes were taking part. Despite the rain very few races were cancelled on the grass track. I list below some of the performances on the day. Ages in brackets.

David Brady(17) won the youths 100 metres and the high jump. Paul Gee won the Diss A.C challenge trophy for youths in an incredible time of 4 minutes & 41seconds considering the wet conditions. If the club had a specialist in any one field event, it must be Kim Dyer(17) in the youths triple jump winning with a distance of 12metres76cm. The girls in the team did exceptionally well, with Carol Westoby(15) gaining a first in the 80metres hurdles and a second in the long jump, while Wendy James(14) was first in the 100metres. I was the only senior in attendance that day finishing a game seventh in the 1500metres Barker Challenge Trophy. Much too shorter a distance for a thirty-year-old!

There were numerous other good performances by club athletes in 1973, both on the track and in the field. We now turned our eyes to the cross-country season ahead with some optimism. More members were now joining the club, and by Christmas of 1973, we

found ourselves up to one hundred and fifty, a number we would never have dreamed of two years ago.

In the september of '73 we struck lucky when Fred Farmer and his ten-year-old daughter Gillian became members of the club. Fred was a talented field events coach, who in the coming years would prove his weight in gold, developing many good athletes to a high standard in their respective disciplines.

In the winter of '74 the club staged its first cross-country meeting held at Gunton Rugby Club. Any doubts about Lowestoft's ability to stage the event were well and truly dispelled. We put on seven races for age groups from under 12's up to Senior men and women. All thanks to John High, he had obtained sponsorship from Christian Salvesen's, the prizes being presented by their manager, Mr Ferrier, who praised the club for putting on such an excellent meeting. Athletes from all around the region as far away as Lincolnshire, Peterborough, Basildon had travelled to the meeting, as well as good support from local clubs. In all around 300 athletes competed on the day.

This particular year six members of the club qualified to represent Suffolk at the All-England Schools Cross-Country championships to be held at Swindon in March. There were four boys: Paul Gee, Robert Cheverton, Gary High and David Gee. The two girls being Deborah Coleman and Doreve Groves. The club continued to achieve good results right to the end of the 73/74 winter, and the prospects for the track season ahead were most encouraging. We were not to be disappointed. Our first meeting in May, held at Shotley, hosted by Ipswich Harriers, was very successful as we finished runners-up in the team event behind the hosts. Better was to come when in June we undertook the long journey to Peterborough to compete in an inter-club meeting. We were up against five other clubs, hosts Peterborough, Holbeach, Huntingdon, West Norfolk and the French club Brouge. It turned out to be the toughest test for us since the club was formed. The only individual winner on the day was Gillian Farmer, who won the girls under 13's 100metres in a time of 14.3seconds. Young Mark Capps-Jenner ran well finishing third in both the 100metres & 200metres clocking 14.4seconds and 30.8seconds in the boys under 13's. New club member Clive Hilliard proved a useful asset gaining third place in the boys under 15's javelin and not forgetting Yvonne Ramsden recording 13.8seconds for the junior womens 100metres. However, we did have some success in the mens 5000metres team event. Myself in third place, Robert Cheverton fourth and Nigel Saunders

in eighth completing the winning team. In July we travelled to Colchester for an inter-club meeting. The day itself getting off to a eventful start when the coach broke down in Saxmunham and waiting nearly the best part of an hour for a replacement. However, arriving just before the start of the meeting, it turned out to be one of the best club performances since we started. Our → mens section did outstandingly well, winning the team event by seven points from the hosts Colchester. The womens team, although gaining many firsts, dropped into fourth place due to the number of competitors available. Notable performances on the day was David Gee and Gary High winning the boys under 15's 800metres respectively in the A&B strings. Keith Garrod made it a treble by coming first in the youths 800 in a excellent time of 2mins.08.9secs. There was also a double in the senior mens high jump, David Brady winning the 'A' string and Kim Dyer the 'B'. The girls were not without success, Yvonne Ramsden making it a double winning the under15 junior womens 100metres in 15.0secs and the 200 metres in 30.8seconds. In the womens under 17's Wendy James again saw off her fellow competitors without getting anywhere near her best times. On this day, yours truly ran the 1500metres A' string finishing third while Steven Cleveland claimed second place in the 'B'. There were many other good performances on the day, too numerous to mention, but in all a good day for the club. Help in many ways was now abundant as the club increased in numbers. By the end of '75 membership was over the two hundred mark. Bill Bullock who had moved down from Romford with his wife, Doreen and son, Billy in '73, had teamed up with John High to become a great 'double act' that in the years to come, both would prove to be 'work horses' in their efforts to improve the club's development for the future.

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In the January of '75 the team of John Daniels(4th), Brian Tate(5th), Lloyd Woolner(7th and Robert Cheverton(11th) triumphed by winning the Suffolk cross-country mens' championship teams event at Bury St Edmunds, repeating the club's success of '73. I could only make the 'B' team this year, finishing 28th. By now I was beginning to slow down due to niggling injuries mainly in the knees and my time spent on coaching the many promising athletes in my charge. A meeting for the younger members took place at the University of East Anglia, sponsored by Rowntree-Macintosh. The boys event was a composite cross-country relay consisting of one under 13 runner, one under 15 and another under 17, running distances of 1700metres, 2000metres and 3000metres *RESPECTIVELY*. Under 13 boy Mark Gee(12) ran in second place to hand over to under 15 boy Colin Quadling(14), who maintained a good strong pace to hand over to Gary High(16) still holding second place. Unfortunately it was not to be Gary's day, dropping four places leaving the team to finish in sixth position. Running in the 'B' team, Glen High(11), Gary Knights(14) and David Gee(17) finished a respectable 11th place.

Lowestoft's two girls teams improved upon the boys positions when the 'A' team of Sally Jeffries, Marion High and Doreve Groves completed the course in fifth place, while the 'B' team of Maria High, Liz Highton and Lynne Barbrook came in sixth.

The last cross-country fixture of the season took place at Gt Yarmouth. There were relays for girls and boys, but a straight race for senior men. Clubs competing were Yarmouth, who had formed their own club in '73, Hertford and Ware and ourselves. It turned out to be a good day for Lowestoft, the boys 'A' team winning their relay and the 'B' in second place. Not to be outdone, the girls 'A' team won their relay, while the 'B' came home in third spot. In the senior mens race it became a battle between Robert Cheverton, Gary High and Paul Gee. Robert held the lead in the early stages, but it was Gary who made the break, winning the five mile course, which *INCLUDED* sand dunes and shingle to tackle, in a time of 25mins-47secs, with Robert in second(26-06) and Paul third(26-39). Three other senior men completed the course. Colin Hood 7th(31-06), Bill Kingaby 8th(31-18) and Nigel Saunders 9th(31-59).

The week after the Great Yarmouth meeting I took a team of five boys to London in a under 16's 5x1½ miles road relay. Thirty

clubs from the capital were taking part. It was left to Gary High to get us off to a good start, and he did not disappoint, finishing in eighth place in a time of 7mins-20seconds. Second boy away, Paul Gee, really set about the opposition and pulled up five places to set Steven Cleveland on his way in third place, while recording a time of 7-24. Steven kept the pressure on with a lap of 7-57, only dropping one position. The pace was now really hotting up. David Gee was the next runner to take on the cream of London clubs turning in his best performance since joining the club in a time of 7-30, within six seconds of his brother Paul. Running the anchor leg was down to Stephen Beardsley, who battled all the way, losing only one place bringing us home in fifth place recording 7-37. It was a fine all-round performance by our boys and as their coach I felt very proud. It also confirmed my coaching methods were paying off.

In the summer of '75 I was rather taken back when parent Norman Steer came up to me one training evening at Barnard's Meadow and asked me, "Brian. How would you think about having a athletic meeting inside Blundeston Prison?"

My immediate reaction to the question was of: "You're pulling my leg, Norman, aren't you?"

"No. I'm dead serious. Obviously males only".

I knew Norman worked as a Probation Officer at the prison, but I also well aware he was a past master at winding you up, something I had experienced in the past. However, it soon came clear he was deadly serious. So it was left to me to select ten male athletes between the ages of fifteen and twenty. Off the top of my head I can remember some of the names: Keith Garrod, Gary Whall, Paul Gee, David Gee, Robert Cheverton, David Brady, Kim Dyer, Gary High and two others that escape my memory. I think we were all a bit apprehensive on what lay ahead that Sunday, July morning. Arriving outside the gates of the prison, we were met by two prison officers.

"Would you be Mr Boardley?", one of them asked.

"That's right. I have a letter here from Norman Steer", I replied, handing him a envelope.

After a quick scrutinize of the letter, he nodded his head in approval before saying, "Follow us. We'll take you somewhere where you all can get changed."

I think the slamming and locking of the gates behind us was the most daunting giving you a feeling of emptiness. We were then led through another steel door into the main part of the prison.

It was then as we entered the building we were suddenly met with loud banging and much shouting coming from the landing above, which we soon realized was where the cells were situated.

My immediate thoughts was one of: "What the bloody hell have we let ourselves in for!"

"Don't take any notice of them. They are always like this when they know there are strangers about", we were assured by one of the officers.

It was with much relief when we were taken through another door, out of range of the vocal taunts of the inmates, up a flight of stairs which led to a small landing. One of the officers then took a key from the bunch attached to his belt and unlocked a door to his right.

"There you are, lads. You can change in here. Don't worry about your things. This door will be locked all the time".

Once everyone had changed we were taken to the prison's sports field. I can remember it had a 300 metres grass track with four lanes, high jump, shot put area and a long jump. Discussing what events we should do with their officer in charge of sport, it was agreed we have a 100 metres, 150 metres and 600 metres on the track, and high jump, long jump and shot put on the field. For myself, I took on the task as timekeeper. I must say it was quite a experience knowing you were amongst men who had fallen foul of the law, but talking to some of them, you would have thought butter wouldn't melt in their mouths. However, everything went well. There turned out to be some of the inmates were very capable when it came to their event. One in particular, a chap in his early twenties, was a very talented sprinter. At the end of the meeting I had a word in his ear suggesting when he was released he should think about joining a club. Whether he did, I would never know. The meeting at the prison had been a great experience for myself and our athletes.

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