**SL01357_Clarence Little Athletics Centre Inc.**

**History of Clarence Little Athletic Centre**

In the late 1970s a group of people in the Clarence area were keen to get athletic sporting activities going for their children to participate in. At that time in Tasmania the options for children’s sport were very limited, and there were no athletics for primary school aged children outside of the schools.

While Little Athletics had commenced in Geelong in the mid 1960s, it wasn’t until 1973 that the first Little Athletics competition commenced in Tasmania (Launceston). Launceston had 4 Centres operating by the time Clarence Little Athletics Centre (CLAC) was formed.

The formation of CLAC was preceded by a meeting set up in the Clarence area which was attended by people from the Launceston Little Athletic Centres, as well as about 20 people from the local area. From this meeting a Steering Committee was formed of which some of the attendees, Ken McNamara, Chris Wilson, Frank Weston, Denise Rowlands and others would go on to be the founding members of CLAC.

Due to the manner in which Little Athletics was marketed, CLAC, commenced through an informal association with the local schools, and their Headmasters. The schools were utilised for training purposes, and as a means of distributing information about Little Athletics to the children and families.

CLAC commenced with competition in the 1978/79 season. CLAC was the first southern Tasmanian Centre to enter the Tasmanian Little Athletics Association (TLAA), with the initial clubs under the CLAC banner being:

* Howrah
* Warrane
* Rokeby
* Lindisfarne

CLAC would later be joined by:

* Bellerive (1981/82)
* Lauderdale (1982/83)
* Richmond (1982/83)

The club colours, and uniforms, were based upon the associated local Primary School colours, while the CLAC Centre colours were maroon and white. Athletes competing at the State Championships were required to hire the CLAC athletic top.

To begin with Little Athletics was for boys and girls aged between 6–11 years of age (U7-U12), with the age group based upon the athlete’s age as of 1st October. This would later be increased to 5-12 years of age (U6-U13) and then to the current age groups of 5-14 years of age (U6-U15), including Tiny Tots. In the 2018/19 season the Australian Little Athletics Association age group alignment came in with the adjusted age group based upon the athlete’s age as of the 1st January.

The first CLAC competition in the 1978/79 season was held at Wentworth Park, where they would continue to meet for the next 2 years. In the 1980/81 season CLAC relocated to the new venue at Kangaroos Bay, with the season officially opened by the Warden of Clarence, Mr R. Pretyman. CLAC would continue to meet at Kangaroo Bay for over the next 30 years until being relocated in the 2015/16 season to the purpose built shared facility at Clarence High School. This relocation was at the instigation of Clarence City Council, who had commissioned the new facilities.

In the first year of operation there were over 300 athletes competing on a Saturday, which would increase in the following years to be in the order of 500 athletes. In 1978 The Mercury described the overwhelming response by the number of athletes as:

‘…..well overdue in Hobart’. (The Mercury, Nov 16 1978)

Due to the large number of registered athletes each club was forced to limit the number of athletes to 100. This meant there was a waiting list to get involved with Little Athletics at CLAC.

At the start of the 1982/83 season CLAC had more than twice the number of children competing than at any other Centre in Tasmania.

In the 1979/80 season Claremont and Kingborough Centres commenced operation, with this seen as an opportunity for local regional meets during the season. In the following years Queenborough, Lenah Valley (Hobart Districts) and East Derwent would join the association.

Over time, and due to the falling number of athletes at the individual clubs the structure of the Centre changed. The clubs were grappling with substantially lower number of athletes and volunteers thus the decision was to wind up the clubs with athletes having to register instead with Clarence Little Athletic Centre.

Events

The range of events first offered were:

Track: 70m, 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 1500m and 60m hurdles

Field: Long Jump, Triple Jump, High Jump, Shot Put, Discus and Javelin

In the 1981/82 season CLAC included 800m for the U9 age groups and regular relay events.

No race walking was offered.

Heats for track events were seeded each week by the Records and Ranking Official, with a marble then used to establish the lane draw for each athlete.

The Saturday meets in the early years would commence at 8:30am and finish at approx. 1:00pm.

Only once a year did the Centres around Tasmania come together to compete against each other. This was for the State Championships, following the CLAC Championship finals. At the CLAC Championship all finalists received an official sash, and placegetters in each event received medals.

Those that received medals got the opportunity to then compete under the CLAC colours at the State Championships, which in the first year consisted of between 50-60 athletes.

In the early years CLAC was forging the way ahead with the use of technology being one of the first Centres to use electronic timing for track events. Frank Weston wired up the starters gun to the finish line equipment, which consisted of a cable that extended the full length of the 100m track. The cable was also long enough to enable starting from the 200m point on the track. Prior to this the traditional stop watch timing methods were utilised.

Committee & Volunteers

The Committee in the formation years consisted of 12-13 people, with every Committee member having a specific role. The Team Managers were separate to the general governing Committee.

Each Club had their own President, executive officers, team managers, and coaches, who were separate to the CLAC executive officers.

The early Constitution and policies governing Little Athletics in Tasmania were adopted from the Victorian Little Athletics Association.

Many volunteers were needed to efficiently run the events and manage the athletes. Each Club had their own tent, with a manager in each tent. Many parents were engaged in the activity of writing out the athlete performance tickets. Parents were provided with a roster and expected to attend on their rostered days. Volunteers were provided by the individual Clubs, with each Club expected to supply at least one official for every seven registered athletes. Failure of the Clubs to provide the required quota of officials could lead to suspension if the lack of support continued for 3 consecutive weeks.

Coaching / Training

Training sessions were typically undertaken at the local schools. At Saturday meets there were parents who circulated around the various events instructing the athletes on how to hold the implements.

The coaching camp was held at Port Sorell in the same location as held today.

The first batch of CLAC coaches were taught by a contact who was based with University of Tasmania (Australian Track & Field Association – Uni course).

The people who started CLAC had no athletic background, thus there was much work to be done in its infancy to develop the knowledge.

Fundraising / Sponsorship

Generally the operating costs of the Centre were low, however in order to pay for the printing costs, etc the Committee used to hold Bingo sessions to raise funds.

Some money from the registration fee went to CLAC with the remaining portion for the TLAA.

The canteen also brought in some money.

Business used to sponsor specific events and meets and was used as a means of purchasing ribbons, etc.

The ANZ Bank was a sponsor of the CLAC Championship finals.

Equipment

The original equipment for the CLAC competitions came from the TLAA.

Some athletes competed in bare feet. There were also no specialised running shoes for children in the early years.

The safety focus was very different in the early years, with this changing over the years as awareness evolved and organisations and insurers become more risk adverse.

The objectives of Little Athletics remain the same today as they were when CLAC first commenced. It was originally touted as a family activity and a FUN activity (family & fitness activity), where children of all abilities were encouraged to participate.

Past Athletes

There have been some notable Little Athletes who have come through CLAC to go onto greater sporting pursuits within the Australian and International sporting world. These have included:

Hamish Peacock

Represented Australia at the 2014 & 2018 Commonwealth Games (bronze and silver medals respectively), and 2016 Olympics Games in Javelin.

Huw Peacock

Represented Australia at the 2014 & 2018 Commonwealth Games in hammer throw.

Gabrielle Steele (Nee Prenter)

A member of the 1988 Australian Team that competed the second World Junior Championships in Canada. Australian junior javelin champion in 1988.

Kylie Risk

A member of the 1998 Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur, in which she won a silver medal in the 10 000 metres. Holds the Tasmanian records for both the 5,000 and 10,000 metres. Has won Hobart’s City to Casino Fun Run on 10 occasions. In 1999 she won the Sydney City to Surf.

Brendan Hanigan

Tasmanian 800m runner. Brendan represented Australia at the 1994 Commonwealth Games. He won a bronze medal over 800 metres at the World Junior Championships in 1992.

Andrea Hughes

Andrea represented Australia at the 1994 Commonwealth Games in high jump.

Jack Riewoldt

Player for Richmond Football Club in the AFL. Member of the 2002 Under 13 Australian Little Athletics Team. Jack won a bronze medal at the U13 Australian Little Athletics Championship in shot put.

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