Dave Wilkie

In Focus
with Carmel Meyer

IMAGE: Geoff Brayshaw

IMAGE: Carmel Meyer

Let's be clear here; I'm not a real athlete. I'm just making up the numbers. Sure they gave me some medals. But most of those were uncontested. Three races at the Nationals and I came last in all of them. Still got a couple of medals though, as there were only two of us running; me and the fast guy.

So there's the secret of success in Masters Athletics. Bottom feeding. Clean up the scraps in the events that no one else likes. Specifically, jumping over things. It turns out that the old and infirm aren't keen on jumping over sticks, little fences and pools of water. You don't have to run that fast to get some bling in hurdles or steeple. Just make it to the end without getting stretchered off.

I never was much good at sport. Some of the other athlete profiles report great prowess in all sorts of team games through adolescence and young adulthood. Not me. Throw a ball, kick a ball, hit it with a stick? No. Sorry. Hopeless. Anyway, sticks are for jumping over; I could high jump a bit at school. There was a 47 year gap before having another go at Masters. It's just like riding a bike.

Another admirable quality of many MAWA members is their contribution to junior sport through coaching and general club involvement. Again, I'm remiss in that department. It's too much effort and responsibility. Just raking the long jump pit stresses me. I'll leave it to the grown-ups.

What about contributing to society through a career in health care, education, industry or science? No. Never had a real job. Couldn't see the point. I started in science – if you want some mansplaining on genetics, palaeoanthropology or cosmology just ask. At your peril. But actually doing science was so dull. Repetitive, pointless, boring.

I went skydiving instead. For twenty years I made a living training beginners and taking people for tandem jumps. Basically a drop zone bum. For reasons I can't fully explain, I put my hand up to be the Chief Instructor. With my aversion to responsibility? Madness. It was a position that really needed some serious people skills. Unfortunately, I've got the EQ of a cane toad and a similar work ethic. It didn't go well and retiring from that was a real liberation. I had a couple of injuries along the way but who wants to hear about them?

IMAGE: Tom Lenane

IMAGE: Carmel Meyer

Implausibly, I'm actually married with children. Yes, I'm neck deep in that shenanigans. My boys are sporty and they've both come along to Thursday night meets and Sunday pole vault training. I've got a girl too but she's not keen on any physical activity that might dislodge a fake nail or eyelash.

Other life trivia for anyone still reading: I used to speak seven languages with varying degrees of competence from gibberish to conversational. Picked them up by spending my youth in far flung corners of the world. I don't use them much these days as I hate travel with a passion and generally avoid people. But when my wife is yelling at the kids I can follow the action.

As for athletics goals: making it through a season without injury would be pretty good. That's more of a fantasy than a goal. The Nationals are fun. I might go again. It's fun doing lots of events at the State champs. If you do enough you're bound to win something.

Field events are great but racing is better. You can't beat that feeling of coming off the bend, feeling strong and then letting rip over the home straight. 200 metres has to be my favourite distance. 400 is too long to sprint and too short not to. It's a race for genuine athletes, not impostors like me. 400 metre hurdles is completely ridiculous. Who could do that? Once you hit 60 for men the distance drops to 300m and the hurdles are lower. That's a huge difference: very doable.

Here's a training tip. You could run further or more often but it's diminishing returns. Go harder. Hill sprints. Get your heart rate up to maximum, collapse in a heap, rest and repeat.

Dave was awarded MAWA Most Improved Track and Field Athlete in 2023.

For more of his inimitable style see February 2024 TFNL pg.11, [*DIY with Dave*] *Ed.*