

Margaret Saunder's

# Love of athletics

Margaret tackles the hurdles as a teenager at Perry Lakes.



In focus

With Christine Oldfield

A PERTH girl through and through, Marg (as she is usually called) grew up in Mount Lawley and Karrinyup. She was a high school PE teacher for about 15 years but now teaches Business Ed/Information Technology. Family life was athletics oriented with her brother a runner and her parents being officials.

Marg and her younger sister first went along to meetings to watch but they then also became 'runners', running the race results from the judges to the timekeepers and then to the announcer. Marg was about 10 at the time and as a 'little official' she learned the rules of the sport and the many different roles involved "from some wonderful and very knowledgeable officials". She was an official herself for many years, including being in charge of winter senior season for a couple of years.

She joined Mount Lawley athletics club at age 12 or 13, in the era before Little Athletics and, as she says, "certainly before females could do distance running before they turned 16 years of age". So she did sprints, hurdles and long jump, "not very

well", being generally "last in last division".

However she loved the sport and enjoyed the friendship of other athletes.

Marg competed in her school athletics team and later, at 23, in her first appearance in the state cross country team, she beat long jumper Eileen Hindle and decided she should take training a bit more seriously. She improved, and, in national track and cross country championships, she achieved sixth places in both disciplines.

At school her coach had been Beryl Byrne, who had greatly influenced Marg's athletics career. She had taught her coaching strategies by teaching her to coach hurdlers. So, when Marg damaged a nerve in her foot in 1979 and then, in the early 80s,

suffered from chronic fatigue and had to give up

running, she coached instead. She did not run for many years except to warm up or cool down with her athletes, but has been coaching ever since. Her philosophy is still based very much on what she had learned from Beryl when she was very young. She has coached many senior athletes and also a number of masters. As a distance coach she has achieved level 5 and amongst her successes is Ray Boyd, one of WA's best distance athletes.

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE



Photo: JACKIE HALBERG

A photograph of Margaret Saunders, an older woman with blonde hair and glasses, sitting on a red running track. She is wearing a white polo shirt with black trim and dark green athletic pants. She is in a seated position, leaning forward and stretching her right leg, with her hands reaching towards her foot. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and a green fence.

# At full stretch

**Margaret Saunders stretches between events at the World Masters Athletic Championships in Porto Alegre, Brazil.**

## FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

SHE has been the team manager/coach of many state teams in cross country and also track and field and has also been involved in two Australian junior teams as a coach. She takes great pleasure from coaching and watching how junior athletes learn so much from their participation in the sport.

And as if that wasn't enough for one person, Marg has also served on various club committees – starting at age 17 as club registrar and then treasurer with Scarborough Womens AC. Both Stirling Swans and AWA rewarded her service with life membership.

After a car accident in 2003 Marg had trouble walking very far for many years and thought she would never run again. But she started jogging slowly and over a very short distance with her training group in 2007. She joined masters for the Sunday runs,

knowing that the range of abilities would mean she would have a group to run with. She had no intention of *“doing any racing or championships”*. But she is grateful to Niamh Keane for encouraging her back into racing with a challenge to compete in the state masters championships in 2008. She surprised herself with the results she achieved and so enjoyed the experience that she continued to race. She has competed in all the state and national championships since then, being *“very surprised to run well and actually win a race in 2009”*. Despite having torn her Achilles at Easter in 2011 she was delighted not only to qualify for the final of the 800m at the world championships in Sacramento but to finish it – as 5<sup>th</sup> in the world. All her rehabilitation work in the gym and her water running had obviously been worthwhile.

In the 2012/2013 Club Tops, Marg came 1st in her age group by quite a

way in the 200m, 400m and 800m. And she passes on useful training tips to others by way of her coaching columns in both TFNL and Vetrin. On Sunday mornings she just runs how she feels, soaking up *“the friendship and camaraderie of other masters athletes”*, many of whom were very supportive when she was injured.

In the 2013 World Masters Championships in Brazil she again reached the final of the 800m and finished a creditable fifth. And she was *“absolutely rapt”* to win gold and become world champion in only her second ever attempt at the 2000m steeplechase. As an added bonus, she was part of the W55 team which took silver in the 4x400m relay.

Marg says *“I just love the sport and enjoy being fit. I am not driven by my results, but enjoy training and racing”*. Having turned 60 in December, she might now just become a little more interested in results.