

Chapter 5

Running the Joggers

“You’d have to die to get out of this job!”
-- Reg Conway, 2001

The Committee

The first “Executive Committee” was formed on 19 August 1967. It comprised the President, Arch Punch; Secretary, Ted Stebbing; Treasurer, Jim Stebbing; and Captain, Bill Kerr.

In May 1971, after four years of “unofficial” existence, the Joggers were officially accepted as an internal (or “inter”) club of the Norths Sydney Leagues Club, with the aim “to promote and popularise jogging as a recreational activity”. It held its first General Meeting, and elected as President Doug Ford, Secretary Reg Conway and Treasurer John Anderson.

In 1973, Doug’s work commitments took him interstate, and Reg took over as President, with Gus Risman becoming secretary. Reg was the official spokesman, and maintained the Mileage Book. Gus played a major hand in arranging most of the functions such as runs, barbecues and social events, and John played a behind the scenes role in keeping the accounts in meticulous order.

Alan Power took over as secretary when Gus moved interstate in 1983. A popular and energetic man, he would only serve one year, resigning to run a new business he had started. Rob Nolan, who had joined in 1976, was elected in his place. Rob recalls that he was initially a bit nervous, as he had no experience in organisational roles. “I thought I’d do the job for a year or two, then hand over to someone else”, he says. As anyone who has served on a committee knows, these are Famous Last Words.

Reg, Rob and John would go on to serve for another 17 years, continuing a harmonious, effective and efficient partnership that would be the envy of any voluntary organisation. One of their hallmarks was the importance of maintaining the atmosphere of the Joggers as a friendly and harmonious group, where competition had its place but was not the dominant force (except on race days!). However, all good things must come to an end. In 2001, after the trio had yet again been unanimously re-elected, Reg looked back on his 29 years as President and mused that “you’d have to die to get out of this job!” At the Presentation Dinner later that year, Rob announced on behalf of the committee that they would all be retiring. What’s more, they really meant it this time! Although it took a little while for this thunderbolt to sink in, a brand new committee was elected at the 2002 Annual General Meeting. Richard Butler took over as President, Rob Jones as Secretary and Laurie Coleman as

Treasurer. In the great Joggers tradition, they have continued to be re-elected unopposed ever since.

Life members

Life membership of the Club is the most prestigious of all our Awards. It is conferred only in very limited circumstances, to persons who have rendered truly exceptional service over an extended period of time. Our life members are:

Jim Bell (1979)
Lal Lawson (1990)
Reg Conway (2007)
John Anderson (2007)
Doug Ford (2007)

Club captains

The role of Club Captain does not have a precise job description but, if it did, it would include words like “popular”, “responsible” and “having the best interests of the Club at heart”. Dave Eaton, who has been our Captain for many years, has had all these qualities, with the added benefits of being a natural morale booster and entertainer. There is no doubt that all these qualities played a big role in Dave becoming the club’s most recent Presidents Shield Award winner.

Club Patrons

Our Patrons represent the close link between the Joggers and the Leagues Club. Over the years, the following Club Directors have agreed to act in this important role and have given us great and much-appreciated support.

Jack O’Reilly
Wally Hamill
Warren Morris (1986 to date)

Finances

For some years the club has received an annual grant from the Leagues Club, which may be supplemented for special projects such as the issue of new uniforms in 2006. Its other main sources of income include membership fees, barbeque money and raffles. The introduction of a Trivia Night in 2006, organised, devised and hosted by our genial Quizmaster Richard Butler, has provided a welcome substantial addition to the coffers, as well as being a great night out.

To help pay for post-run fruit juice and biscuits, members are encouraged to “feed the pig” each week, by putting a coin in our tasteful pink plastic piggy bank. The club also benefits financially by providing volunteers each year to help run a children’s fun run.

Catering and BBQs

Post-run fluid and food replenishment has always been a high priority with the Joggers. Originally, in keeping with the social mores of the time, the task of catering for this fell largely to wives and girlfriends of the blokes. Prominent among these were Betty Ford, Marj Kiely, Merle Curtis, Carole Farrell, *[others???*]

In the mid 1980s, however, it was suggested that it would be fairer if individuals volunteered to cater for particular races, and this system has worked well ever since. However, for as long as people can remember, Doug Ford and Reg Conway have reigned as the undisputed BBQ Sausage Kings.

Birthdays

For runners, birthdays can have special significance, as they often result in the runner qualifying for an older age category in fun-runs. Indeed, it seems that at one stage, a special award was made for the over 60s in our club races. A tradition also built up about having morning teas and a cake to celebrate birthdays. With a membership of 50–60, it soon became clear that the inexorable laws of statistical probability meant that this involved a cake every week. To help stave off a mass outbreak of diabetes, Betty Ford eventually limited the celebrations to “major” birthdays -- those ending with a zero.

Jimmy Bell, who was in his 90s at the time, argued that he should be entitled to two cakes, as his next major birthday would end in two zeros.

Uniforms

Official Club uniforms made their first appearance in 1971, in the lead-up to the first City Surf Fun Run. The designer of the motif was Trevor “Picasso” Nixon, who was no slouch when it came to putting brush to canvas. At the time, Running Bear reported that Joggers looked “resplendent” in their new red singlets, with a Big Black Bear emblem on the front and “NSL Joggers” printed in big letters on the back. The idea for the red and black colours and the Bears logo were of course adopted from the North Sydney Football Club.

It seems, however, that some members took a while to get used to the new look. Here is Jogger Jargon’s report of one incident:

Trevor Nixon was endeavouring to catch up to the leaders who had somehow opened up a large gap. He turned a corner to see a tell-tale patch of red in the distance. Head down, and another part of his anatomy up, he headed straight for this red patch, only to find on reaching it – many minutes later – that it was a bright red post box, miles off the run route.

After a number of variations over the years, a completely new set of uniforms were unveiled in 2006. They featured the latest high-tech breathable materials and the new-look Bears logo that had been adopted by the Leagues Club. As Running Bear reported, the new designs met with general approval after being modelled by catwalk sensation Merran Butler. Members currently receive them at a generous discount, made possible by a subsidy from the Leagues Club.

Another area in which there has been substantial change is in the quality of running shoes. Back in 1967, the only “running” shoes were the running spikes that athletes wore on the track. The Joggers made do with a motley collection, with most favouring sandshoes such as Dunlop Volleys. Even the experts were not too specific in those days. Running guru Arthur Lydiard’s suggestion was simply “shoes with sponge rubber insoles”, while Percy Cerutti felt that “an old pair of shorts, tennis shoes and socks are all that is required”.

Alan Farrell was a true trendsetter in this regard. Alan was in the Army – in fact he was a Commando – and he managed to surprise everyone by regularly jogging in his Army boots. In August 1971, Running Bear asked incredulously “Has anyone seen Alan Farrell? Someone suggested that Mosman Council has refused to let him run at Balmoral because his Army boots were breaking up the promenade!” Alan recalls that he ran his first City to Surf in sandshoes and his second in Hush Puppies. Even these were a big step up from the bare feet that he started running in.

Sometimes Joggers were a little reluctant to replace their old trusty running shoes. Rob Nolan recalls how Denis Garland liked to get full value out of his. After a run one Sunday, he complained that his feet felt hot and abraded. He took off his shoes and discovered that he could see right through them – the soles of his feet had actually been hitting the pavement. He commented ruefully: “I suppose this means I might have to get a new pair soon”. On a similar theme, Jogger Jargon reported in 1988:

***For sale:** one pair of KT 26 running shoes, slightly used, only six years old, best offer accepted. Contact Jim Bell, also slightly used, only 86 years old!*

Jim Beal also attracted attention by turning up wearing a heavy air of black leather dress shoes. At first no one said anything – he was just a new member – but eventually someone gently suggested that running shoes might make jogging easier.

“I know what I’m doing”, retorted Jim. It turned out that Jim was a champion middleweight boxer, having won a silver medal representing New Zealand in the 1950 Commonwealth Games (then called the British Empire Games) and later having a short but successful professional career. According to Jim – often referred to as Rocky -- training in heavy shoes strengthened the legs and made you light on your feet. Strangely enough, no one argued the point with him! Jim incidentally was a talented sign writer who had done restorative work at Luna Park, and he hand painted our original race number patches, including one for “de Judge”.

And who could forget the way that Lal Lawson championed his new Dunlop KT 26s? “Like running on two cream sponges” he remarked blissfully.

The Book of Miles

The Mileage Book was originally kept by Doug Ford but was later taken over and maintained for many years by Reg Conway. For each year, it lists all our members, and their self-reported distances run each week, with running totals kept each month and at the end of the year. For many joggers, it provides a powerful incentive to run regularly. Each year, prizes or certificates are presented at our Presentation Night to those who have achieved our standard targets – 1,000 km, 2,000 km and so on.

In the early days, the Mileage Book would have played a significant role in charting how close people were getting to the magic 1,000 mile mark. It has continued to play a vital role as an incentive, and as an invaluable record of joggers’ achievements over the years.

In the 1980s, the Book rather belatedly changed over to metric distances. Running Bear explained that “We are a bit slow in changing over to metric distances. I’m afraid old habits die hard.” Despite the change, the title has tended to stay the same – “Kilometreage Book” or “Distance Book” does not have quite the same ring.

Reg eventually passed on the Mileage Book duties to Phil McCouat, who in turn passed it to Laurie Coleman after a few years. You can easily see the change – Laurie is much neater!

Once when Hanna Paxton’s husband John was away on one of his field trips, Reg cheekily said to her: “How about I come round one night during the week and record your mileage”. “Oh, there’s no need to hurry, Reg”, was the demurely innocent reply, “He’s away for weeks yet!”

Club Scribes

Ever since the Joggers started, a news feature on the activities of the club has appeared in the periodical journal of the Leagues Club. The information in these articles – variously referred to as Joggers News or more commonly Jogger Jargon -- has been an invaluable resource (and source of amusement!) in the preparation of this history. The authors of these articles, with approximate dates, are:

Bill Kerr (1967 –1971)
Reg Conway (1971 – 1984)
Rob Nolan (1984 – 2001)
Phil McCouat (2001 to date)

Bill wrote under the name “Zatopek”, after the legendary Czech long distance runner who set 18 world records and won four Olympic gold medals. Reg, Rob and Phil have all written under the name “Running Bear”, inspired by Johnny Preston’s 1959 hit song of the same name that also became the unofficial theme song of the North Sydney Football Club.

Club Website

The Club website – currently accessed at www.runnorthsydney.com -- started off as an experiment by Richard Butler in 1998. It immediately attracted great interest, both from regular members looking for results and from prospective members looking for running clubs in the area. Richard has upgraded it extensively since then, and it now features the race calendar, results, race routes, maps, registration details, some historic photographs, published articles on running by members, and links to related running sites.