

# Barbara's back on track



Barbara Blurton received the 2018 AMA Administrator of the Year award and is well known as half of the dynamic duo whose contribution to Masters Athletics is world-renowned. A look at Barbara's history as an athlete is long overdue however. Her vast experience, extraordinary success interspersed with trials and tribulations, provides motivation for all athletes.

London born and raised, Barbara showed early promise as a runner, leaving male classmates in her wake. Athletics was not offered at the schools she attended so Barbara utilised her running skills playing hockey. Considerable success followed and while at Leeds University studying Mathematics, Barbara competed with the University First Eleven, eventually representing West Wales. Her enjoyment of hockey waned though,



## In focus

With Carmel Meyer

following patella re-alignment surgery and the introduction of the all-weather surface. At this stage she met Richard and they went running together. Barbara joined the Southern Counties Vets and had some success as a sprinter, however in Richard's opinion she didn't really have the raw power required for sprinting. Barbara was horrified when he suggested 400m as her event, but that horror turned to interest when, with no prior training, she ran a 64sec 400m on the local cinder track!

In 1989 the Blurtons combined a holiday with the Veterans World

Championships in Eugene, Oregon. Barbara came fifth in the W35 400m (PB of 60.79) and won gold in the 4 x 400m relay. She has always considered her Eugene performance a source of inspiration. Barbara then joined the South London Harriers (of Gordon Pirie fame), training with Olympic coach Mike Smith. Success continued when at Turku, Finland (1991) she won her first individual gold, W40 400m (58.38sec).

In 1992, a temporary stay in Australia became long term. Barbara missed the 1993 Japan Worlds due to achilles surgery but after moving to Melbourne in 1994 she started training for Buffalo with original AIS coach, Norm Osborne. The 1995 Buffalo WMA Championships produced what has been described as one of the all time best masters track races.

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# with physio's help



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Barbara came up against champion Americans Mary Libel and Phil Raschker. She was momentarily disappointed to finish third, despite achieving her 400m PB of 57.91sec, until Richard told her all three athletes had broken the existing World Record! Barbara's time was also a European Record, which she held for an extraordinary 23 years. It was finally broken in 2018 by Nina Anderson, also from Great Britain. Barbara is believed to be the first MAWA member to hold a European Record. She also ran for GBR in the 4 x 400m and has since found out that the Australian team spent time strategising how to overcome the 'Blurton Effect'; must have paid off as Australia won!

A pivotal moment in Barbara's career was unexpectedly winning the 800m gold in Buffalo as she then came to realise the W45 800m WR was achievable. She broke it twice in 1996, running in open competition at Olympic Park, Melbourne ...*magical nights...* she remembers. In Durban (1997) Barbara was the hot favourite for both 400m and 800m. It was a championship that she rates as her

most successful. She achieved the double, plus gold in both relays. In Brisbane (2001) she took the 400/800m wins plus W50 WR in 4x 400m.

Barbara had bounced back from injury over the years but, catastrophically, 2005 saw her succumb to such an extent that she spent the next decade out of athletics. Severe ankle pain, knee operations, nerve disorders and a mis-diagnosis of rheumatoid arthritis dogged her. It was physiotherapist and good friend Neil Drouet who set Barbara on the road to recovery. *He was right and I owe him a lot*, says Barbara.

*My first Parkrun in July 2016 was a milestone and finishing the Perth x-country was a psychological boost.*

Barbara now trains with a modified version of Norm Osborne's regime. She remembers Norm as a superb coach who was fond of saying, *Put in the hard work and the results will follow*; not very original

Barbara admits but anyone who has seen her train will agree that Norm's mantra is being adhered to!

Now well and truly back,

Barbara's most recent success was 400m gold at the 2019 Melbourne nationals. Quality times in 200m means both events are now targets for W70 records after her birthday in March 2020. The 400m remains her favourite event although she wryly adds *..favourite event?... really whichever one I am performing best in! To be at the top is a great feeling, but the competition is intense from UK, USA and Canadian athletes. My desire to win is still there as I showed in the Nationals 400m final.*

Barbara loves to travel and although she says she prefers the *easier* walks, she is a willing companion for Richard on his historical and pilgrimage hikes both locally and international.