



*Pen & Palette
Club Papers*

*The Fourth Red
Book*

My Sporting Moments

SPORT AND I

Words have different meanings. Assuming, in this context “sport” does not refer to an Australian friend or, heaven forbid, amorous behaviour, I’ll focus on its customary sense of recreation involving physical exercise. In his poem “Young and Old” Kipling evokes the later phase:

“When all the world is old, lad
And all the trees are brown
And all the sport is stale, lad
And all the wheels run down
Creep home and take your place there
The spent and maimed among:
God grant you find one face there,
You loved when all was young.”

To wind back to when young. Brought up in Headingley, one could turn up at the Yorkshire cricket nets and be coached by Arthur Mitchell, the Yorkshire coach, and the great batsman Maurice Leyland (while also getting the autographs of Herbert Sutcliffe and Len Hutton). One also watched the Test Match in 1948 with Don Bradman and his great Australian team, while in the winter, Leeds Rugby League team played their matches on the other side of the stadium. Competing on the cricket ground in the prep school’s high jump, mother overheard a lady commenting about that “skinny little boy” which led to subsequent extra rations.

Actual performance at boarding school in cricket, tennis, rugby. running and fives (the rugby variety) was generally mediocre albeit with an occasional highlight. and much enjoyed. Umpiring and scoring also suited my legalistic and obsessional temperament. An unexpected experience in later life was hockey played at Durham on Boxing Days, not as ladylike as anticipated but ruthless and uncompromising and eventually abandoned after injuries to some older participants. Golf, a demanding but fulfilling game, social (though these days talk of one’s clinical symptoms must stop after the second hole) and played in pleasant surroundings, has taken over in recent decades. The Pen and Palette Cup made a handsome addition to the family silver for a year (though the Cup for the runner-up was even larger).

Alan Kerr

MENS INSANA IN CORPORE INFIRMUS

We all know people play sport to keep healthy and fit: Mens sana in corpore sano. Obvious.

Well if that's so why did I lose my first front teeth to a cricket ball smack in the mouth? On the same wasteland of 'The Back' we played footy with a soggy leather ball. A man passing by saw me in goal said, "see if tha' can save a penalty lad" and whacked it hard. To save my face I flung up my left arm and heard my forearm snap. He ran off ("See yer Mam") and I was in plaster for months. As a Wolf Cub we played British Bulldog and as the last survivor the whole pack pounced on me, banged my head on the floor and gave me severe concussion. At scout camp I burned my hand on a white hot poker (it smelled like roast pork). In junior school our sports were sissy rounders and bare-knuckle fighting in the playground where nosebleeds were frequent.

Grammar school rugby was just a series of bloody knees and the adult teams we played against spat in your ear on the front row or rasped you with their whiskers. At youth club I became expert at table tennis and badminton, mainly to show off in front of girls. However, I was most enthusiastic about swimming and diving. I did a 'torpedo' with my hands down by my sides and cracked my skull on the bottom of the pool. For a backward somersault you whip your knees up into a tuck: mine came up too quickly and broke my nose so, stunned and bleeding, I crashed spreadeagled into the pool and had to be fished out. Walking should be safer but I sprained my ankle on the school hike by jumping off a haystack and had to hop four miles to a bus stop. Happy days.

At college I tried every new sport available: squash, fives, hockey, throwing the hammer, discus, putting the shot, ice skating and weightlifting. I nearly failed my first year exams I was so busy. Rowing was tempting for a while, but I soon tired of the pre-dawn practices, retching over the side on an empty stomach and picking leeches off the boat's bottom. Instead I took up boxing. At the 1958 University Championships in Newcastle I faced McHugh of Liverpool, a rugby international and three stones heavier than me (the heavyweight division has no upper limits). My mind only clicked back into focus after 40 minutes in which, I was told, I had been knocked down twice, left the ring, showered and dressed without knowing about any of it. Rock climbing in the Lakes seemed relatively stress free until I pulled up onto a grassy ledge and the whole lot sheered off the cliff. I fell about thirty terrifying feet until the tiny chap above held me on his belay. I survived darts, pool and shove ha'penny relatively unscathed

Five years later in Finland I went on a 10 kilometre ski with a much more experienced friend. A snowstorm came in suddenly and we had to flee for our lives before the whiteout. Flogging to keep up with him knocked my heart out of rhythm and no amount of electric shocks could knock it back, so I have atrial fibrillation to this day.

Trekking in Nepal I visited a Hindu temple in Kathmandu where I was bitten in the arm by one of the sacred monkeys. The anti-rabies injections were worse than the bite (and very expensive). On a later trek I had a touch of mountain sickness walking at high altitude and my daughter had to sit on my chest to stop the shakes. Once back home I had agonising kidney stones because I hadn't been drinking enough water in the heat.

Since then I have stuck to sit ups (two hernias), tennis (elbow and back trouble), walking (knees) and swimming (verruucas).

The moral : Slump on a sofa with a can of lager and a pizza and you will be pain free and fit as a flea. *

Malcolm Yorke

* I tried this and got gout in my big toe

Rowing on the Itchen!

Whilst doing my engineering degree at Southampton I spent a considerable time in the back of an eight shouting at the top of my voice at the eight oarsmen to row harder and "give it ten!"

All this was done on the tidal reaches of the Itchen where we practiced over long hours rowing to the Woolston Ferry and back to Stoneham. This was done in all weathers as we prepared for the Heads of the River Races at Reading and London. I was in charge of the second eight so not much was expected of us!

One cold winter's day we got down near to the ferry and I being the cox had to get the boat turned round which could be a bit tricky especially in tidal water. I knew there was a post with a cross tree in the area but it was covered with water. The coach was busy telling the crew how to improve their strokes and timing whilst I worried that we were drifting ever closer to the hidden cross tree hoping we would clear it. The inevitable happened and we slowly bumped along it with cracking sounds coming from the shell! Cries of "cox what the hell are you doing there's

water coming in". Fortunately we cleared the incumbrance and the boat was still floating with reasonable freeboard and we rowed (or rather the crew) back to the boathouse and all landed safely if a bit damp. Being a wooden shell it was quickly mended with veneer patches. So no harm done but hurt pride in being responsible for nearly sinking the eight!



The Crew!

Pat Cooper

Immiscibility

Quite early in my science education I learned the wonderful word “immiscible” and I realised it perfectly described the relationship between me and sport. At my first school, when team captains were choosing sides, I was always the last to be picked. I must be one of the few people in England never to have scored a run in cricket, and was appointed team scorer. The belated provision of spectacles did nothing to improve my hand-eye coordination, and I continued to miss any moving object I was trying to hit or catch.

I was a bronchitic child living in foggy Huddersfield, so at age 13 my Carlisle-born parents sent me to school at St Bees on the windswept Cumbrian coast, and I’ve never had bronchitis since. This school had a reputation for sporting prowess, particularly in rugby, and there was compulsory exercise every afternoon except Tuesday and Sunday. Tuesdays were spent staggering around a parade ground carrying ex-WW1 Lee-Enfield rifles, and on Sundays we were expected to cycle into the Western Lake District to climb fells (no risk assessments in those days).

I soon realised that my survival in this culture demanded guile. Cross-country running was the least worst energetic exercise, and quite enjoyable in the rare good weather; I took up golf, as the school had a 9-hole cliff-top course populated by sheep and seagulls, which added to the entertainment; and surprisingly I got permission for piano practice to count as exercise.

My greatest sporting achievement in my more senior years was to be put in charge of the rolling squad. The main sports ground was used for rugby in the autumn term and cricket in the summer term. In the spring term it rested, and was rolled every afternoon, with the heavy roller being pulled by a team of eight younger boys. Someone had to organise this activity, preparing the schedules and directing the work. For two years, that someone was me.

In my final term, it was decided that I should take the grade 8 piano exam; I had not taken any of the lower grades, so had nothing to show for all my afternoons of practice. However, one week before the exam, I was fielding quietly near the boundary during a game inappropriately called "softball", when the ball was hit hard in my direction. I was too slow to skip out of the way and it caught me squarely on my right hand, breaking the knuckle of the little finger. I was taken to hospital and a splendid plaster was put round the hand and little finger. That was the end of my piano exam plans, but I've played the piano ever since, and my injured hand has a useful wider stretch. I gave up golf after leaving school when I realised how expensive it was, and I have been nowhere near any other sport either. Truly, sport and I are immiscible; we simply do not mix.

John Wilkin

SPORT

This subject has formed quite a large portion of my life by self-participation, watching family members playing or watching Newcastle United in good and bad times. I am struck by a number of coincidences or should that be family genes in play?

My father had been a good amateur soccer player for the "Norsemen" football club in London and an excellent wicket keeper/batsman for North Middlesex C.C.(known as North Mid).I myself played at St.James Park a good number of times as a youth in cup finals and for Northumberland County in national championships. I was lucky

enough to play for England Boys in 1946 in Northern Ireland, having to forfeit a seat at what would have been my first visit to see the cup final at Wembley plus missing my club's semi final in the county cup competition as they all coincided on the same day. Whilst in the forces I had played as an amateur for two professional clubs but when demobbed decided that was not where my future lay. As a result I played in the best amateur league in those times namely The Northern League for Heaton Stannington and later Willington, later to Whitley Bay and finally to a strictly amateur club namely "Bohemians" until I was 40.

My son had trials for Manchester United when he was a teenager but that life did not attract him. His main sport was cricket where he had great success as a junior as a wicket keeper/batsman mainly for South Northumberland where his two sons carry on the tradition. After being selected for trials he was picked to play 3x1day games for the newly reformed England Amateur Cricket team away in Scotland for two matches and then in Esher, Surrey against Pakistan.

The coincidences or genes from his paternal grandfather who died before he was born are;

- (a) Both excelled at athletics
- (b) Both played soccer to a high standard
- (c) Both played cricket as wicket keeper/batsmen
- (d) Both were educated at Woodard schools, grandfather at Bloxham, Banbury and grandson Kings, Tynemouth.
- (e) Both played for clubs known by compass points e.g North Mid and South North.

A granddaughter between 1996/1999 when she was 11/14 years old competed at home and abroad with England gymnastic teams. From 5 years old training was 6 days a week and in the national squad 7 days a week with weekends at Lilleshall Training Centre. She was weighed before and after each session and no allowances were made for Christmas and other holidays. Between 1999/2000 she changed direction becoming part of a trio competing in Acrobatic Championships representing Great Britain in Belgium, Ukraine, Poland, United States, Switzerland and Russia. In 2001 aged 16 she retired with an injury which took too long to heal for her to be able to continue. I will let you be the judge of whether this true story is a series of coincidences or a question of genes.

Alan Sidney-Wilmot.

My Sporting Life

Only one individual can run the fastest in the world, or jump the highest, or swim the quickest in a particular stroke, and we are offered celebrations of them in regular festivals. The Greeks did it, the Romans did it, and there's no indication that there will be any let up.

What doesn't seem celebrated with the same enthusiasm is the huge body — all the world minus one — who are needed to prop up the spectacular. A race is no race without other competitors than the winner. That is what my sporting life consists of, being an also-ran.

This is my excuse for having tried and enjoyed many games and sports and been outstanding at none. I once held the school record for the high jump, having something of a head start by being well over six foot even as a teenager, but since my jump was a good foot lower than the athletes at the olympics were producing, I wasn't going to be placed against them. On the other hand, my high jump was performed on a simple field with a bar held by two props. Having jumped the bar, one had to land without doing oneself an injury, with no huge inflated bag to fall into; just the same unfriendly turf that one took off from. And the rules of the high jump are obscure to me so that the very elegant backwards dive now performed since the Fosbury flop inaugurated the era of diving, doesn't fit my definition of a jump.

I was no better at team sports. Before contact lenses, the choice was between wearing glasses and not seeing the ball, neither of which choices made for much success. I once was reserve for a school football team, and it seemed as if I was about to take the field when only ten others turned up for the game. But my thoughts of glory were dashed by the late arrival of the chosen player, and I watched from the touch line. Luckily, the school didn't play rugby, where glasses aren't an advantage, so another opening was denied me. I might have been some use in the line-out. Or perhaps in a basketball team, if there had been any basketball courts in the county I grew up in. If there were, nobody ever told me.

I could swim, and indeed swam for the town on several occasions, but I can't say that there was any bunting put out on my return home. There always seemed somebody fitter, faster, and more suited to the event.

My memories of cricket are not of the heroic century or the star bowling performance, but of being so hot and sweaty on a summer day that my wild slog at the ball contrived only to have the bat slip from my grasp and fling towards the square leg umpire. I was a dab hand with the score book.

So I take credit merely for being one of the millions who like hitting balls, jumping things, or otherwise competing, but for whom the Olympic motto is some consolation, not the winning but the taking part.

Kelsey Thornton

My Sporting Life

It started badly.

Training hard with the junior school footy team, standing freezing on the touchline waiting for the call to perform and it never came. Not once. I gave up on football and have disliked everything to do with it ever since. Thanks Mr Mountain, school coach, I think you saved me from a life of footballing misery.

Things improved.

I joined North Shields Polytechnic running club (I still have the vest) with track and field during the summer and road running during the winter months. There were no 'joggers' then, we were the only runners to be seen and my fitness levels improved.

I grew in height and breadth during the summer holidays just before moving to senior school offering rugby, a sport new to me. I loved it, playing three games a week. Wednesday afternoon and Saturday morning matches for the school and Saturday afternoon club matches for Percy Park. Prop forward to start with and then hooker as my initial height advantage was overtaken by others. An abiding memory of Percy Park games as a fourteen year old was the never ending supply of shandy provided at the end of each match and drunk in the communal bath if I recall correctly. It wouldn't happen today.

I threw the hammer for the county and set a record for the eight eighty yards at the school sports day. Who needed football!

Things declined.

I continued to play during my university years until a badly broken arm resulted in my early retirement. I still miss playing the game and the great social life rugby provided.

I started work, married and had a family, none of which, at the time, left any opportunity for sport. I tried squash only to be thrashed by each and every opponent and so my 'lack of sporting life' continued.

I discovered badminton. Not really a team game, although we normally played doubles so I suppose that must count. Sadly brought to another abrupt end after a few years by a dislocated shoulder (actually sustained during a game believe it or not).

Things improve again.

What next? After a couple of healthy walks in the Cheviots and completing the Light Wake Walk twice I took up competitive hill walking taking in the Chevy Chase, Durham Dales and Allendale Challenge, all in excess of twenty miles over hard terrain. I once bumped into a fellow P and P member, Edward Watson, running hard in the opposite direction!

My hardest walk was the Cheviot 2000 organised by Northumbria Police undertaken only by armed forces, police and emergency services. I was an auxiliary coastguard so was allowed to bring a team. We parked the car near the start and introduced ourselves to the occupants of the vehicle next to us. We are the 16th Airborne they advised. Suitably impressed we whispered their identity to our neighbours in the vehicle to our side. Ah, we know them our new friends replied, we are the SAS. Two competitors were helicoptered straight to hospital during that one (heat exhaustion not battle wounds).

The future.

I have reduced the length of walks and am member of a walking club where a beer at the end is guaranteed and once a month we are treated to a Weatherspoon's curry.

I have relocated to the country for rest and relaxation with a mere one mile trip to the dust bins and seven acres of fields and stone walls to maintain. Not quite sport but at least I get some exercise.

Paul Hickey

The Sporting Life

The Dictionary defines sport as "amusement, diversion and fun" and a player as "fond of sportesp. Hunting"?

First introduction into organised "Sport" will be school Sports Day, loved, and loathed equally and competitive, with winners and losers. Not "amusement," "diversion", but "fun" when we've tried and won.

What ever it is, the British play it , watch it , and have exported it world wide, entered into it at the slightest opportunity and in the strangest places, for example the football game with the enemy on Christmas day 1914. Indeed I have a medal struck in 1917, won by my Grandfather that commemorated a football game played by wounded soldiers recovering in a hospital in France.

However the dictionary only once mentions the word games, yet that is what most people would recognise as sport today. Even war games on their Mobiles!

So I would claim not to have been a sportsman, but a player of games.

In games I had an advantage and a disadvantage concurrently. My parents had a medical certificate stating that following a serious operation at the age of four “I was on no account ever to take part in competitive sports of any kind”.

My family excelled in golf. And it seemed I was introduced at birth, (my teething ring still remains beneath the floor boards of the golf house), and at the age of six, armed with a cut down hickory shafted club, I accompanied family members around the course. Not that they had spotted a future “tiger wood” but in searching for one lost ball in the rough I invariably came out with two or more, an asset not to be sniffed” at in the dark days of the 1930s. However hard work brought successes at College and thereafter, and I have an athletics tie and the inevitable golfers bad back to prove it!

It seems to have been completely ignored by all and I was allowed to play what I liked. It was however a “get out of jail free” card, that is, I could take part in, games enthusiastically, but when I didn't excel I had an excuse. I rarely used it preferring to have a “go” at almost anything, some better than others. Riding, golfing, cycling, skiing, swimming, tennis, sailing all the usual team games, football, cricket,

So what remains for the older gamester when quick movement has gone. Buy a sports car.



A Low built fast job

Definition; “A low built fast type ”Well why not ? it is a form of a game;

So to prove it, co-driver/ wife and I, went on a rally to Monte Carlo, land of the Formula 1 and raced around the track, at midnight in full dinner jacket and tie, long dress and high heels. Now that is what I call a real game, a game with death, not to be repeated; but still better than, gazing at the cathode ray tube.

One buys a “fast type low built car” when you are old enough to afford it and give it up when you can’t get out of it. Leaving you with, a badge, and the inevitable bad back to prove it.

So what does one get out of all these activities, apart from a stiff back. You have to conclude that it is really what you put into it and simply how to mix with people and subconsciously play the game of life within the rules.

So put away that Tablet and Mobile and as Sir Henry Newbolt’s poem *Vita Lambada* tells you just....

“ play up, play up, and play the game” until the final light fades, and the great Architect of the Universe decides to “ up-stumps.”

Dennis Robson

Sport - My attempt at becoming a Man!

My father was the sports teacher at the local Grammar School. He was also the President of the English Schoolboys Rugby Team and took the team to France. So of course I played rugby. I was a scrum half. In those days- after a try had been scored - I was the one who had to lie down on the wet field and hold the ball steady for someone else to try to kick it over the bar.

I could run. In one afternoon I broke the school record for the 1/2 mile and won the mile. Now look at me. I can hardly walk to the bar! They tell you that sport is good for you- it will make a man of you. Really!

When I joined the army I was told that I was to be a gunner. Nobody told me that I would be expected to take part in sport. We all had to box. I fought two fights, won one, lost one, so felt I had done my duty. One day a sergeant came into the barrack room and announced that there was to be a Regimental boxing evening and he was looking for two volunteers. Our tallest man said he would have a go “Good” said the

sergeant, "That's a big one So now we need a small one". Everybody looked at me And that was how I found myself in the ring again. While waiting to fight, my opponent mentioned that he was an ABA (Amateur Boxing Association) champion. We had to fight three two minute rounds. For two rounds we stood in the centre of the ring and just belted each other. I was resting in my corner when the doctor entered the ring and stopped the fight. I had a burst blood vessel in my forehead. I have never boxed since.

I was trained to fire a field gun called a 25 pounder. Eventually I was commissioned and told to defend Wales. My regiment was an anti- aircraft Regiment. My colonel was as disappointed as me when I told him I knew nothing about anti aircraft guns. He decided that I better become the regiments admin officer, become responsible for paying the men and teaching the firing of the bren gun. "Oh, and you might as well be the sports officer, he smiled. (I wondered what all the other officers did all day.

The regiment was divided into three batteries. I raised a football team from each and entered them in the local league, the Dyceni Valley Cup. As manager I attended a meeting in Barmouth. The chairman announced that because there was an English officer in the room could we please speak in English. Of course, they ignored him. I was determined for revenge and one of my batteries won the cup

I took a rugby team to Harlick. I played scrum half, scored twice and we won the game. In the return match they murdered us. I took a boxing team to Warrington. No, I was not fighting. My job was to sit at the ring side and congratulate or commiserate with each of my team as they left the ring. I took a cross country team to Filey to run in a Divisional seven mile race. We came second.

I left the Army. I have up sport. Now I watch Rugby on the Telly. It can be exhausting!

Charlie Wesencraft

My Sporting Life

I cannot remember a time when I did not enjoy being out in the open air regardless of the weather

Living in a tight secure village I had the freedom to roam the area. A newcomer to the village told my mother that she had noticed me as I was always running, jumping and skipping but never walking.

At the age of six I attended West Jesmond Infants School which entailed a twice daily walk across Newcastle's Town Moor in all weathers. The path was light grey and smooth and seemed never ending with lamp posts stationed along its length.

It was a great joy to run to the first lamp post then walk the next and so forth . I can remember my feet skimming across the surface - it was so exhilarating.

As the school we had no playing field we held our games lessons on a field situated at the end of Forsythe road and next to the Great North Road.

All the gear, skipping ropes, bean bags, balls, rounder bats and coloured team bands (some of the bean bags were used as bays for the rounders games) was packed in a wicker basket with tow handles at either end.

I always volunteered to carry the basket and was so disappointed when not chosen.

My enthusiasm for games continued into my Grammar School Life.

When introduced to netball I became very competitive and was chosen to be on the house team.

Netball continued throughout the year but in the Summer rounders became my favourite game - whacking the ball and speeding round the boys and scoring a point was a high light in my day. I could never fathom the girls who could not understand the strategy of the game and detested sports day.

In winter hockey was played on the unsown field with no special hockey shoes due to the shortage of everything after the early days just after the war.

There was a lot of mud about and it was not my favourite sport but I was still competitive especially when playing against the three school houses .

It was one of those games when the score was 0 - 0 and with two minutes to go when the ball came my way. I did not see it coming but by good luck it hit my stick and it ricocheted into the net to win the final match. It was a complete fluke but I kept it secret until now. But I was claimed heroine for the day!

With my school days completed I did not play any games as there were no sport facilities nearby.

Then Married life took over and all our energies went into supporting the children Paul, and Janet, with their sporting activities.

When that phase of 'taxi-runs' had ended I heard that golf lessons were available in the local school hall with tuition by the Tynemouth Golf Club pro', a scotsman called Bill so I joined his class.

We used lightweight indoor flight balls and I realised if I flicked my wrists just at the end of my swing I could make the ball rise and drop into the netball ring at the end of the big hall.

We praised putting and on the final day of the course we had a competition and I won the final putt. I was awarded a prize - it was a golf ball!

Proudly I took it home to show off and then noticed stamped on the ball those never forgotten words "SUB STANDARD " 'Hows That"1

Norma Hickey

My Sporting Life Rowing and Running!

At school we had to take part in sport every day after lunch. My one big sporting regret was that I never scored a try in all my years at school. In my last rugby game I was within a yard of scoring but was held and carried was, however, captain of house and I running after also have a when I flirted rowing.



up, literally, backwards. I appointed athletics for my kept on school. I did brief spell seriously with

"Fours Head of the River - 1987"

Running was something I could easily pursue in my peripatetic career. In Holland, I raced all over the country as the only foreigner in my club. Years later, approaching the summit of Mt Kilimanjaro, I was to meet two ladies from the very same club. In Bahrain I joined the Hash House Harriers which had begun in pre WW2 Malaya but with origins in the old Hare and Hounds tradition. Now a global movement, sometimes referred to as "runners with a drinking problem or drinkers with a running problem", the Hash would meet once a week after work. The pack would chase about following a paper trail set by hares and would then drink beer on into the night in the desert. But the Hash also had a serious running group and it was in the sweltering heat and humidity of Bahrain that I ran my best marathon with a time of 2 hours, 53 minutes and 1 second. A day on which the great Ron Hill, then aged 46 and who I had invited to participate, won in a time of 2 hours and 25 minutes. We still keep in touch.

One race in Japan went up hill for 30 kms! In Vietnam I organised a race around a lake on the outskirts of Hanoi in 1984, to which I had invited every diplomatic mission. Some 100 diplomats turned up for the race, only to be stopped from running by Vietnamese soldiers armed with AK47s. However, the authorities did grant me permission to train in the Hanoi stadium built in French colonial times. One day I set what I believed to be the Vietnamese national 5,000 metres track record, only to discover that the track was a mere 360 metres round, having been limited by historic buildings surrounding it! In Kenya I took part in an overnight charity run of 122 miles for the victims of the Nairobi 1998 bombing of the US Embassy. I ran some 50 miles, through the night, hopping into and out of a Landrover with two other runners, supporting a pair of ultra distance runners who ran the full distance. In Kenya I was also to meet the great Kip Keino several times. In Japan, Setsuko and I were attached to the British team at the 1991 world athletics championships. Setsuko acted as interpreter for The GB team manager, Frank Dick, who had been a master at my old school, 20 years earlier. I was also to bump into Toshihiko Seko, who won the 1986 London marathon, in which I ran as a Blackheath Harrier. Occasionally finding myself in the UK I would enter other races, including the first Great North Run in 1981 (discovering only recently that John Havis also took part) and in one of the last Morpeth to Newcastle New Year's Day races, running for Gateshead Harriers. After some 20,000 miles of running, one foot gave up the ghost and I am not sure I will ever run again. Regrets? None. Maybe I will now take up road cycling?

Jeremy Bell

My Sporting Life

Playing career.

My primary schooling in Chester-le-Street had taken place almost entirely during the war years when there was no organised sport at all. On starting grammar school in 1947, in a form of 30 boys I found that I was unable to obtain a place in the football team. My father had been a professional footballer with Sunderland and Burnley but had died when I was very young. This failure on my part occasioned mild surprise but no great regret as I was well aware that I had no aptitude for the game. As for



cricket I thought it much too difficult to master its various skills as well as being dangerous to life and limb. At university I finally found a sport I could enjoy as my height qualified me for a place in the second row of the scrum and I enjoyed three years of fairly coarse rugby. After graduation I took a job in Kent and enjoyed two seasons of rugby with the Sidcup club in the “extra B’s”. On moving to Billingham I played for two more seasons with Sunderland RFC, once rising to the heights of the second team, before a pulled hamstring helped me to decide on a fairly honourable retirement from competitive sport.

A supporter’s career.

My father having played for them I have always had a soft spot for Burnley and my first great disappointment as a supporter was the defeat of Burnley by Charlton Athletic in the FA cup final in May 1947. That was a much more important event to me as a 10 year old than the fact that Burnley were promoted to the First division in that same season; the FA Cup no longer has such importance as once it had.

In March 1947 I was taken by my step-father to my first professional match at St. James’ Park when Manchester City beat Newcastle United 3-2. It was an enormous crowd and I found myself being passed over the heads of the crowd to the touchline.

Later that year we moved to Sunderland when my love affair began with Sunderland AFC. I followed them through all the “Bank of England” years, a rain sodden cup semi-final at Villa Park versus Manchester City in 1955 was a low point, beaten 1-0, but we enjoyed the whole 10 year career of the wonderful Len Shackleton in

Sunderland colours, until the train hit the buffers with the punishment meted out to the club by the FA in 1958 for under the counter payments. Resignation to the second division soon followed, for the first time in our history, and things have been a struggle ever since, notwithstanding the FA cup win in 1973. Now look where we are!

Indoor sport.

The only one worth a mention is the wonderful game of Bridge which I took up in my teenage years with three friends. I have since played the game in every sort of situation, in lunch time at work, in working mens clubs, bridge clubs, golf clubs and cruise ships. It is the recreation of choice in my old age which I intend to pursue until I am called to the great club room in the sky.

Peter Wallace

My Sporting Life

My sporting life started when I was 6 years old and was taken to St James Park to see Newcastle United Reserves play Chesterfield Reserves. I was at the very front of the Leazes end and don't remember much about the match apart from the fact that we won, and the goalkeeper wore a cap!

After that experience, football became my main sporting interest and I have followed the Magpies ever since. My father was a season ticket holder and used to regale me with the excitement of the exploits of the first team. Being small and not of a sturdy frame, actually playing the game was not one of my strengths although I made up for this in my enthusiasm. I remember on one occasion after playing for our youth club team, I scored two goals. This magnificent feat was somewhat diminished when my friend's mother, when asked by her son who it was had scored two goals, went through the entire team (apart from the goalkeeper) before naming me!

At school I never took to rugby and was usually chosen to play in game 3 amongst the non-hoppers. We had a pact that it was forbidden to handle the ball and played

soccer with the oval ball. I have since contented myself with attending St James Park and offering my advice from the terraces, mostly to no avail.

Other sports were tried in my youth. Although my brother had school colours for rugby, swimming, diving and gymnastics, these talents were not passed to me. In fact, the swimming teacher wondered, as my feet remained firmly on the bottom of the baths, whether we had the same mother! I had a go at snooker, where I hit the ball as hard as I could, and after rebounding off the cushions, eventually, through sheer exhaustion, it dropped into a pocket.

However, in my youth club days, I was introduced to table tennis, and this was a sport that I took to and still enjoy even now, being a member of a local club and playing weekly.

David Kilner

