

*In fond memory and a sincere tribute to Roy Fowler who passed away on June 27, 2009
From an article by Cliff Franks*

Roy Fowler

Picture yet another dingy, dark, drab dressing room, packed to the gunnels with competitors for another League race. (Does the Guinness book of records, have a record, for how many athletes can be squeezed into the smallest of changing areas?) In walks a small diminutive man, 5'5" in stocking feet, grin upon his face and surrounded by his teammates, he starts a banter with a rival from another Club. Soon the crowded room is awash with friendly insults and laughter. More to the point, somehow and with determination has found a bench for himself and his teammates to place their kit on.

Changed into vest and shorts, he rests a while and then takes out his false teeth and wraps them in a handkerchief which is placed carefully in a pocket of his trousers, which are hung on one of the few hooks within the changing room. Then as if from nowhere a large bottle of liniment is produced, this is liberally rubbed into the legs and passed on to teammates to do likewise. The pungent smell of the liniment eclipsing the smell of the nearby loos. Roy Fowler of North Staffs and Stone has arrived and is ready to run.

Roy Fowler was one of the great characters of cross country running, certainly nobody could have been a more tenacious and fierce competitor. He was in essence 'the runners runner' looked on by his peers with admiration and respect". If you were ever good enough to come in ahead of Roy, then you had indeed earned your placing, for no race was easily won if the Staffordshire man was in the line up. His record in the sport speaks for itself as can be seen below.

On the track Roy Fowler was twice Midland 3 mile Champion in 1960 and 1963, he also won the Regional title over 6 miles in 1968. But it was in 1962 that Roy really hit the headlines by winning the AAA Championship over 6 miles in a time of 27m.49.8s, a new Commonwealth and UK record, the race was hard won in an exciting finish with Mike Bullivant, who ran the same time. This performance gained Roy selection. for the European Championships in Belgrade and for the Commonwealth and Empire Games held in Perth, Australia.

The height of Roy's track career came in the European Championships a few weeks later when he outsprinted Martin Hyman for the bronze medal in the 10,000 metres. Unfortunately, he finished outside the medals. after a long, long season when he went to Perth for the Commonwealth Games. However, he sprung back in 1966 when he recorded 27m.24.8s for the 6 miles.

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On the road, Roy was a member, on more than one occasion, of the successful City of Stoke team that won the AAA 6 stage road relay Championship on several occasions in the late sixties, early seventies.

However it is cross-country running where Roy Fowler will be best remembered. Roy first featured at National level when North Staffs & Stone finished 10th team in the National of 1959. Roy led his team home in 33rd. position. Two years later he was to take the first of his two Midland titles; his second win was in 1969. But for the likes of Basil Heatley, Eddie Strong, Mike Bullivant and Dick Taylor. it is very possible that Roy would have taken even more Midland titles.

1961 was the first time that Roy was selected for England for the International when he finished in a fine fourth place in the National. He was to go on to run for England in the International on five separate occasions. His best National performance was second to Basil Heatley in 1963 on the course at Cambridge, where infamously the course has a stretch of concrete that athletes could choose or not choose to run on. Unfortunately it was quicker to run on the concrete and as a result Roy was to get hairline fractures to both legs.

Despite this handicap Roy was to run in the International at San Sebastian, Spain; where he was to produce perhaps his best performance in winning the event, beating the great Gaston Roelants into second place. In the 1966 International at Rabat, Morocco, Roy Fowler was to lead England to a fine team win, finishing in a fine 4th place himself.

Although never to win the Individual title at the National he did lead North Staffs and Stone to the team title at Sheffield in 1966, Roy finishing in eighth place. Although never winning the National title, Roy was to win the CAU title in 1966 at the Blackpool showground beating Ron Hill.

His Birmingham League exploits are unbelievable, between 1967 and 1969 he won eleven consecutive first division races, completing almost three years of being unbeaten in the League. The total number of victories that Roy chalked up in the first Division was 23, this over a period spanning from November 1960 until November 1972. In fact Roy was still running well in League races in 1984.

Towards the twilight of his career, Roy was a founder member Staffordshire Moorlands and was part of their team throughout the divisions and in fact went on to finish third team in the National of 1983 although Roy was not part of this team

The ultimate in competitors, he will be fondly remembered by all who knew him...

In memory from The Birmingham & District Cross Country Invitation League