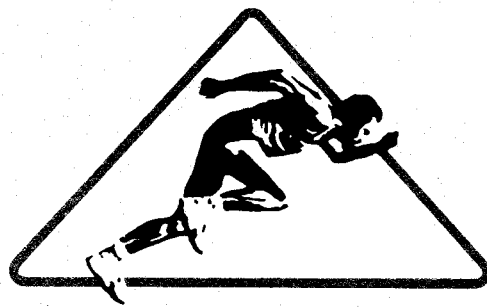


J. Harding



Doncaster Amateur Athletic Club

A CLUB HISTORY

1971 - 1982

DONCASTER AMATEUR ATELETIC CLUB

CLUB HISTORY - 1971 to 1982

Season 1982-1983 will see a restructuring of Victorian athletics. The men's and women's associations will be merged into the one body. Consequently the Doncaster Amateur Athletic Club (DAC) will merge with the Doncaster Women's Amateur Athletic Club. With this thought in mind it seems an appropriate time to recount the events that have led to the formation and growth of DAC.

As memories are fading and the number of original competitors still at the club numbers one, a factual history telling "the way we were" is essential. As I was priveleged(?) enough to witness first hand some of the historic moments of the early days of DAC, I feel I can not only present the facts but also try and give an impression of what competing for DAC was like at the time.

I hope the pages that follow are of interest and convey the necessary facts and impressions.

Rob Neish.

FORMATION

In 1971 a large, sloping, paddock called Rieschieck's Reserve was being overrun every Saturday morning by Little Athletes. At that stage the Little Athletics centre was the only organised athletics group in Doncaster. It was evident that there was a need not only to provide ongoing competition for the little athletes, but also to cater for senior athletes who lived in the growing municipality of Doncaster.

Initiative was taken by Mrs G. Bolton and Mr Allen Stevens to hold a public meeting to assess the level of interest in the idea of forming senior men's and women's athletic clubs.

The following letter relates the outcome of that meeting to the V.A.A.A.

The Secretary,
V.A.A.A.,
12 McKillop Street,
MELBOURNE, 3000 Vic.

Dear Sir,

Further to our letter of 21st April, we now wish to advise that, at a public meeting held in the Athenaeum Hall, Doncaster on the 4th May, 1971, the following resolution was passed - that a Senior Men's Amateur Athletic Club be established in Doncaster.

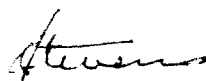
At a meeting of interested parties held after this resolution, under the Chairmanship of Mr. K. Taggart, the Doncaster Amateur Athletic Club was established, and the following office bearers were elected:-

President	-	Mr. I. Adderley
Secretary	-	Mr. A. Stevens
Treasurer	-	Mr. B. Murphy
Committee	-	Mr. P. Green

This Committee is now proceeding with the mechanics of adopting constitution deciding club uniform and recruiting sufficient members to apply for an affiliation with the V.A.A.A.

We would like to express our appreciation of the considerable support offered by the Association in our initial stages and will be in contact with you regarding an affiliation in the near future.

Yours faithfully,



A. J. STEVENS

Several problems confronted the committee during the winter of 1971. The major problem was finding the 20 members which were required before the club could be affiliated with the V.A.A.A. Although there were many members of other clubs willing to transfer to Doncaster, they were not able to until the club was affiliated. The necessary 20 were found but not all were genuine athletes. Affiliation was finally granted on the 13th of October 1971, less than a month before the beginning of the track season.

THE FIRST SEASON

Doncaster was allotted to the Heidelberg venue. Teams were entered for D grade, U 17, U 15, and U 13. Due to the majority of would-be competitors experiencing delays with transfers, the club fielded 5 competitors on the first day.

The Heidelberg venue was at the old Olympic village training track near Northland shopping centre. The other clubs competing at the venue were Camberwell, Collingwood, Ivanhoe, Kew, Old Carey, and Old Paradians. Fred Lester was the race marshall with his familiar distinctive style.

The club uniform was decided as a green D on a gold singlet with green edging and green shorts. The committee had its hands full with recruiting members and filling teams and the uniforms weren't available until the second year of competition. In the meantime DAC's athletes wore white singlets and shorts with a green D pinned on. The DAC boys really looked, well, a team at least.

By the end of the season there were 20 registered competing athletes, with another 5 athletes awaiting clearances. The under-age teams who were desperately short of competitors all season (usually one or none per team each week) finished last. The under 13 team was an exception. Robert Adderley managed to defeat Camberwell-YMCA single handed to clinch 4 points and raise the team to second last.

The D grade team had consistent performers and reached the finals. The first four teams used to contest semi-finals with 1st against 4th, and 2nd against 3rd. D grade finished 4th after losing to Old Carey in the semi. The team had a strong sprint trio of David Bellairs, Gordon Wallace, and Russell Wain, with help from Greg Andrews, Gary Bellairs, and Phillip Galt. Peter Green performed well in the jumps, whilst Gordon Wallace had a good season in the middle distance events. During the season he was joined by Michael Moore- a promising 16 year old. The team was completed by the throwers- Ian Adderley, Greg Andrews, and Allen Stevens, who was also a part-time hurdler.

One observation of the first track season made in the annual report was "an evident lack of basic conditioning of a number of athletes."

The first Annual General Meeting was held on Thursday 6th of May 1972 and was certainly a 'memorable' occasion. It was held in the Lincoln Drive Salvation Army Hall (long since demolished) in Bulleen. The hall was a weatherboard room with a few rows of wooden benches and a couple of naked globes overhead. Eighteen people were present. Allen Stevens chaired the meeting due to the absence of the president. The major problems confronting the club were outlined and included the low numbers of junior competitors, finances and poor training facilities.

Mr N. Brown, MHR Diamond Valley, was guest speaker and commented on the problems new organisations face and also remarked on the progress of the club. He also mentioned the possibility of an athletics track being built in Doncaster sometime in the future. Next came the trophy presentation. It happened something like this.

Allen Stevens announced that the committee had decided to award medallions to every member who competed for the club in its formation year. One by one the following received his medallion from Mr Brown:- G. Andrews, D. Bellairs, G. Bellairs, P. Galt, P. Green, G. Wallace, A. Stevens, I. Adderley, R. Adderley, I. Humble, K. Humble, M. Moore, G. Thornycroft, R. Wain, and S. Black.

Once everyone was seated again and the ripple of applause had disappeared, Allen Stevens apologetically announced "Aaah, those of you with medallions may have noticed that your medallions are missing their inscription. Well, as you all know it's only the club's first year and at the moment we're a bit short on funds so if you wouldn't mind handing them back we'll get them engraved as soon as we receive some more subs'." There followed some good-natured laughter as everyone rose from their wooden benches, wandered to the front and handed their medallions back.

After everyone was seated (benched) again it was back to Allen Stevens who said, "Aaah, some of you may have had enough time to notice that your medallions had a small hole in each side. Well, aaah, there's supposed to be a stand which holds the medallion and, as you all are well aware, this is only our first season so after we get some more subs' after we've done the engraving, we'll buy the stands."

Once the presentations were finally finished, it was announced that subscription rates would remain (I thought they may have risen for reasons given above) at under 13 and under 15- \$4.00, under 17-\$5.00, and senior-\$7.00. After a bite of supper the historic AGM finished.

HEIDELBERG DAYS

From 1971-2 until 1976-7 DAC's interclub competition was held at the Olympic training track at Heidelberg. The track was set amongst empty paddocks, with Northland shopping centre and the drone of motor bikes in the background. However it wasn't long before DAC brightened up the venue with an all-purpose bright yellow weather shelter.

Initially DAC was a senior team with a few juniors making up entire under-age teams. As recruiting and a stream of ex-Little Athletes filtered into the club the junior teams filled over the years. Despite frequent shortages of competitors DAC's teams managed to remain competitive, like the under 15's of 1975.

The team consisted of 4 competitors;- the first was a sprinter, hurdler, pole-vaulter and relay-runner, the second was a sprinter, shot-putter, discus-thrower, javelin-thrower, and relay-runner, the third was a sprinter, hurdler, long-jumper, triple-jumper, and relay-runner, the fourth was a walker, high-jumper, distance-runner, and relay-runner. The finely oiled machine only narrowly missed the finals but recorded many good wins during the season.

DAC never appeared to have much luck at finals time at Heidelberg. A classic example was in 1973-4 when DAC's top side C grade finished fourth and met top team Ivanhoe in the semi-finals. Tremendous team performances and athletes competing numerous times to fill gaps on the team sheet saw DAC tie on points. There were long delays as the results were checked and the tie stood. A run-off over 600m with 3 runners from each team was to decide the place in the grand-final. The run-off took place in the evening shadows some hour and a half after the end of competition. Ivanhoe recalled their specialist 800m men, who had been home resting for the previous few hours, and DAC put forward 3 of their all-purpose goers. Whilst DAC gained points for trying they didn't gain points for placings and Ivanhoe went on to win the premiership.

As the days at Heidelberg drew to a close, DAC won venue premierships in sub-junior B in the last 2 seasons as well as a premiership in under15 in the final year (1976-7). Meanwhile DAC had gained promotion to B grade in 1975-6, the same year as the first Doncaster schoolboys cross-country championship. The following year saw the introduction of the demanding club handicap race, the Doncaster-Park Orchards.



Presentation for U15 Doncaster schoolboys cross-country, 1975.
L to R P.Healy, J.Chambers, G.Chambers, Mr F.Wain.

CLUB DEVELOPMENT 1971-7.

Many problems confronted DAC during the first six years. Lack of facilities, funds, competitors and an inability to hold on to competitors were the main ones. The committees of the times were aware of the needs for improvements and acted positively to meet the needs as effectively as possible. Volunteer coaches, active recruiting (members rose from 28 to 58 in one year from 1973), and a fund-raising sub-committee were effected.

Much needed local press coverage was begun which apart from giving exposure to the club also gratified many egos. Team management was introduced to create better turn-ups and team performances.

Finances were a major problem for the initial 3 years, As memberships were low, income from subscriptions, and functions was minimal. Many fund-raising ideas were attempted. One was participation in a community Mowerthon. Community clubs were given areas where they could pre-arrange to mow a lawn or nature-strip for a small fee. DAC made something like \$15.00 which would have doubled the bank balance.

DEVELOPMENT OF GEORGE ST. TRACK.

As was mentioned earlier the council aired plans for the possible development of an athletics track early in 1972. In June 1972 a meeting of the Doncaster Women's Amateur Athletic Club, Doncaster Little Athletics Centre and DAC informed the council of the long term requirements for each of the bodies.

As time passed a steering committee was formed to advise the council in their planning. Recommendations on the lay-out and surface were accepted as was the proposition that the ground should be fenced. Correspondences regarding the steering committee went through DAC as Allen Stevens headed the group.

The time schedule for the completion of the track was revealed and created an urgent need to improve finances in order to contribute to the equipping of the ground. The fund-raising sub-committee formed in 1974 worked ahead of budget to enable a successful move to George st. The track was officially opened during August 1976.



ATHLETIC TRACK UNDER CONSTRUCTION - 1976



DAC AT DONCASTER

Interclub competition began at Doncaster in 1977-78 and was the first time that combined men's and women's competition was held in Victoria. Some teething problems arose , especially with the lengthy program and late finishes.

The move to Doncaster generated a lot of enthusiasm. Were the women inspiring greater attendances at training and competition? Whatever the reason DAC went on to win 3 venue premierships that year (U17,U15,U13) after having 9 out of 11 teams in the finals.

Competition at Doncaster enabled the club to gain enormous financial benefits from running the canteen. May 1978 saw the appointments of John Hirst and Geoff Thomas as club coaches. The following cross-country season was again disappointing at the senior level with E grade teams being seldom filled.

Despite a lean winter, summer inter-club in 1978-79 was an enormous success. Ability combined with top coaching to bring DAC 4 premierships (B,D,U14,U13) and runners-up in the other 3 divisions. Under 14 and under 13 went on to become DAC's first association premiers and D grade went down by one point. Also B grade gained a significant promotion to A-reserve by finishing 3rd.

The wave of success continued into the winter season where the benefits of consistent distance coaching enabled DAC to easily win the 2 E grade premierships.



Members of the Association premiership team - U14, 1979.

Season 1979-80 once again had successful junior teams with U15 and U14 winning the venue and U15 taking their second association flag. The highlight of the 1980 winter season was that the Victorian U15 cross-country team was comprised entirely of Doncaster runners (Sean Quilty, Paul Murray, and Andrew Hart). D grade again dominated the section to win both the road and cross-country premierships.

1980-81 interclub produced 3 venue premierships for DAC (D, U15, U16). Both U15 and U16 went on to win the association flags, producing a hat-trick for the under 16's. One figure which shows the enormous depth of talent in the club is the 39 medals won at the Victorian Championships (nearly all in junior age-groups). Jeff Chambers became the first DAC athlete to win a gold medal at the Nationals with his victory in the U20 5000m in Adelaide.

The '81 winter season showed DAC's continuing improvement in cross-country and road racing by notching another two premierships and producing a would-be 4th placing in A grade at Jell's park. The 81-82 track season demonstrated the U17's strength as they collected their 4th consecutive association flag. U16 won the venue and A-reserve finally reached the finals after finishing 5th in the previous two years.

These pages have been restricted mainly to team performances because individual achievements are too numerous and too difficult to list accurately. However the selections of Sean Quilty and Jason Agosta in the Australian schoolboys team to tour U.S.A in 1982 must rate among the most noted achievements in the club and are a great acknowledgement of the pair's talents.

Another important aspect of club functioning is the newsletter. These have been around since 1971 but the current form "DAC CHAT" must rate as the most successful and consistent. It plays an important role and part of the club's success can be attributed to it. A club history wouldn't be complete without a few of the memorable moments from the "rumours" column. Here's two of the classics:-

- Peter Ramsay has been seen so often in athletic gear lately that people are beginning to confuse him with the athletes. Is he finally serious about athletics OR modelling sporting gear OR chatting up girls at the track or...or...What can all this mean?

- A well known women's 400m hurdles state champion who wishes to remain anonymous, has of late shown a certain panache for divulging the deeper meanings of human relationships. Her latest philosophical gem was "all men are basically animals when you get them by themselves"

In short, Doncaster's 10 years and 11 track seasons have seen a steady rise in senior teams from D grade to A-reserve and a tremendous improvement in under age teams. All junior teams can claim to be among the best in the state with more than 20 athletes being able to claim likewise.

It must be remembered that the club has yet to reach the top bracket in the seniors. The past few seasons have shown that promotion to Agrade is far from being a natural progression for the club. Not only depth, but a depth of quality is needed to make promotion and continuing success possible.

The merger with the Doncaster Women's Amateur Athletic Club seems to be only a formality as the association between the two clubs has always been sound.

The achievements of the Doncaster Amateur Athletic Club in competition, administration and social functions justifiably generate pride. Hopefully the achievements of the next phase of the club's history will enable those involved with DAC to feel a similar pride from accomplishment.