

Athletics captivates

Champion thrower James (Jim) Davis was born in Leicester, England in 1934. Shortly after, his family moved to South East London. In 1943, seven-year-old Jim found himself evacuated to the relative safety of Somerset. It was very traumatic leaving his mother, who was a nurse and his father who was already away serving in the RAF. There was a bright moment though. The sports carnival was held the day after he started school in Somerset. Jim was captivated as this was the first time he had seen athletics. He remembers a few events - 100-yard dash, long jump and cricket ball throw. When he returned to London after the war his mother enrolled him in the local athletics club, South London Harriers. And so began a love affair with athletics that has lasted some 79 years.



In focus

With Carmel Meyer

Sadly his dad was killed in action so Jim joined the workforce early, becoming an apprentice printer at thirteen. The National Service call-up saw Jim follow in his father's footsteps and enter the RAF. He was in the airforce for eight years, working as a Physical Training Instructor. He recalls this time fondly, especially the very first camp he went to, where he saw someone throw the hammer in competition. He remembers his eighteen-year-old self-thinking, *'Woah! that's good, I'd love to learn to do that!'* Learn it he did. He later finished second in the RAF championships hammer event. He also developed considerable skill in soccer and basketball. Jim's advice to novice throwers is don't try to throw too hard until you have mastered technique; force and distance will follow once technique is solid.

Jim left the airforce in 1960 and with sponsorship from a Melbourne soccer club he emigrated to Australia with his first wife Jackie. They have three adopted children, who all live on the East coast. Jim worked as a Phys. Ed teacher; first with the Education department and then for fifteen years in private schools. He also coached (Level 2 - athletics) with the NSW Academy of Sport for about six years and over time has used this coaching background to develop his throwing skills. Jim tells the delightful story of how, whilst teaching in Victoria, he looked over a line-up of schoolboy hammer throw hopefuls. The small guy on the end was Gus Puopolo. Jim had his doubts about him but Gus proved him wrong by becoming a Commonwealth Games thrower and is now *'...one of the best coaches in Australia.'* Gus and Jim remain friends and Jim recently *'...twisted Gus' arm...* and got him to come out of retirement and throw again.

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Jim at a young age



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Australia Jim maintained his Harriers connection, joining St. Stephen's Harriers, which he remembers was the top athletics club in Victoria in those days. In the early 1970s, Jim joined the newly formed Veterans Athletics following two chance encounters with thrower John White who encouraged him to sign up. After retirement, Jim and Jackie moved to Port Macquarie. Jim stayed on thereafter Jackie passed away, keeping himself fit and busy. He even joined a local dance club.

Jim developed Ischaemic Optical Neuropathy in his seventies. This debilitating visual impairment, caused by insufficient blood supply to the optic nerves, means Jim has minimal sight in his left eye and about 15% in his right eye. In a testament to his character Jim has made the best of a difficult situation and has not let his vision issues prevent him from enjoying life. He is very grateful to his second wife Carol, and his training buddy Ossi Igel for the essential support they provide.

In a roundabout way, Jim has Masters Athletics to thank both for his move to WA and for his second wife Carol! He intended to participate in the 2010 Perth AMA Championships. However, his friends were concerned it would be difficult for Jim to get around in Perth given his disability so they decided to find him a lady friend via the internet who could care for him while he was here. Jim chuckles as he recounts how five ladies rose to the challenge. He left it to his friends to make the final choice for him, citing his lack of clear vision! He met Carol, and they hit it off straight away. Their relationship thrived despite the difficulties of a long-distance romance and they have now been married for nine years and live in Mandurah.

Jim is still throwing well despite having had a hip and a shoulder joint replacement. When asked about other injuries he ruefully recalls the time he was awaiting his turn to throw at the British Championships. The thrower in the cage was off-balance, his hammer flew and landed on Jim's foot, crushing it. Jim says his foot was

'...reassembled using staples and, eventually, I got over it.'

Hammer is Jim's favourite event. He recently threw 32.62 m, breaking the M85 Australian record. He is now looking to competition later in the year where he hopes to make the Throws Pentathlon record his as well. Jim knows that as he approaches eighty-six, maintaining good physical health is essential *'...I've been lucky so far...I'm looking forward to getting on with it and to still be competing at ninety!'* He feels his greatest achievement is his Hammer bronze medal at the 2001 Brisbane World Championships. A continuing pleasure is catching up with fellow competitors from other states. He mentions Victorian athlete Tommy Hancock - *'Tom and I have been competing against each other for something like sixty years! I've met some wonderful people in athletics, absolutely wonderful.'*