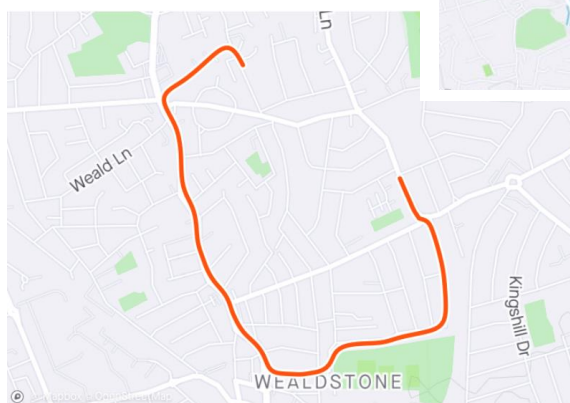
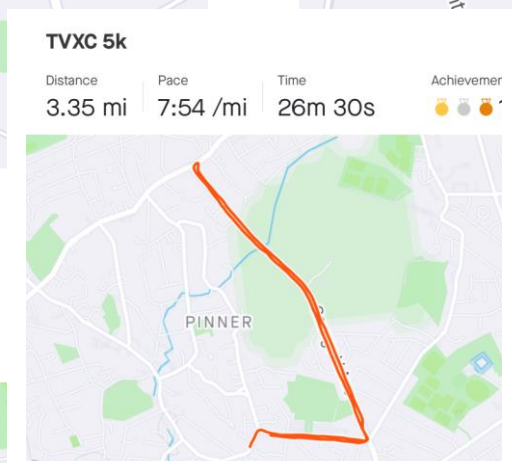
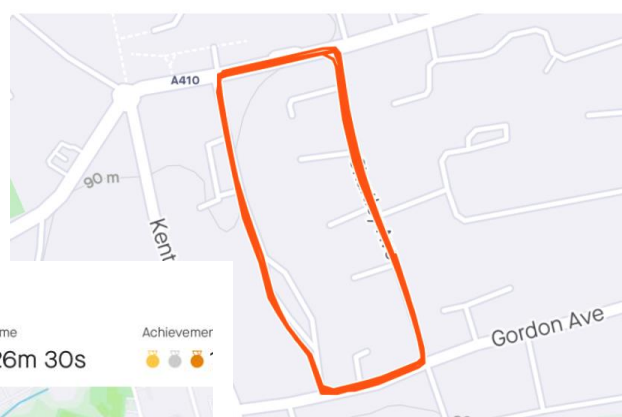
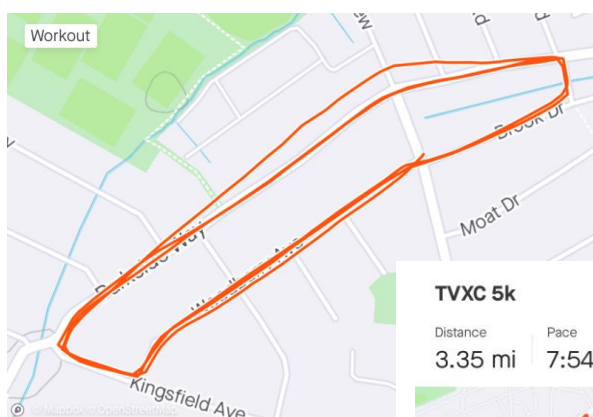




May 2020
Issue No. 378



Running solo together

Note from the Editor!

I hope everyone is OK and keeping well.

I'm all zoomed out and have developed a sourdough baking obsession!

Importantly, most of us are still able to go outside for exercise and what can be better exercise for our physical and mental health than running. Due to current restrictions we have to exercise alone or with members of our household while staying a safe distance from others. Although we may be missing our Metros friends, we can still be together in a way and compete against each other. Thank you to Emma and Marcus for organising the 5K events and Adam for the weekly virtual Saturday session and there will be more to follow. Look out for the group e-mails. Thank you also to Emma for organising the quiz on the Metros Facebook page.

Very sadly, a former Metros member has passed away with Covid -19. See the obituary for Koster Tavatgis on the following pages; condolences to his family.

Thanks to everybody who has contributed to this month's Metrolines – please keep it going.

Anne Ambrose

Metrolines Contributions

All contributions welcome – please send to Anne Ambrose

Email: metrolines1@gmail.com

Articles should consist of no more than 3 to 4 sides of A4 font Arial 14.

Please provide in Word format.

When submitting articles, please ensure that all information is correct, and that times, dates and places are clearly shown.

Contributions by: 15th of each month please.

If you would like to advertise in Metrolines the rates are as follows:

Full page £5; Half page £3; Quarter page £2

KOSTER TAVATGIS
23 December 1941 – 13 April 2020



It is with great sadness we recently heard that one of our former members, Koster Tavatgis, has passed away in hospital, a victim of Covid-19.

He was running a little when a friend entered him in the 1983 London Marathon and later Koster and wife Molly joined London Road Runners Club NW - our club name before we evolved as the independent club called Metros.

They were Metros Committee members by July 1987 when meetings were held in committee members houses. Koster was Chairman of the Committee from May 1998 to May 2001.

Koster instigated, organised and acted as Race Director for the Harrow Town Centre races and the Harrow Hill race. He initially ran, then helped organise the Harrow Charity Marathon and Half Marathon with other Metros.

He fully participated in Metros activities with sessions on Monday – then led by Mary Swindles, Tuesday – then from the Whittington Pub (now the Pinner Arms), Thursday - Summer and Winter, from Kings College Road, Ruislip and Sundays, often as leader for the sessions.

He was an excellent marathon and half marathon runner and also ran in events such as the London League (now the Summer League), Today Runner Cross

Country League (now the Thames Valley Cross Country League), Combe Gibbet to Overton 16-mile XC and the Sunday Times National Fun Run in Hyde Park.

Molly and Koster participated in the Round Norfolk Relay for many years, Koster running the long legs and also, with Molly, supporting the rest of the Metros team, transporting people to various locations and lighting the night-time legs.

Molly and Koster moved to Rustington, West Sussex in 2004 and Koster took up golf. He is remembered with fond memories by the Metros who knew him. He was a cheery and friendly man, full of life, an excellent runner who encouraged others to run and improve.

His passing is sad at any time but especially now in these most difficult circumstances and our heartfelt condolences go to Molly, daughter Kay and son Paul (in Australia) and their families.

Pat Jackson / Dave Brown

Molly thanks Metros for their kind messages, which are much appreciated.

Running during "lockdown" – Adam Leary

I have no idea what the situation will be by the time you read this but at the moment we're still allowed to go out and run once a day. It may be that regulations have eased, in which case, stop reading now. Or it may be that we have more restrictions.

Either way your running is probably still restricted in some way, so this is the perfect time to pay a bit more attention to how you run, rather than how far or how fast.

There are quite a few things that you can do, either on a shortened run or just at home. These are a few suggestions, most of them will make you look silly to the rest of your family or to people passing in the street but that's all good as far as I am concerned.

Arm movement when you run: this is the easiest one to check yourself and to do something about and it's also the one that has a marked effect on your running. Four main things that you can practice walking around your house, your garden or ideally when walking upstairs:

1. The angle at your elbow should be 90 degrees, i.e. with your arm hanging straight down you need to raise your lower arm until the hand and elbow are at the same height.
2. Relax your hand, imagine you are holding a Pringle between your thumb and first finger when you run, you only get to eat the Pringle at the end if it's in one piece...hold it lightly. If your hand is tense, then probably your shoulders are tense too.
3. When you bring your arm back, your little finger should just brush your hip.
4. Your arms should go back and forth in a straight line i.e. no crossing. The more they cross, the more you rotate and the more energy you waste...don't waste energy as you need it to run faster, further or to be less tired when you finish.

So, bearing in mind the above, every time you walk up (and down) stairs try to slightly exaggerate the leg movement (a bit more "high knees") and swing the arms as above...do it slowly and carefully and if you're in anyway unsure, do it on flat ground instead. This will make you the subject of pointing and laughing so please feel free to make the rest of your household do this as well, especially parents and kids.

Balance: as runners we don't do enough balance work, you'll have all noticed that when you do static stretches like the quad stretch (standing on one leg and grabbing the other leg behind you) that you're more stable on one leg or the other. The less the difference is, the more evenly you will run, and the more efficient you are, and so again you use less energy, or you go further / faster.

A few things to try (these are all better to do when you're warmed up, even if it's just at the end of a walk):

1. Stand with your feet close together but not touching and try lifting one leg off the floor about 10cm, see if you can do this (this is the important bit) without tilting your body to the opposite side, hold for 20s (try not to clench your toes) and change legs. If that's too easy, repeat but put the lifted leg out in front of you and hold, then behind you and hold. This is good to do in a door frame so that if you wobble too much you've got something to reach for.
2. Stand as above but take your right leg behind you (knee not locked but leg straight-ish) and bend forward, drop your left arm. Start small but the aim is to get a straight line along your back and down your right leg with your left arm pointing to the ground and shoulders square to the ground. Hold for 20s. Repeat on the other leg. Look up "leaning rotations with reach" if I haven't explained that enough.
3. Stand on to the balls of your feet and try not to wobble for 5s, 10s, 20s...then
4. Feet shoulder width apart, rise onto the balls of your feet and walk forward for 10m or in a circle for 30s, stop, lower your feet, breath, turn around and walk back in the same way. If it's too easy, add some weight by carrying dumbbells or a couple of tins of beans.

There are loads more of these type of exercises, my favourite site at the moment is brianmac.co.uk

Keep running, keep strong, keep smiling, keep safe.

Cheers

Adam

Metros Virtual 5k Challenge – April 2020

Thank you to everyone who took part in the inaugural Metros Virtual 5k Challenge, and well done to the men's team who beat the ladies on average age grading by 2.56%. We are planning to repeat this virtual challenge in May (assuming we will still be able to). To get involved, please join the Metros' Strava group and upload a 5k run (3.1 miles) sometime between 4th and 10th May. Please rename it 'Metros Virtual 5k Challenge' to ensure your time is counted! Email

emma.rackham@hotmail.co.uk if you have any questions. We understand that not everyone will be in a position to participate in the current circumstances however we wanted to offer a virtual challenge for those still able to get out and run. -

Emma

Name	Time	Age Grading
Nigel Rackham	17m 57s	86.82%
James Kerrane	19m 54s	69.35%
Marcus Weedon	20m 57s	68.81%
Chris Shearwood	23m 9s	67.31%
Mike Morris	22m 31s	66.54%
Tim Oakley	28m 28s	56.56%
Glyn Watkins	30m 36s	54.90%
Nirmal Valji	27m 14s	53.37%
Mike Reid	29m 50s	53.07%
Mitesh Patel	25m 05s	52.62%
Peter Rackham	24m 54s	52.14%
		61.95%

Name	Time	Age Grading
Caroline Day Lewis	25m 17s	67.57%
Lynne Jones	28m 38s	65.54%
Ruth Tidder	25m 28s	64.86%
Annie Birch	30m 28s	64.77%
Zahra Bassiri	24m 1s	62.32%
Linda Dunne	27m 10s	62.15%
Judy Rackham	30m 1s	61.74%
Teresa Young	31m 29s	59.61%
Sasha Ryan	27m 13s	55.73%
Emma Rackham	29m 11s	50.60%
Linda Grimes	34m 11s	49.98%
Caroline O'Dwyer	40m 32s	47.82%
		59.39%

Battling Hillingdon 20

In 2013 I ran my last Marathon, my 3rd attempt doing the London Marathon and trying to get under 4 hours, think I was 10 seconds off my second attempt so one thing for sure is that I was very consistent.

The problem I had at that time, was that I trained about once or twice a week and I wasn't part of Metros, so I had no idea what proper marathon training was. I really struggled in all the marathons after mile 17, and the last 2 suffering from cramp in both calves. I mean nothing can prepare you for 9 miles of running with cramp, apart from probably training much better which I now realise.

I suppose that I certainly discovered that my body and brain just weren't built to run this distance and more recently opted for the speedier shorter distances, I liked the fact it wasn't as painful and over much, much quicker.

You could say that I have transformed somewhat since joining the Metros running club, albeit having the back disease which, believe it or not, does hinder what I think I should be capable of, but since joining I am now running 4-5 times a week, actually yesterday I completed my 17th day straight of running 10K plus, thanks to Coronavirus and not having anything else to do due to having no work, every cloud.....

Over the last few years many of you have said or asked, 'why don't I run another Marathon?', and thinking I would easily get under 4 hours. In fact, most think I would get well under 3:30. Well, I started to consider it over the Xmas period into February, as I started building up the distance each Sunday and managed to run 23 miles on my birthday from my house to Uxbridge and then to the finish line of the Watford Half Marathon. I stopped quite a few times as the conditions along the canal were atrocious, but I felt pretty decent considering.

Earlier in the week I went down to a track session where Nathan was putting us through a few hoops as usual, well it was a track session called 'Lasso', where you run 10 x 800m and your average time is converted from mm:ss to hh:mm. I think mine worked out to be 3.20, which obviously then fuelled people to encourage me further to run a marathon.

At this point, a few people mentioned Hillingdon 20; a test I thought on whether I would sign up for a marathon or not, and it was a few more weeks away so I could get more miles in, check out the course and then take it on, so I got signed up..... Oh no what did I do!!!

After checking out the course, only 1 lap, I started to realise the extent of what I was letting myself in for, 4 laps of ups and downs. I hate hills, as most know, so the route certainly felt like more up than down.

Race day then arrived, and I must admit, I was dreading it. In my head I was always going to be happy to hit 2:30, knowing the course and what I am like running, and anything better than this would be a bonus.

So, we all started heading off and I started off at a much slower pace than I would normally, knowing there was a long way to go and those hills were going to be brutal at some point. I spent the first 5 miles hanging onto Terry Mackin, then Sasha Birkin, then James Kerrane, in these first 5 miles I felt comfortable and thought this will be OK if I can stick to this pace. The next 5 miles I saw no other Metros apart from James who was about 200 metres ahead of me and I was still feeling quite comfortable, until we hit Norwich Road, and then the aches and pains started in my glute, this was an area that I was hugely concerned about and had suffered from during my previous long runs.

Coming back around for lap 3, running up Park Avenue I started thinking about stopping and pulling out, but knowing there was a few downward slopes and flat coming up I continued and took a pit stop at the water station again on Pinn Way, taking my gels and fluids, plus a glute stretch before heading off once again. Hitting the half marathon mark I knew I would struggle for the rest of the run (more so than I had thought already). At 1:33hr, which is about 4-5 mins off my half marathon pace and ahead of the pace that I should have ran, in so much pain by this time I was starting to think even 2:30hr would be out of the question.

Joel Street appears once again and becomes even more daunting, especially as Norwich Road is right after it, the initial stretch isn't really that hilly but when you know you have to go around twice more and you feel like you have nothing left and the pain I was experiencing, well it seemed rude not to stop a few more times. Fortunately, there is a decent downhill to recover after Norwich Road.

In fact, the rest of the race became more of an interval training session, other runners would pass as I stopped to walk - mainly up hills and then I would start again then run passed them, goodness knows what they were thinking about me, but hey ho it was the only way I could get through to the end.

One of the things that kept me going was the other non-racing Metros running around the route in the opposite direction, to be cheered and encouraged along the way helped hugely whilst I battled with the negative and painful thoughts of completing these horrendous 4 laps. Even Dave Brown with his camera cheered me up, though I have to admit I was walking at the time he spotted me, so rather quickly I got back to my running up the last stretch up Park Avenue.

Looking at the lap times – 1st 33:19, 2nd 34:32, 3rd 36:38 and 4th 39:10 certainly demonstrates how much I slowed down during the race.

Much to my relief, I reached the finish line, and there after I collapsed in a heap holding my glutes. Onlookers must have been wondering why I was holding my butt cheeks! I can't tell you how much they hurt at that moment and all the way through this race! Literally a real pain in the butt!! But on a positive note I finished, I didn't give up and I didn't get cramp like I did in those London Marathons.

I'm sure many of you felt that the race wasn't that bad, in fact I saw so many got great times and PBs and that should be applauded as this course is tough, well done to you all. In fact I did also get a PB and by some 30 mins, so although I struggled somewhat all the way through, the training and the motivation I take from everyone that I have met so far since joining Metros, got me through and got me a decent time, which I can't thank you enough for!

However, one thing it highlighted is that I am in no way in a rush to do a marathon anytime soon or this race next year either. I'm not built for it and like my feelings after the last marathon back in 2013, 'why put myself through all the pain?'.

So, I will happily go back to running 10Ks and half marathons when they start again, and I will be making sure the courses are flat as pancakes!!



TVXC – Virtual 5K Relay Challenge

Name	Gender	Age group	Time
Chris Shearwood	Male	Vet 50	20:25
Steve Paull	Male	Vet 60	23:02
Zahra Bassiri	Female	Senior Women	23:31
Ruth Tidder	Female	Vet 50	24:03
Shyam Patel	Male	Senior Men	24:27
Linda Georgiades	Female	Vet 50	25:56
Tim Oakley	Male	Vet 60	25:59
Jean McPherson	Female	Vet 50	26:25
Lynne Jones	Female	Vet 60	28:03
Annie Birch	Female	Vet 60	29:35
Shefali Rao	Female	Senior Women	29:48
Teresa Young	Female	Vet 60	30:41
Glynn Watkins	Male	Vet 60	31:12
Irene Paull	Female	Vet 60	33:17

Club Standings

Club Name	Men's fastest 6	Women's fastest 6	Combined Time
Reading Roadrunners	01:36:47	02:00:06	03:36:53
Maidenhead AC	01:46:02	02:01:00	03:47:02
Finch Coasters	01:42:27	02:06:31	03:48:58
Windle Valley	01:44:48	02:04:17	03:49:05
Burnham Joggers	01:44:42	02:09:41	03:54:23
Datchet Dashers	01:47:21	02:09:39	03:57:00
Sandhurst Joggers	01:48:49	02:13:13	04:02:02
Handy Cross Runners	01:51:08	02:17:18	04:08:26
TVT	01:50:14	02:18:18	04:08:32
Marlow Striders	01:58:58	02:14:31	04:13:29
Sheen Shufflers	01:59:27	02:26:07	04:25:34
Metros	01:55:52	02:31:54	04:27:46
Tadley	02:04:57	02:31:23	04:36:20
Wargrave Joggers	02:16:16	02:23:58	04:40:14

Bath half – the last big race before the lockdown – Nigel Rackham



We love the city of Bath and have for many years made a weekend of the event. The race is relatively flat, in spite of Bath's famous hills and both Judy and I have set our half marathon PBs here. There are always a lot of masters competitors and the race organisers give free places to runners who are "good for age" which I have benefitted from. Accommodation books up early and in previous years we have stayed in a B&B on Bristol Road just by the race 2-mile mark. When we first stayed, we were somewhat surprised to come down to breakfast to meet John Norris and Bernie Conway – small world! They are also Bath regulars. This year, we were going as a family of five and so booked an apartment which would accommodate us all. It was on the top floor of a typical Bath Georgian town house right in the centre and literally a stone's throw from the race village which takes over the Rugby ground. The downside was no car parking and the adjacent car park was closed for repairs.

We arrived late on Friday night in the rain, but the weather was fine on Saturday and I ferried Judy and Emma to the local parkrun which is on a hill overlooking the City. I decided not to do parkrun as I cannot resist the temptation to race and chose to run along the canal instead where it was also less muddy. My Plantar Fascia was

very painful by the end and I was concerned I might not manage 13 miles the following day. In the event I had no issues in the race which I partly attribute to my foot strike being different when I run faster and partly to the Nike Vaporflies which are amazingly cushioned for race shoes.

As an aside I seem to have got over the Plantar problem having spent a lot of time stretching and strengthening the calves and also wearing a splint overnight. Others have sworn by different cures.

It is hard to believe now that pre-lockdown we happily spent the Saturday strolling the streets and shopping. The weather deteriorated overnight and as forecast it was raining steadily on race morning. The start was 11am so it was a leisurely breakfast. Judy and I were running, and the three offspring were spectating - to be more accurate Peter and Matthew were going to be hanging around near the race route until the pubs opened.

Bath normally has 12-15,000 runners, but only half that number actually turned out because of COVID-19 fears. There was in fact some controversy about the organisers going ahead, although it was within Government guidance and there were ten times that number thronging the Cheltenham festival just down the road. Nonetheless, some races were already cancelling and the Fleet HM due to run the same day was cancelled only a couple of days before. Perhaps because of this, Judy - who went to the start before me - found the usual discipline around pens a bit more lax than usual. I didn't leave the apartment until about 20 minutes before the gun and avoided the mire that the Rugby ground had become to run the first mile of the race in reverse to duck into the front pen. The rain seemed to be slackening off and it wasn't too cold, so I peeled off the old shirt I had worn to the start having decided to race in a vest. In fact, the rain then came on again and was pretty intense for the next two hours.

I learnt by experience on a very wet Marlow HM that wearing glasses is not great in these conditions as I could neither see with them on or off. That was the same event where I had to retie my laces mid race. So ever since I have worn contact lenses to race and triple knotted my laces.

The start is on Great Pultney Street just over the iconic bridge and heads east then south down to the station and across the river before winding through the city centre, up a short incline and around Queen's Square before heading west down the Upper Bristol Road. Past our old accommodation at 2 miles, John gave a shout of encouragement. He was injured but supporting Bernie as well as a few other Metros. I was struggling somewhat to see, due to the rain and was concentrating more on my feet than spectators so completely missed Emma, Peter and Matthew. I soon realised that my number had my name printed on it as more people than usual were shouting my name.

The race follows the river Avon valley and as you enter the countryside about 4 miles into the race, you cross the river and head back towards the city on the Lower Bristol Road parallel to the outward section and now south of the river. Keen spectators can cross other bridges to follow competitors on multiple occasions without travelling very far.

I had felt pretty good to this point and had assumed the wind was behind and would be in my face on the turn but in fact there was no wind to speak of and I passed the 10K checkpoint at around 35 and a half minutes which I felt was too fast for my current form and expected to pay the penalty later. We now entered the second lap and pretty soon I began passing the slower runners. There is a slight incline at around mile 8 (or 3) which I don't remember being of much significance before, but it suddenly felt like a Metros Wednesday night hill session – I am getting old. Heading back to the city a second time I still felt OK and started picking off one or two runners as I held my pace towards the finish. I gave Bernie a shout as she was going over the 10K mark for the first time but evidently missed Veronica, Judy, who was a little way behind Bernie, and Pauline who must have been on her second lap. The last mile is the first in reverse and slightly up hill which is always hard work. I was very pleased to get over the line in 75 minutes which was better than I had hoped for. It was shoulder pats rather than handshakes at the finish in deference to the virus. Having been de-chipped and collected the goody bag I realised how cold I was and picked my way through the muddy race village, very happy that the accommodation was so close by. I managed to extract the key from the keybox despite my shivering hands but was still sitting on the stairs unable to untie my laces when luckily Emma arrived to help. I then stood in the shower while my various extremities thawed out. I was in no mood to go out again to welcome Judy who arrived later equally happy with her run. Pauline as ever had an excellent run to dip under two hours and was second in her age category. She is now ranked 31st in the UK.

The children had to return home on Sunday afternoon, but Judy and I had an extra night and we celebrated at an excellent Turkish restaurant we can recommend.



Dorney Lake Marathon, March 8th – Steve Paull

Way back in the mists of time (March!), there was a race called the marathon. Four Metro warriors went to Dorney Lake to do battle with the 26.2-mile challenge. There was handsome Lord Nathan of Headstone, the venerable Sir Stephen of Whitmore, plus the Earl Ariff and fair maiden Countess Sakina of Kenton.

Here is the report of their quest.

Nathan and I were here back in 2017 for this most unglamorous of marathons. Ten laps, although the word lap here is not really appropriate, it's ten, mile-and-a-bit up and backs. You see and acknowledge every other entrant regularly. It's on concrete/tarmac and rowers are doing their thing on the lake almost alongside. On the other side, hidden by trees, is the River Thames. The organisers have use of the space for six hours to satisfy the ultra-community and indeed some did go on beyond 26, but the heavens opened very soon after I finished, so it wouldn't have been much fun later on. Nathan whizzed round the 26.2 (I'm not sure if he lapped me two or three times) and whereas Ariff and Sakina wanted to go that far, on the day they pulled out a few laps short. They must have seen the rain approaching.

And then came the big illness and the world changed.



Metros Quiz – wc 6th April

1. Which two members of Metros were inducted into the Metros Hall of Fame in November 2019?
2. Who were the overall male and female winners in the 2018 Metros Marathon Week?
3. Who is the membership secretary on the Metros committee?
4. Who ran the first leg on the Metros team in the Round Norfolk Relay in 2019?
5. Which member of Metros has run the most different parkruns?
6. Which is the longest race in the 2020 list of trophy races?
7. At the Metros host fixture of TVXC in 2019, who was the first Metros finisher?
8. In which park do the Saturday morning training sessions take place?
9. Name the male and female who hold the Metros high jump records from Vets track and field.
10. Who is the editor of the Metros monthly newsletter, Metrolines?

Metros Quiz Answers:

1. Dave Brown and Barbara Robson
2. Nigel Rackham and Sasha Birkin
3. Irene Paull
4. James Kerrane
5. Errol Clarke
6. Hillingdon 20
7. Luca Matharu
8. Roxbourne Park
9. Marcus Weedon and Jane Scoffham
10. Anne Ambrose

Answers accurate as of 6th April 2020

Roding Valley Half Marathon - 8 March 2020 - by Chris Shearwood

Celebrating its 40th Year, the Roding Valley Half Marathon ("RVHM") is billed as a popular event and a useful warm up for the London Marathon, attracting a core of regulars who make this one of their "must do" races; it continues to flourish despite competition from newer "corporate events".

I first ran the RVHM in 2014 and this was only my third visit - it often clashes with other, more local races, in what is usually a very busy period for half marathons. This was my fourth of 2020 and I was hoping to keep up my 100% record this year of sub-90-minute half marathons, having set the pace (most unexpectedly) at Watford, a month earlier. RVHM is certainly not as hilly as that (or Berkhamsted) but it is undulating and mostly on pavement which is simply not as optimum a surface for speed as the wide-open road.

Why was I first attracted to a small event on the other side of London? Well, it's actually quite easy to get to for one thing - I could go via the Central Line (the journey would be about 90 minutes) but we invariably bomb around the North Circular and that takes less than an hour. They recommend that you get there by 8 a.m. to park (on site) for a 9 a.m. start so, in fairness, that would mean quite an early start by tube from our side of London.

The venue is Ashton Playing Fields, specifically the running track used by local club, Woodford Green Athletic Club with Essex Ladies (WGEL), the former dating from 1908 (by 1957 it was arguably Britain's leading track and field club, being undefeated in inter-club competition that season) and the latter from 1921; they merged in 1998. They have a number of Olympians among their number, most famously, Sally Gunnell.

It's the low-key nature of this event that does it for me. It doesn't do it for Gill, though - there's not a lot for her to do while I'm out on the course since the local shopping parade just about musters up a Costa Coffee. But she does get to see me twice and got a couple of good pictures into the bargain.

There was, of course, a major shadow over the whole event. We runners had already had to endure the foulest autumn and winter rainfall that I can remember for a long time. Autumn was the 5th wettest on record and we've just had the UK's wettest February in over 150 years. Storms Ciara, Dennis and Jorge resulted in significant daily rainfall extremes for the UK and accounted for about 44% of total February rainfall. Ciara had already caused the postponement of one of my half marathons to 22 March and, sadly, on that occasion the event was cancelled for other reasons.

By the beginning of March, it would have been difficult to ignore entirely the headlines about what was happening in China, South Korea, Iran and Italy. Cases of Covid-19 had by now been detected in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The Tuesday before the race, with the total number of cases standing at 51, Boris Johnson stood behind a lectern and launched the government's "Coronavirus Action Plan". The first death, of someone with underlying health problems, occurred the next day and by 8 March there were 273 cases.

So it was that the race venue was decked with home-made signs reminding people to wash their hands - social distancing was not quite an issue yet, still less the requirement to "stay home" (sic). Indeed, the view was that events such as these were evidence that life should *not* be disrupted by the epidemic (it was dubbed a *pandemic* by the WHO three days later).

Gill and I bumped into a chap we had met at the parkrun in Florence while there in November (and subsequently at Osterley parkrun) - Charles Leonard of Wimbledon Windmilers. He had recently run an overseas marathon but had not finished. I went for some warm-up laps around the track and before long we were lining up behind the start/finish gantry seemingly of unconcerned about being in close proximity with each other.

300m around the track and we were off out of Ashton Playing Fields, turning sharp right under the southern end of the M11 at the wonderfully named Snakes Lane East for a 2-mile mini-loop. We passed Woodford Underground Station and crossed the River Roding, before two larger loops of 5.5 miles. Did I mention that I was aiming for another sub-90-minute half marathon? I joined the Strava Gang at the end of last year and Vincent Cheung kindly let me buy from him a Fenix-3 Garmin watch, out of which I'm getting a lot of fun - this clocked me at just under 13 mins, on course for my desired time.

We then passed the parade of shops where I saw Gill - this was the lengthiest uphill stretch (111 ft of elevation) which, coupled with having to run on the pavement, made for a slower 3rd mile. We crossed the border between the London Borough of Redbridge and Epping Forest District Council and were now in non-Metropolitan Essex, passing Chigwell station, on the Hainault loop of the Central Line, at about 3.5 miles. For Underground buffs, they're older stations at this end of the Central Line, dating from the early 20th century; our end of the line wasn't completed until the 1940's.

There was a left turn into a couple of suburban streets, where you could run in the road, before a downhill stretch (I said it was undulating) along the busy Chigwell Rise/Roding Lane which crosses the M11 and River Roding again. The semi-rural nature of this stretch meant crossing and re-crossing the road (a bus route, to boot), so hats off to the marshals, the ever reliable and uncomplaining local Rotarians, for getting us through it (twice).

Then, back into suburbia where we climbed again before joining Snakes Lane East and heading back to the playing fields entrance and the second big lap. The half mile either side of this point was my slowest, but I was well in sight of the coveted sub-90 minutes and redoubled my efforts for Gill's next photo opportunity. I might not be wearing club colours, but my t-shirt was one of last year's souvenir Round Norfolk Relay items and has a big "Metros" logo emblazoned on the back. Apparently, I don't need to wear anything particularly eye-catching - Gill says she nowadays recognises me in the distance among other runners, specifically from my



running style.

I needn't do a blow-by-blow account of the second 5.5-mile lap, suffice to say that the marshal just after the 9-mile point, helpfully called out that I was lying 16th, which spurred me on somewhat. I was then promptly overtaken and now had to battle with a stiff headwind but, storming down Snakes Lane East, overtook Charles, the Wimbledon Windmiller.

I credit that stiff wind with the last two miles being over 7 min/mile but I bust a gut, overtook someone else around the track to maintain 16th position and crossed the line in 1:29:54. First place went to Orion Harriers, another local club, in 1:18:34. I was actually only 5th in the VM50-59 category but, as is my way, I have checked more precisely the age categories on Run Britain Rankings and was pleased to note that the others were all in the VM50-54 bracket, thus younger than me, but there is no getting away from the fact that four of us were beaten by a VM60-69, Dave Cox

of WGEL, who posted a truly magnificent 1:25:26 and came 8th. You get a small medal which is fine by me.

There were 240 runners, the last of whom managed 3:19:10. We were lucky with the weather this year, despite a mixed forecast in the week before - showers started just as the last runner crossed the line. I was able to check the results by leaning over the shoulder of another runner checking a laptop in the clubhouse (no social distancing then) and could see that it was not worth (my while) sticking around for prize-giving. There were showers there, which eventually ran hot, and then Gill and I headed off, deeper into Essex to meet her brother and sister-in-law for lunch at a Tiptree Jam tearoom in the grounds of Writtle Agricultural College near Chelmsford. Away from London, the Essex countryside is truly lovely, and we were treated to (i.e. often overtook competitors in) a bicycle race on the way there.

I was looking forward to my next half marathon the following week, Easter Sunday, at Fleet, with Steve and Irene. Matters had escalated by then and, although lockdown was not to happen for just over another week, people were getting very jittery and, possibly because that particular event has a high number of squaddies (whose employers no doubt felt that their services would be required elsewhere), it was cancelled, although the Bath Half went ahead on the same day; I would have been in luck if I had entered the Dartford Half, as did our Wimbledon chum Charles.

In thanking those who took part in the RVHM, the Race Director stated that numbers were down on previous years, he thought mainly due to the emergence of many big "corporate" events in the adjacent weeks. When the race was started in 1981 it was primarily targeted as a London Marathon warm up, and lots of other organisations have since "jumped on the band-wagon". For this reason, RVHM might move to a different time of year for 2021 but it won't be cancelled so hopefully there won't be so much of a clash with other winter/spring races and it can become one of my regular fixtures.

Cheddar Cheese Mini Loaf Scones

At the beginning of lockdown, I only had some self-raising flour, which you cannot really use for bread, but found this recipe on a Lakeland blog. These would have been perfect for the Summer League picnic – perhaps next year! If you do not have a mini loaf tin just cut out the scones with a pastry cutter and bake on a baking sheet.

Ingredients

- 325g self-raising flour
- ½ tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp salt
- 75g butter
- 150g mature Cheddar cheese, grated
- 2 tbsp finely chopped red onion
- 1 tbsp chopped fresh chives
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 150ml milk



Instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 220°C/Gas 7.
2. Sift the flour, baking powder and salt into a large mixing bowl. Rub in the butter with your fingertips until the mixture looks like fine crumbs. Mix in roughly three-quarters of the cheese along with the red onion and chives.
3. Beat the egg and milk together, then add just enough to the mixture to make a soft, but not sticky dough, mixing it in with a knife to bring the dough together. Avoid using your hands, as this warms the mixture.
4. Flour your hands a little, then knead the dough lightly for a few moments. Turn onto a floured surface, then use a lightly floured rolling pin to roll out the dough to about 2.5cm thick.
5. Using one of the loose bases as a template, cut out the dough to fit the Mini Loaf Tin – gathering and re-rolling the trimmings to make 12 in total.
6. Put the dough into the Mini Loaf Tin. Brush the tops with the remaining egg mixture and sprinkle with the rest of the cheese. Bake for 15-18 minutes, until well risen and golden brown. Cool for a few minutes, then transfer to a cooling rack.

Tip: If using plain flour, you will need 2½ level teaspoons of baking powder. Use a proper measuring spoon and sift it into the flour to ensure thorough mixing.

London Marathon

The 40th London Marathon was scheduled to take place on 26th April. Hopefully, it will take place in the autumn – or when it is safe to do so. Will the winners be holding hands and kissing when this is next run, as they did in 1981?

Thank you to Jeanne Coker for circulating pics of her 1981 finishers' medal – see below.



Metros Website and social media

www.metros.org.uk

Contributions to Irene Paull at metros.secretary@yahoo.co.uk

We also have a Facebook page and Twitter account – please like or follow us. If you would like to join Metros' group email, please contact Irene Paull at metros.secretary@yahoo.co.uk
Group email address: metrosrc@googlegroups.com



tip:

Stress and adversity weaken the brain's ability to learn and retain information, but running can counteract those effects by bolstering communication between brain cells.