

Gay's accidental

Gay Wyatt is a self-described 'accidental' athlete. As one half of Team Wyatt, Gay has been a constant support and off-sider to coach Dave. She has had a lifelong interest in fitness but increased confidence has seen her take to track and field with gusto and great success. Gay epitomises the Master's ethos – willingness to have a go, give your best effort and be a part of it all rather than looking on from the sidelines...

My childhood may be considered a little unusual as I grew up as an Australian Army officer's daughter. I was born in Perth but left for the eastern states at the age of four. We were always on the move and once, in the space of a year, I attended four schools. My friends thought I lived a glamorous life as most of them still lived in the same house they were born in and Western Australia was so far away. Oh, how things have changed!

I eventually returned to Perth after having met my husband-to-be, Dave whilst living in England for two years. I felt I couldn't live there permanently but as luck would have it, he was happy to pack his bags and start a new adventure with me. We married here and raised our two gorgeous daughters. Our eldest Emma lives in Canada with her Canadian husband, amazing stepson and her two wonderful children. Alicia, our youngest, lives in Melbourne with her husband and two black Labradors. We are very proud of the independent young women we raised but maybe we did too good a job. Having them closer would be preferable but at least we do get to travel. Dave and I rarely travel to World or National Competitions. We would rather visit our family whom we miss terribly.

I can truthfully say my athletics career started by accident. I enjoyed athletics at school, particularly the long and high jump. In those days you had to scissor kick into sand. I wasn't a sprinter (still aren't) and was usually the fourth pick for the relay team. I have, however, been a keen gym member for 35 years and still go three times a week so fitness was not an issue in my older years. Athletics was never on my radar and when Dave (a passionate Masters athlete) went off to train on Saturday mornings I would lay in bed eating breakfast and reading the papers.

Retirement 11 years ago, however, changed things. After a year or so I decided to join Dave and the other Masters on Saturdays. I still couldn't sprint and didn't enjoy sprint training so after warmup, I would go for a long run.

I love the solitude of the run and the buzz I get from pushing myself. Not that I would ever do it competitively! Eventually, I asked Dave if he would coach me in high jump, as he was a great high jumper himself. And, the rest they say is history. I joined Masters six years ago at 59 and have gradually added long and triple jump and finally, the pentathlon, to my repertoire.

I am not sure I can be called a committed athlete and I'm the first to admit that my training regime could improve. Thursday afternoon is usually spent with Dave, Sue Coate and Lisa Limonas working on high jump technique. Every second Tuesday, during summer athletics, I work on long and triple jump; occasionally I throw a javelin with Sue. She is a fantastic thrower and has been trying to improve my technique. I'm

not sure who is more frustrated-her or me. I also run the 60 and 100m on Tuesday nights and call that sprint training! I have surprised myself though, collecting a couple of state records and, having moved into a new age group, I hope that I can add to these. Time will tell.

When I joined the Masters I only competed in high jump. I was reticent to take part in the State Championships as I felt I could not compete with the amazing athletes that I had seen. It took me a while to realise I had nothing to be embarrassed about. All the competitors were supportive and caring and it was only myself that I was competing against. Being part of this lovely group of people is the most important part of the competition.

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Eventually, this led me to take the giant step of entering the Perth 2016 Worlds. Very brave I thought, considering I hadn't even competed at national level. The highlight was my seventh place in the triple jump and PB's in my first three jumps. Unfortunately, this was my only highlight. The next day I fell ill with a nasty virus and was unable to continue. I had been eager to see what I could do in the long jump as I was feeling rather pleased with my efforts.

Since then I have entered two National Championships – Darwin and Perth. Again I surprised myself with a silver and two bronze medals but my proudest achievement occurred in the pentathlon at the Perth Nationals. I had only competed twice in this event and had managed to break the state record on my first attempt. I had already won two gold and one silver at this competition and was amazed at my success; anything else was a bonus. From within I had found a resolve I did not know I possessed. Not only did I win, but I also broke my state record. I had one of those days that I don't think I will experience again. A day when you think you can achieve anything. Maybe that is my motivation to continue with athletics, to experience that feeling of invincibility again!

Luckily to date, I haven't been injured. I put this down to 35 years of gym work: strength training, core work, and aerobics. Of course, like any other 65-year old, I have my niggles but I work through them. It is all part of the ageing process, even if it is "b" annoying.

Athletics has become an important part of my life. I was a Level 2 coach for many years, which I incorporated into my career as a teacher. I assisted the Phys Ed teacher during athletics season, usually in the jumps, as that was my area of expertise. Recently I have also completed the Level 1 Officiating Course and officiated during the Schools Competition. I now officiate at Strive. My knowledge is growing all the time but I don't think it's going to assist my own performances no matter how much I try to channel the youngsters' efforts.

Life is pretty busy and athletics will continue to be a major part of it, along with gym work and volunteering in the school at Perth Children's Hospital. I enjoy the camaraderie, the physical and mental challenges of athletics along with the knowledge that it is an effective way to stall the ageing process. Most importantly it is the friends that I have made who pick me up when I am unhappy with my performance, chivy me along to improve and just make me feel good about myself. To them, I say a big thank you!

