

# Striders of Croydon

DECEMBER 2019 MAGAZINE



Two of our youngest runners, Christopher and Lucy Finch, with their trophies at our AGM

(photo by Ally Whitlock)

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## **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

Sat 21 Dec – South of the Thames Cross-Country Championship – Lloyd Park

### **2020**

Sun 5 Jan – Surrey Cross-Country Championships – Dorking  
Sat 11 Jan – Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two – Chobham  
Sat 11 Jan – Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two – Wimbledon  
Sat 8 Feb – Surrey Cross-Country League Division Two – Lloyd Park  
Sat 8 Feb – Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two – Richmond Park  
Sun 15 March – Croydon Half-Marathon – Sandilands (Striders marshalling)  
Sun 26 April – London Marathon (Striders marshalling)



**Our women's cross-country team after their Surrey League match at Mitcham**

## CHAIRMAN'S CORNER DECEMBER 2019

Well, what an honour it was to warmly welcome an elite pro to run with us recently, Ben Rotich! I'm sure everyone there will fondly remember our Kenyan style warm-up, mile time trial and Q&A session afterwards with Ben.

As usual this edition of our magazine features diverse stories of running across the globe in varied climates and conditions and type of event.

Sophia Sachedina takes in the special atmosphere of the Great Ethiopian Run along with 45,000 other runners but with no chip timing or race numbers and a somewhat unusual finish.

Sarah Allport braves colder climes as a parkrun tourist in more northerly Britain and Dublin and encounters a cow marshal along the way.

Alan Dolton takes in the scenery but also the heat and a congested start in the European Masters Championships 10k on the Italian coast.

Nikki Javan, Jane Hughes and Laura Fell review Game Changers, a recent Netflix documentary advocating plant-based dieting for athletes and they also share their wider views on this topic of increasing interest recently.

A festive double treat this month from Reader's Recipes; Vegan Chocolate Orange Cake from Nikki Javan and Vegan Fruity Cinnamon Flapjacks from Debra Bourne.

Having had a few injuries over time, I read Alan's book review this month 'Strength and Conditioning for Endurance Running' with particular interest.

My own running has happily remained injury free for over a year now and I will have been spotted clinging to the back of group three recently. Being at the back of a group rather than the front has really reminded me just how fantastic our club members are at giving out encouragement to keep going. I always try and say thank you for each bit of encouragement but if I didn't manage it rest assured I did so on the inside! 😊

Tony





## THE GREAT ETHIOPIAN RUN (by Sophia Sachedina)

If you want to get a better sense of the atmosphere at the Great Ethiopian Run, head to YouTube, type in 'Teddy Afro Ethiopia', hit play, and then read this article whilst listening (and dancing too, if you feel like it!).

Let's get one thing straight from the start, the Great Ethiopian Run (GER – I don't know if that's the official acronym, but we're going with it) is not about running. It is about so much more than running. How do you describe one of the most mesmerising and special occasions, and confine it onto the words of a page? I worry that this article won't do the GER justice, and unfortunately, you can't post videos in a word document, so I'll just have to give my pen the chance and hope that the joy of the event shines beyond the words.

### Pre-race

You have to sign up for the race early as, although they keep upping the places by roughly 5k a year, it still sells like hotcakes (or should that be hot injera! Oh dear.). There are no race day collection points, you go and pick up your bag with the t-shirt in advance, and you don't have to worry about race numbers – there aren't any! And – I know this will turn some people off straight away – NO CHIP TIMING! Unheard of in UK races now, where you can even track your friends on apps! Not here in Ethiopia, it's a good old-fashioned start and finish, with one clock at the end to give you a notion of your time. As you can probably guess, most Ethiopians do not own fancy GPS watches and, although I wear mine on every run (otherwise there's no Strava, and what's the point in that!?), I'm now fully content to hit 'start' and 'stop', and never look at it in between.



Walking to the start line was a luxury! I love local races: no travelling, no worrying about getting stuck in traffic. The only other race I've done here was the Wenchi Crater Lake half-marathon in October. The three-hour drive to the hotel, then a further one-hour bumpy ride up to the crater was long, but the views were stunning and so worth it! The run, however, was a different kind of challenge – after taking nearly an hour to scramble to 7km, I was ready to pack it in, but I muddled through eventually. Yet I think the memory haunted me slightly because, as I was walking to the GER, I admit I was feeling nervous. I didn't know what to expect, large crowds give me anxiety, and even though I was not planning on 'racing' it, I did want to break the one hour mark – just to prove to myself I hadn't completely lost my running feet! Spoiler: I did it in roughly 56 minutes. Nothing to write home about, but the race itself definitely is!

About 1km out from Meskel Square (where the race starts), the road started filling out with more and more people joining. All the roads in the area were closed, meaning everyone had to walk there, which just started building the atmosphere early on! People were getting their faces painted, playing music on their phones, and there was a real buzz. A feeling that you were about to be part of something.



On a practical note, there are a few checkpoints before you can get to the start area and, although well organised, the police were quite strict on what you could bring through. We couldn't even bring our water bottles and, as there's no bag drop, you should carry everything you need on your body. You could spot the ferenj (local word for foreigners) tourists, with their big non-running rucksacks, who had to lug them all the way around the 10k course – they clearly hadn't got the memo!

When you arrive, it's pretty simple, as there's no race number or chip to pick up, no bags to drop off, and your t-shirt is your ticket in. You just rock up and you're ready! I've heard there's a little black market for selling on spare t-shirts, in case you don't sign up in time.

## Start line

The start line was AMAZING! This year there were two groups (depending on whether you had a green or red line on your t-shirt). Those who ran last year said it really helped ease congestion this time round.





I was in the first group but opted to start at the back of that cluster, anxious about getting squished in a stampede. The music was blaring and I was happy as I recognised the songs and could hum along. As the start time ticked closer, there was no need to do a proper warm-up, people were just dancing instead. Turns out, it's a much happier way to start a race! With music, dancing, face painting, and stilt walkers, you could easily mistake the event for a carnival rather than the start of a 10k running event.



Five minutes before the start, and the music stopped suddenly. I wondered if they were going to do a countdown or some sort of speech. Instead, the Ethiopian National Anthem started. I realised that I had never actually heard it at all, but the people all around joined in, and the moment was so powerful. I don't know how many people outside of Ethiopia follow the country's politics, but it's going through an important transition that is bringing opportunities but also needs to resolve a lot of ethnic tensions that are coming to the surface

and causing violence and suffering for the people. With this in my mind, I was so touched by the unity of that moment. Masses of people around me, all standing together, raising their arms to the sky. It brought a tear to my eye and made me appreciate once more the power of running to bring people together.

Another special memory at the start line was the presence of Haile Gebreselassie!! Oh yes! He founded the GER and is still very much an important part of Ethiopian life and culture. He was standing on the stage and, as the race got underway, everyone ran past him saluting, cheering, and waving. If you remember when Prince William and Kate Middleton started the 2017 London Marathon, it was like that except, dare I say it, even more profound. You could feel the respect, appreciation and pure pride flowing out of people.

### **Chanting, chatting, singing, dancing**

As soon as we started running and the heat of the sun struck me. I realised that I had never run this late in the day here. I normally run around 6.30/7 am and nearly always finish by 8 am. Partly because I can't run after work as it's dark by 6.30 pm, partly because it's less busy in the morning, but mainly because it's much cooler. However, I didn't dwell on this for long as the atmosphere quickly infected me with so much liveliness, I don't think I even noticed I was running for the whole way round!

Although I'd gone to the event with friends, I ran by myself and it was perfect! I don't think I've ever spoken to so many people in a race! Everyone was chatting away to each other, complete strangers. No headphones in, no eyes to the ground (or to the watch). I was taking it slow and constantly looking around, trying to take in all the sounds, colours, and emotions around me. There weren't that many ferenj running, so it was a great opportunity for me to practice my Amharic, and I even learnt a new word! 'Suse'. I asked someone why everyone was shouting it, and it turns out it means someone who drinks a lot, smokes a lot or chews a lot of chat. They were teasing all the people who were sat on the side of the streets (in the GER t-shirts) drinking coffee and beer – they clearly weren't chasing a PB.

Along the route, there are a few underpasses you go through and although some of my friends later said that they didn't like those bits because it can get quite crowded as the road narrows, those were some of my favourite times! The acoustics underneath were amazing and everyone was chanting 'Run da run! Run da run!', with others making the impressive African style ululations. With the sound echoing so impressively around you, you couldn't help but get swept up.

For those who need music when they run, then this is a good race for you. There is music non-stop, which is common in Ethiopia even when you're just walking down the street on a normal day. And Ethiopian music is so distinct, very catchy and has a lot of rhythm. At the main music stations along the route, there were dancers on the stage, and so many people were literally just stopping running and decided to dance along for a few minutes, often with complete strangers, before carrying on.

Although it took me nearly an hour to get round, the time went so fast and I was having so much fun that I was almost sad when we rounded the corner back to Meskel Square (I needn't have been worried, the party and atmosphere continued on the streets for the next few hours!). One thing that confused me when I arrived at the finish, was that you didn't go under the finish line. There was a banner set up, but apparently only the elites and the speedy amateurs went under it. For everyone else, you just kind of arrived in the open square and jogged to a stop, which was a little underwhelming. But then a lack of a finish line didn't really matter – it's not what the event is about.





However, I will note a couple of things for those interested in joining next year (and I highly recommend it!!). Do not come and do this race for time. Partly because that's not what it's about, and you wouldn't be able to enjoy the atmosphere and take everything in if you're focussed on hitting a goal. But also, if you're coming straight from the UK where the highest peak in Croydon (or so Google tells me) is 175m at Sanderstead Plantation, then coming to a city which ranges from 2,300m to 3,000m+ is going to take some acclimatisation, to say the least. The 10km route also contains a couple of hills and a total of 137m of elevation gain (thank you Strava). These may just seem like numbers, but as someone who's been living and running at altitude for the last few months, I can tell you honestly that even running the flats here at a leisurely pace has me huffing! So by all means come and experience this great event and, if you come aiming for fun rather than a PB, then I can guarantee you won't be disappointed!

## Female representation





The GER is sponsored by PLAN International with the slogan 'Girls deserve to be equally seen heard and valued' plastered on the back of every t-shirt, and ginormous printed signs along the course. Working in the development sector myself, and for an organisation that gives women choice, I fully support PLAN's message and the ethos behind this year's theme. However, you can't help but notice the lack of habesha women running. I run with a group on Wednesday mornings and there is a strong Ethiopian, male contingent, and lots of ferenj women, but we have never had an Ethiopian woman join us. I've also never seen an Ethiopian woman running, other than on the trails in the hills around Addis, and that's only because the professionals train there so the women I see are all elites or semi-elites. Locals often stare when I run around my neighbourhood because, not only is it uncommon to see a ferenj running, but a ferenj AND a female is a pretty rare sight. Although, happily, I have lots of female running friends here.



During the GER, I did not see a single habesha women past 4km (there were probably some speedy or semi-professional ones ahead), but in a crowd of 45,000 people there should have been at least some women running around my pace. Nada. Zero.

I'm sure most women in the UK, and many of my Striders friends, can recall a time they've felt uncomfortable running, either because they were alone or getting unwanted male attention. But I would really love it if, as an international body of women, women all over the world had the opportunities, protection, and confidence to lace up and get outside! Don't get me wrong, there were a lot of women in the GER, but they were all mainly walking – many not even wearing trainers. There is nothing wrong with walking, but I would love to see more women mixed in with the male runners at all levels and speeds.

## Finishing token

Now let's get onto the medals because oh yes, although there's no chip timing, there are still medals! I've only ever done two races where there weren't medals and I can't even remember the names of them! Clearly backs up my point that what is a race without a medal? Although some people said the medal wasn't as good as in previous years, I wasn't there so can't compare, and to be honest if they are increasing entrants by 5000 a year, that's a lot of medals to produce! The medal was two-sided, one for 2012, and the other for

2019. If you don't know about the Ethiopian calendar, we just reigned in the New Year in September for 2012!



A fun fact about the GER medals: there are three ribbon colours. Green, Yellow, and Red. Runners, Joggers, Walkers. The green ones are given to roughly the first 10,000, then the yellows up until around 30,000, and finally the reds. Although people really didn't care about time, there did feel like a little bit of competition, as the second thing my colleagues asked on Monday morning (the first question being: How did you enjoy our race?), was 'Which colour medal did you get?'. At first I had thought that maybe they were using a traffic light system on the medal colouring, but then it dawned on me that it's the three colours of the Ethiopian flag, which was another nice little touch.





## Organisation

For an event with over 45,000 participants, and living in a country where not everything runs smoothly all the time, I have to say I was impressed with the organisation of the day. The organisers had done a good job of simplifying things and stripping out all the ‘unnecessary’ extras of a race, and that helped everything work well and avoid any frustrations. Particularly at the finish area, the police were consistent, but polite, in moving people on to avoid congestion at the end.



Although wearing the same t-shirt creates a wonderful sense of unity (and guarantees you wear it at least once before shoving it in a drawer!), it did make a little hard to locate people at the end, in a sea of green tops and happy faces! There was a fair bit of, ‘I’m standing under the tallest tree’, ‘I’m opposite the sign for Debonair’s Pizza’ on the phone, but with a great post-run warm down to join in with everyone, that didn’t bother me too much.





For those who drink lots in races, then prepare for this. At first I thought there were no water stations, only the normal stalls along the road to buy bottles from. Stopping running, haggling over the price of water, getting out your Birr, waiting for change, then starting running again kind of breaks the flow. Although it is good for local businesses! However, at the half-way point there was a water station to run through which was well-manned, although giving out the normal 500ml bottles was a little wasteful (but those coming from abroad need to stay hydrated in the altitude!). I did like the water fountains you could run under though!

Next year marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary since Haile Gebreselassie started the Great Ethiopian Run, and so I'm sure it will be even bigger and better than ever!



## Final thoughts



Like I mentioned earlier, the fun didn't stop when I reached the finish line. The celebrations continued. Walking to a post-run brunch, we went back past the '500m to go!' sign where there was a music station. 500m from the finish line of any race in the UK, I'm pretty sure people will be cheering you on, congratulating you, urging you on to a sprint finish. Runners would dig in and find the last bit of strength, you wouldn't give up then. In Ethiopia, things are very different. Sure, the professional athletes way at the front would have run hard and strong the whole way, but not for the rest of us mere mortals. Teddy Afro's 'Ethiopia' (yes, play it again!) was blaring out on repeat and there was a crowd of people dancing. A lot of people had finished and were wearing their medals, but the best part was that all the runners still on the course saw the fun and the dancing, and stopped running to come and join in. Some of them must have abandoned the race for at least 10-15 minutes, some might have never even bothered making it to the finish line. But that didn't matter. It was the best atmosphere I have ever experienced and, even though I have not yet fully mastered the art of eskista (a form of Ethiopian dance), I couldn't help but join in. That night, I don't know if my legs were more tired from the running or the dancing – always a sign of a good day!



If you want to feel happiness, joy, life, and everything that is good about running, then sign up for 2020! Or at least I hope that the power of the Great Ethiopian Run is able to inspire your running, wherever you are, to not just focus on time and distance goals, but to take joy in the process of running itself, and for no other reason than as an expression of living. So please, dance, sing, laugh, love and RUN!

## A SUMMER OF PARKRUN TOURISM (by Sarah Allport)

### Bressay, The Shetland Islands



When we discovered that the Shetland Islands held the most northerly British parkrun title, that was the 2019 holiday sorted. Shetland's only parkrun takes place on the island of Bressay at a very civilised 9.30. We set off on a 20-minute walk from our holiday cottage in Lerwick to the ferry terminal. The instructions were very clear – take the 9am ferry and follow the marshals. It is only a 10-minute crossing and they run extra ferries in summer when the number of runners exceeds space. It was rather cosy in the passenger lounge, but it gave that week's Run Director a captive audience to cajole locals into volunteering for future weeks. Once we reached Bressay it was a short walk to the carpark of Maryfield House Hotel for the pre-run briefing. To begin with it followed the usual format – children at arm's length and dogs on a short lead but then came the safety warning. There was a Skua that had taken up residence on part of the route and had a habit of dive-bombing passing runners! Confusingly the parkrun does not take place in a park, but on quiet mostly car free roads. The lack of cars allowed us to fan out at the start although we were expected to remain on the left of the road or on the pavement where there was some. Bressay sees an average of 44 runners although this typically doubles in summer. It is a gently undulating out and back course (husband thought it was flat, but he's used to Lloyd) south through the main village and out along the shore. The course is well marshalled and has kilometre marker boards, which was a new but welcome feature. Once you reach the telephone box it is a right turn down towards the coast and views across to Lerwick on what the Shetlanders refer to as the mainland. A cone halfway along this road and a cheery marshal mark the turning



point, then it is back to the village but this time heading for the primary school playground where the finish funnel is located.

When the local school closed it was taken over by the Bressay people and turned into a community café, with activities and artists' studios. On a Saturday it welcomes the park runners with hot and cold breakfast options and good coffee. The food is sourced locally and volunteering in the café counts as a parkrun volunteer session. Having recovered with delicious bacon butties we headed back to the ferry terminal. Once again it proved useful for the Run Director to have a way of capturing departing runners. The scanners had malfunctioned and some of the previous week's data was still stored giving some people two times and missing others. The ferry company had agreed to let her ride the ferries back and forth asking runners if they could remember their finish number or time. I can never remember mine, so it was Strava to the rescue. The husband was more fortunate: he finished sixth so was in no doubt of his finishing position.

Having initially thought we would only be able to do one parkrun we decided that as it was an overnight ferry home we surely had time to squeeze one more in. Friday night we packed up the cottage and the second time drove over to Bressay. Whilst the first time was sunny and clear this Saturday it was misty and decidedly humid. Having parked in the ferry car park we made our way to the start fighting a swarm of midges as we went. This made our second run not as enjoyable, but I found it best to focus on the bacon butty that I knew was waiting. Having vacated our holiday cottage, we used the toilet facilities to change and freshen up (toilets are in the café when open and at the ferry terminal) and then braved the mist to explore some of the island by car.

### **The Pastures, Alnwick Castle, Northumberland**

When my husband recovered from the shock of receiving a place at the Great North Run, we turned our minds to practicalities. Accommodation was sorted as Northumberland is his home county and we were assured of a bed and delicious home cooking at my in-laws. but we would need a local parkrun to loosen his legs the day before. When staying in the New Year we had run Druridge Bay Country Park which was very similar to South Norwood and at the time bagged the most northerly England park run. Since then, however, one had opened in Alnwick, thereby stealing the most northerly England crown and as we had run Bressay it felt wrong not to give this one a go. The Pastures parkrun is situated beneath Alnwick Castle, and having parked in the town centre it was a short steep downhill walk to the Lion Bridge before crossing it and entering the pasture. The course is two loops around the field with amazing views of the castle on the return as you run alongside the river Aln. The average number of runners is 75 and we expected that to increase due to the Great North Run, but surprisingly there were 60 of us. The wide-open pasture meant that the faster runners could head off with ease. We were slightly alarmed or reassured to be told that the cows in the adjacent field had now been moved back having jumped the fence that morning but don't worry, the Cow Marshal (yes that was an official role) would be keeping an eye on them. Sure enough as we set off they all moved to the fence line for a better look at us and I was not reassured by the man next to me commenting that he felt safe as I was between him and the cows. It was reminiscent of Lloyd as the pasture was boggy in places, more so by the river, and there was a section where the path had been eroded away. After two laps it was a short uphill drag to the finish funnel, which gave a great view over to the castle. Heading back to the car over the Lion Bridge there was just the sharp uphill to the castle to conquer before the short drive home. It will be one we will repeat on future visits and who knows, if Berwick Upon Tweed starts a parkrun we might get to run as far north as you can before the Scottish border. A new half marathon PB of 1:43:33 for him rounded off a wonderful weekend.





## St Anne's Park, Raheny, Dublin

We were in Dublin for their 40<sup>th</sup> marathon and the husband's first, and as with the Great North Run, he wanted to be able to loosen the legs the day before. Dublin has several parkruns, including one named Bushy (most confusing) and one (Poolbeg) within walking distance of our hotel. The husband, however, fancied a fast course to see what the months of marathon training had done for his speed – so we settled for St Anne's with a course record of 14.44 for men and 16.51 for women. It was a 5-minute walk to Connolly station and a short train ride up to Raheny station before a 20-minute walk through the village and across the park. We knew they typically had a large attendance, and this was confirmed by the longest finish funnel we had ever seen – it even doubled back on itself. We received a wonderful Irish welcome and on hearing that it was the marathon that had brought us over, the running advice began, the most common comment being to 'take the parkrun easy don't go for any PBs as you need to save your legs'. 440 of us attended the briefing (thankfully no dive bombing birds or misplaced cows) and then made our way over a small bridge to the start area. It was two laps on a mixture of forest path, gravel and tarmac that wound through the park, culminating with a 900m long, flat and wide stretch of tarmac. As it was the weekend before Halloween it was marshalled by some interestingly dressed ghouls and witches, which added to the atmosphere. As I approached the finish of my first lap, I realised that the husband would not be saving his legs as the temptation of a PB would be too great. Sure enough the grin on his face as I finished my second lap confirmed he had a new 5k PB despite the marshals urging him to slow down. There is a café and toilet facilities in the park, and a farmer's market, which meant a good variety of post run treats before the train back to the hotel. If you are looking for a fast, welcoming parkrun whilst visiting Dublin I would recommend this one. Oh, and his marathon? Well the parkrun PB seemed to have done no harm as he finished his first marathon in 3:39:24 which meant Guinness all round!



## GAME CHANGERS (by Nikki Javan, Jane Hughes and Laura Fell)

A review of the documentary film which is currently available on Netflix

(<https://gamechangersmovie.com/>)



### Introduction (by Nikki Javan)

It's when your four year old comes home from school asking to be vegetarian like her friends that you realise just how common dietary lifestyle choices are becoming and how the conversation is about everywhere you turn which evidently includes the lunchtime table for younger school children. This autumn the debate around plant based diets for athletes just got even hotter with the official release of the documentary Game Changers. If you haven't seen it then you might want to have a watch before reading on any further.

Whilst I'm not trying to be biased, I have summarised what I think to be some of the most relatable parts from the documentary for a runner. However, the film presents one side of a two-sided argument so the below may seem weighted much more on the pro-plant based side. Although I haven't shared my view we have a couple of other people at the club who are much better placed than me to share their opinions and perspectives which you can read further on.

Boasting a production crew including James Cameron, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jackie Chan and featuring some of the strongest and fastest athletes in the world such as Lewis Hamilton, Novak Djokovic and Scott Jurek, this documentary is hard to miss or ignore. The documentary follows UFC fighter James Wilks' five-year research journey into the optimal diet for energy and recovery which took a dramatic turn when he read that the Roman Gladiators ate little or no meat in their diets.

The research team claim that "switching to a diet centred around plants can yield significant performance advantages, providing optimal fuel, increasing blood flow, making muscles more efficient, and speeding recovery by lowering inflammation". It's hard not to be tempted to find out more when you read such statements because isn't this what we're all after?

I'm not wanting to give the plot away but the film claims that owing to the lack of nutrition education most people receive in their lifetime, we are often left over-whelmed by the information about what is good for us and what is not. Food companies and lobby groups act



in this knowledge gap to shape our views and one of the largest spenders and therefore getting most bang for their buck are those engaged in the meat industry.

There's a couple of areas that I think the documentary is particularly interesting for runners. Firstly around endurance as few of us are sprinters and are therefore tapping into some sort of endurance reserve even if it's not for a 100 mile ultra. Secondly, we all know it but weight training is so important to all that we do as it ensures we build strong muscles to prevent injury and generally ensure we move better (in everyday life as well as running). I've pulled out some of what I think to be the interesting arguments around endurance and muscle repair from the film and website.

### *Endurance*

The film makers cover ultrarunner Scott Jurek's record-breaking attempt to run the 2,168 mile Appalachian Trail which involved him running almost 50 miles a day for an eye watering 46 days (spoiler: he did it and broke the previous record by 3 hours). Scott is a well-known plant-based runner having been vegetarian since 1997 and wholly plant-based since 1999 so he's not new to this lifestyle.

So what is it that makes plant-based so important for endurance? The film suggests that nitrate-packed vegetables make muscles more efficient and help preserve our limited fuel supply, which can significantly affect stamina. Next time you're at an event expo and you see those beet shots you'll know that this is the logic they are based on. Moreover, even without deliberately emphasizing nitrate-rich vegetables, eating plants has been shown to combat fatigue. Really interestingly for me they quote a study which found recreational runners were able to shave 6% off their 5K run times just four days after switching to a plant-based diet. In this study, the researchers hypothesized that the anti-inflammatory nature of the antioxidant-rich plant foods also contributed to the faster run times. At this point in my running I'll take a 6% saving because that's better than *those* new Nike trainers are meant to 'add' to performance.

### *Muscle & Strength*

We've all heard the claim that proteins, particularly from sources like lean meats and eggs, are essential for muscle energy and therefore the best thing to have after a hard workout to aid the repair of muscles. The theory from the movie is that although we need protein to build muscle, this protein doesn't need to come from meat.

Firstly, from a physiological perspective we all need a calorific surplus to build muscle. By nature plant based food is lower in calories by volume which means there is a real need focus on those plant based food that have greater calorie density to ensure the deficit is there. Secondly, the film states that plant based proteins are in no way inferior to those from animals. It goes on to suggest that taking in proteins from plant based sources tend to come with other nutrients such as vitamins, fibre, healthy fats and anti-oxidants which also aid with the building and maintaining of other tissues so may actually turn out to be better for you when considered holistically.

If you do find yourself tempted by either a plant based or more flexitarian attitude to your diet, the approach suggested by the film makers is quite straightforward. It comes back to a mantra I personally use a lot at work and at home as 'perfect is the enemy of good'. That is to say you don't need to drop everything immediately and make a holistic change. This doesn't need to be an all or nothing instant revision to the way you eat.

## Jane Hughes (one of Striders' plant-based runners):-

"The recent movie, *The Game Changers* shows us the benefits of a plant based diet for athletes. The documentary takes on common misperceptions about excluding meat, milk and eggs from your diet. At the outset, it's important to be clear on the difference between plant-based and veganism. Plant-based (more fully, 'whole foods plant based') is a specific diet that some argue is the healthiest diet you can have. Veganism is an ethical stance that shuns animal-based food products, with many vegans happily chowing down on unhealthy meat and dairy replacements. To improve athletic performance, it's the former we should be considering. I've deliberately avoided citing articles below on whether plant-based athletes have training gains compared to other diets precisely because this is a controversial topic. It's incredibly difficult to have properly controlled studies over a prolonged period of time. So I encourage you to watch the documentary, but always to decide for yourself!

Plant-based eaters will be familiar with these questions:

- 1) Where do you get your protein from?
- 2) Where do you get calcium from?
- 3) Can a diet that excludes so many food groups be healthy?
- 4) Isn't veganism unnatural?

The British Dietetic Association recognises that "well-planned vegan diets can support healthy living in people of all ages"<sup>1</sup>. The emphasis needs to be on *well planned*. A traditional Western diet tends to consist of lots of milk, cheese, eggs and meat. We've been brought up to believe that milk builds strong bones, meat builds muscle and that we need these foods for a balanced diet. Guess what? We don't. There is a debate about the 'natural' state of humans - were we primarily plant based or omnivores hunting animals in our distant past? Whatever the science, let's all accept we aren't in this natural state anymore!

The argument around meat is normally about protein, which athletes need to build muscle and even relatively sedentary people require to be healthy. Actually, many plants are an excellent source of protein. If you never looked at the amount of protein in a soybean, take a look<sup>2</sup>! Tofu, lentils, beans, chickpeas and nuts are all excellent sources of protein. Around 65% of the world's population are lactose intolerant to some degree<sup>3</sup> so humans aren't 'built' to consume cow milk. You can get calcium from leafy greens such as kale, almonds, chia seeds, figs and some tofus.

One final point to stress if you are thinking of going plant-based. Please supplement, at least for B12. Supplements don't necessarily mean taking pills - you can choose fortified breakfast cereals, plant milks and other foods, but you need to ensure you get enough essential nutrients. This is no different for vegans than it is for omnivores - many people with a 'normal' diet are not obtaining a full range of nutrition. If you are already over 50, please consider a B12 supplement anyway as studies have shown that the risk of B12 deficiency is much higher in older people, no matter what diet they consume<sup>4</sup>. Whilst the evidence on performance is debatable, a plant-based diet will reduce the amount of animal exploitation and have a much lower impact on the environment<sup>5</sup>. If anyone is interested in more information on a healthy, whole foods, plant-based diet, I thoroughly recommend looking at Michael Greger's work, including his 'daily dozen'<sup>6</sup>."

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bda.uk.com/news/view?id=179>

<sup>2</sup> <https://fdc.nal.usda.gov/fdc-app.html#/food-details/174271/nutrients>

<sup>3</sup> <https://ghr.nlm.nih.gov/condition/lactose-intolerance#statistics>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5130103/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2018-06-01-new-estimates-environmental-cost-food#>

<sup>6</sup> <https://nutritionfacts.org/daily-dozen-challenge/>





**Jane Hughes**



**Laura Fell**

**Laura Fell** (who isn't plant-based but takes a much more flexitarian approach to her diet which involves increasing the number of plant-based and vegetarian meals but not wholly excluding meat):-

"This week I watched The Games Changers film about athletes who have embraced a fully plant-based diet. Unfortunately, instead of being inspired, the scientist in me was left despairing.

The film fired out huge numbers of impressive sounding, cherry picked and twisted "scientific" facts to push the idea that a vegan diet is superior and an omnivorous one is unhealthy. This stance is not supported by most dietitians and the film failed to convincingly challenge that. In fact, some content was embarrassingly bad (apparently eating a veg burrito gives men bigger erections!).

The theme was either you're a meat feasting carnivore with fat globules oozing through your veins or you're a super-human vegan. The athletes claimed that after ditching meat and eating more vegetables, they felt much better. Well no shit Sherlock when you saw that previously they thought they needed protein for energy, were eating giant slabs of meat and one said he'd barely seen a vegetable before. Where were their dietitians? Most would advise that you need plenty of veg and carbs for energy, not just protein.

A cyclist said she won a race because she changed to plant-based. Really? Did Usain Bolt win because he ate chicken nuggets? Arnie claimed that his blood tests are better now than when he was young. Of course they are! He was pumped full of steroids, eating 12 eggs and a cow every day!

There were many facepalm moments. One being the illogical nutrient comparisons of totally unrelated foods including the superior antioxidants in lettuce compared to salmon. What about all the many other superior nutrients found in salmon?! And apparently, oxen grow big on grass therefore we can too. Hmmm, but whales are massive! Does that mean we should eat krill?

The film suggested research supporting meat consumption was biased, but every expert in this movie makes money from the vegan industry. Claims were taken from anecdotes, tiny obscure studies or bits of studies taken out of context. One scary sounding example was claiming a 17% increase in cancer risk if you eat meat, without explaining that this was relative risk, not overall risk. If the average risk is 5% and 17% of 5% = 0.85%, that's an increased overall risk from 5% to 5.85%.

There was some interesting content about the environment. Despite some exaggerated stats, there is little doubt amongst most respected experts that meat production has a higher environmental cost compared to crops.

When it comes to the plant-based athlete debate, the film should have ditched the nonsense and presented the well proven facts that a diet rich in fruit and veg has several health benefits, less meat and dairy is better for the environment and (some argue) more ethical regarding animal welfare. Organisations such as the British Dietetic Association say that with good planning and supplements it's possible to be a healthy vegan; therefore it's reasonable to assume it's possible to be a healthy vegan athlete.

My discussions with peers working with UK athletics have highlighted reduced impact resilience in some vegan athletes but currently this is anecdotal and possibly could be solved by better diet planning. Public health guidelines don't support that a vegan diet is superior and generally promote balance and inclusion not exclusion of foods. Personally, for now I'm sticking with eating my greens and loving cheese!"



## READERS' RECIPES: VEGAN CHOCOLATE ORANGE CAKE

(by Nikki Javan)

There are three important things you need to know to understand this recipe; 1) the ladies cross-country team love cake, 2) we're an inclusive team and 3) there are some vegan runners in the team. This all results in a shared love of vegan cake! This was one of my recipes from cross-country last year which I adapted from a few sources online and overall I think worked out rather well. I hope to be making for one of the upcoming fixtures so if you're a lady then please join us for the remaining cross-country races of the season and you might even get to try a piece.

Don't be alarmed that this cake tends to be a little crumbly and it does tend to shrink in a little from its height in the oven. I find the syrup helps hold everything together and it's not like it ever hangs around long enough after cross-country for any of it to be a problem. The best part for someone as disorganised as me is that it requires very few fresh ingredients so I can still make this one when my larder is (close) to bare.

### Ingredients:

For the cake:

275g plain flour  
200g caster sugar  
1 tsp bicarbonate of soda  
2 tsp baking powder  
Zest of one orange  
100ml vegetable oil  
170ml cold water  
1 tbsp orange juice

For the topping:

75g caster sugar  
Juice of half one orange  
Dark chocolate

### Method:

- Heat the oven to 200 / 180 fan / gas mark 6 and prepare a loaf tin (I cheat and use liners)
- Mix the dry ingredients in a bowl. Add the oil, juice and water. Mix until smooth.
- Pour into tin and bake for 30 mins. When ready (a skewer comes out of the cake clean) leave to cool for around 5-10 minutes.
- Whilst cake is cooling prepare the topping by heating the 75g of caster sugar with the juice of half the orange until the sugar has melted and starts to reduce and go syrupy (it'll only take a couple of minutes).
- Once the syrup is ready use a skewer (or I just use a pointy knife) to make holes in the top of the cake. Carefully and slowly spoon the hot syrup over the top of the cake. It will seep into the holes all the way to the bottom of the cake.
- Whilst everything is still warm sprinkle over some grated or finely chopped dark chocolate which will melt on the top of the cake.

## **READERS' RECIPES: VEGAN FLAPJACKS (by Debra Bourne)**

### **(Debra's seedy fruity cinnamon vegan version)**

#### **Ingredients:**

- 250g rolled oats
- 75g vegan margarine
- 60 ml sunflower oil
- 60 ml golden syrup (preferably Lyle's)
- 80g dark brown/Muscovado sugar
- 100g mixed seeds (I use sunflower and pumpkin)
- 100g raisins and/or sultanas
- 2 rounded teaspoons ground cinnamon (or to taste)

#### **Preparation:**

- Preheat the oven to Gas Mark 5
- Heat the oil, margarine, sugar and golden syrup in a saucepan, stirring until they are all mixed fully together as a thick brown liquid.
- Turn off the heat and stir in the oats, then add the cinnamon and stir in, then the fruit and seeds. Mix it all well.
- Grease a baking tin and transfer the mixture to the tin, leveling it off.
- Cook for about 20 minutes – I usually do two trays and switch which is on the top shelf and which on the middle shelf halfway through.
- Leave to cool. After about 10 minutes use a knife to score/cut the mixture into pieces
- Once fully cool, finish cutting the pieces and remove from the baking tin.

**Eat!**





## THE EUROPEAN MASTERS CHAMPIONSHIPS (by Alan Dolton)

In the September 2017 issue of this magazine, I included a report on the 20th edition of the European Masters Championships, which took place in Jutland. The championships are held every two years, and this year's edition took place in Jesolo, which is about 20 miles north-east of Venice, on the Italian coast.

In Jutland I had been in my first year in the M60 age-group, and had competed in three track events (1500 metres, 5000 metres and 10000 metres). However, my performances had declined during the subsequent two years, and I felt that I was not running well enough to compete on the track, so I confined myself to entering the 10 kilometre road race, which was held on the final day of the championships.

I flew to Venice on the Wednesday before my race, so that I could do some sightseeing and watch some of the athletics. There is an hourly bus service from Venice to Jesolo, which starts from Piazza Roma in the west of Venice and then calls at Venice's main railway station and at the airport before proceeding to Jesolo via a couple of small towns. Even though I was travelling in September, outside the peak holiday season, my experience of these buses was that an hourly service was simply inadequate to cater for the number of passengers (including tourists arriving by train or air with suitcases) who wished to use it. I travelled to Jesolo with my suitcase on a very hot and crowded bus, having to stand until the last mile of the journey. Fortunately I had booked a hotel which was only about half a mile from the bus station, very close to the beach, and just over a kilometre from the track.



**Lisa Thomas leading the W50 steeplechase  
(photo by Christine Courtney)**

On the Thursday afternoon I watched the steeplechase races, and was very pleased to see Lisa Thomas of Hercules-Wimbledon (whom some Striders will know from our Veterans League matches) win the W50 race. Former Croydon Harrier Niobe Menendez was third in the same race, but was running for Spain rather than for Britain (she was born and brought up in London, and competed for England in the 2006 Commonwealth Games, but her parents were originally from Spain and she has now moved there). I also watched some of

the 200 metre finals, and particularly enjoyed seeing the over-85 and over-90 races: I was impressed to see Herbert Muller of Germany win the over-85 race in 38.43 seconds.

On Friday afternoon I watched the 800 metre finals. I particularly enjoyed watching the W55 race, where Virginia Mitchell of Guildford was first with Clare Elms of Dulwich second and Christine Anthony completing a British clean sweep of the medals in third place. Clare Elms' run was particularly impressive because she had won the W55 5000 metres (at a different track, about sixteen miles east of Jesolo) only a few hours earlier. Another race which I definitely enjoyed watching was the M60 race, partly because this is my age-group and partly because it featured a spectacularly close finish. A French athlete led the field through 400 metres in 64.45 seconds (which is quite impressive for an M60), with British runner Keith McGhie on his shoulder and another British runner, Paul Fletcher, leading the rest of the field some way further back. In the last 100 metres the French runner began to tire as McGhie came alongside him with Fletcher, who had run a more sensibly paced race, closing fast. In the last 15 metres the Frenchman's legs gave way and he fell on the track as Fletcher came past to win in 2:15.22, just ahead of McGhie who was second in 2:15.32. With John Thomson sixth and Peter Mountain eighth, Britain had four of the first eight finishers in this race. Seeing just how strong Britain is in this age-group made me feel a bit less depressed about having finished a well-beaten sixth in the British Masters Championships a few weeks earlier. In addition to the wins for Virginia Mitchell and Paul Fletcher, four more British runners won gold medals in the 800 metres: Angela Copson (W70), Winston Laing (M75), Andrew Ridley (M55) and Dominic Bokor-Ingram (M50).



**Virginia Mitchell winning the W55 800 metres with Claire Elms second**

My 10K race was on the Sunday morning. In some ways the organisation was very good: there were changing tents and well-organised baggage tents in a park (Parco Grifone) not far from the start and finish. However in other ways the organisation was not so good. A course map had been posted on the official website, showing that the latter stages of the race would pass along the promenade which many of us had been using for our early-morning training runs. This would have given us good views of Jesolo's long sandy beach,



but the promenade was quite narrow and in view of the hot and sunny weather, it would have meant that the runners would almost certainly have had to weave their way past pedestrians while competing for medals. Just a few days before the race, the route was changed so as to avoid this stretch along the promenade, and there was also a slight change to the location of the start. Many athletes who had competed in other events, and had therefore arrived in Jesolo some days before the race, did not know of the change. And while there were some signposts showing the way to the baggage tents and changing tents, there were no signposts showing the exact location of the start. So, about 15 minutes before the race was due to start, a lot of athletes were milling around in Via Dalmatia (the road in which the race started and finished) trying to find exactly where the start line was. Many of the runners assumed that the race would be starting from where the finish gantry was, but in fact it started about 150 yards further south along the road, so that when the officials belatedly tried to assemble the athletes behind the start line, many of the runners were 150 yards down the course. This caused inevitable congestion as some of the runners who had found the start line and got there early tried to keep their position in the front row, while many more runners tried to squeeze alongside or in front of them.

I was one of the runners who had found the start line in reasonable time, and was happy to start near the back of the field. However by the time the race was due to start, it was noticeable that the right-hand side of the starting area was still in shade while the left-hand side was in the heat of the Italian sun. Not surprisingly, many of the athletes, including me, were keen to stay on the right-hand side of the starting area, which proved to be a wise move as we were kept waiting for eight minutes after the official start time until the officials had received confirmation that all the necessary road closures were in place. Looking at the runners ahead of me, I could see that a petite Frenchwoman with W75 on her back had positioned herself some way in front of me, and was surrounded by much younger and faster-looking runners. It was not very surprising that, just after she had crossed the start line, she tripped over, along with a couple of other runners, thus delaying many of the runners who had started in a more sensible position behind her.

It took me nine seconds to cross the start line, and the congestion meant that it was at least half a minute before I could start running freely. However, starting so near the back of the field did mean that I had the psychological boost of gradually overtaking people. In the congestion I did not see the first kilometre marker, but I was reasonably pleased to reach the two-kilometre marker in 9 minutes 20, which was significantly quicker than I had run in my previous 10K, in Malaga last year. The course was flat, and on a cool cloudy day it would have been ideal for fast times, but there was not a single cloud in the sky. By this time we had already left the built-up area where there was some shade from buildings, and were running in open countryside with no shelter from the hot sun (the temperature rose to 28°C by the end of the race). My first three kilometres were all run in under five minutes, but in the fourth kilometre I began to feel the effects of the heat: my pace dropped to over five minutes per kilometre, and I was overtaken by a few of the runners whom I had passed in the second kilometre. I reached the halfway mark in 24 minutes 33, and realised that, as in Malaga, I was going to take more than 50 minutes to complete the race. I therefore decided to forget about the stopwatch, and concentrate on trying to finish safely without getting too dehydrated. The only drinks station on the course was just after the halfway mark, and I slowed to a jog to ensure that I could take in adequate water before continuing. At about six kilometres I was overtaken by a Portuguese runner with M80 on his back: I was disappointed to be overtaken by an 80-year-old, but his deep suntan suggested that he was much more accustomed to running in these hot conditions than I was. I continued to run at a steady pace, and eventually reached the finish line in exactly 52 minutes, which meant that I had averaged almost exactly 5 minutes 30 per kilometre for the second half of the race. I was slightly disappointed that I had not managed to run a second faster and duck under 52 minutes, but I reflected that since it had taken me nine seconds to cross the start line, I would have been credited with doing so if there had been chip timing at the start line.



**Via Dalmatia: the early stages of the race**

When the entry list for the 10K had been published, I had been surprised to see that there were only 18 entrants in the M60 age-group, and that the time of 46 minutes 32 which I had recorded in 2017 ranked me as 13th of those 18. In fact, only 16 of the 18 entrants actually started, and I was the 12th finisher in my age-group. In the race as a whole there were 224 finishers, of whom I placed 185th. There were a total of 420 finishers in the half-marathon, which started half an hour after the 10K and consisted of two laps of the same course with an extra loop at the start. A lot of the half-marathon starters dropped out after one lap, and in those hot conditions I would have been very tempted to do the same.

Although the hot conditions meant that I did not enjoy my race, I was impressed by Jesolo as a location. The long flat promenade, which extended for several miles, was a good place for running in the early morning (it became too congested for running later in the day) and there were also quite a few cycle paths which could be used by runners. It was very flat, so it would not have suited those Striders who enjoy running up hills. Even in mid-September, it was very busy with holidaymakers, most of whom seemed to be from Italy, Germany or Austria. The biggest drawback from a British perspective was the inadequate bus service between Venice and Jesolo: only having one bus per hour seemed to be the equivalent of running only one two-coach train per hour between Gatwick and Brighton (and Jesolo has a far more attractive beach than Brighton does).

Next July the World Masters Championships will be taking place in Toronto, and will include road and cross-country races as well as the usual range of track and field events. For more information about Toronto, see Ally Whitlock's article about the Toronto Waterfront Marathon in the December 2018 issue of this magazine. If any other Striders would like to take part in international athletics, the first step (in addition to membership of Striders) is to join one of the regional clubs that are affiliated to the British Masters Athletics Federation. For most of us, this is likely to be either Southern Counties Veterans AC (<http://www.scvac.org.uk/index.htm>), who organise the track and field league in which Striders compete on Monday evenings, or Veterans AC (<http://www.vetsac.org.uk/>), who are based in London.



## **BOOK REVIEW – STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING FOR ENDURANCE RUNNING**

**(by Richard Blagrove: reviewed by Alan Dolton)**

In the March 2014 issue of this magazine, I reviewed a book entitled 'Conditioning For Marathon Runners and Endurance Athletes' by Mike Winch, a well-known coach who was one of Britain's best shot putters. Winch's book was first published in 2006 and was 160 pages long. Richard Blagrove's book is both longer, comprising 296 pages, and more recent, having first been published in 2015. Richard himself was a student at Loughborough University, where he ran 800 metres in 1 minute 53.01 (which is faster than any Strider has managed). At the time of writing this book he was working at St Mary's University in Twickenham, but he has subsequently returned to Loughborough where he is now a lecturer in physiology.

The book is divided into four parts. The first part is called 'understanding your needs'. A brief introduction to strength and conditioning observes that "the running action relies heavily on the elastic properties of tendons and connective tissue to produce the majority of force". This is followed by chapters entitled 'physiological perspectives', 'biomechanical and injury considerations' and 'assessing strengths and weaknesses'. The chapter on biomechanics includes the observation that "for the distance runner, it is unwise to try to focus on running with 'high knees'. Although the hip flexors work hard initially to remove the foot from the ground and pull the thigh through, the height your thigh reaches will mainly depend upon your running speed. Efforts to pull your leg excessively high will simply lengthen the recovery of your leg and delay your foot reaching the ground ...". Blagrove also comments that "whether you strike the ground with your heel, mid-foot or forefoot isn't of huge importance. However, if you heel strike in front of your body this will cause high braking forces and stress to the knee. Forefoot striking is a characteristic of fast running as it enables you to use elastic energy more effectively, therefore saving you energy."



**The runner in second place appears to be heel-striking with his foot in front of his body, which puts stress on the knee and increases the risk of injury  
(photo by Ray O'Donoghue)**

Like most coaches, Blagrove recommends that runners should regularly vary the surface and terrain you run on, commenting that “the problem with very soft terrain, such as sand, is that your muscles and Achilles tendon have to work overtime to provide sufficient stability and stiffness to store and return elastic energy effectively. This actually places a high degree of stress on your lower leg, which conversely increases the risk of injury. At the other end of the spectrum, concrete provides a very stable surface to run on, so your muscles and tendons don’t need to work hard ... The problem with hard surfaces, though, is that all impact forces are directed through your body so the external stress is still very high. Woodland paths or soft grass offer a compromise, so both are ideal to carry out the majority of your running. However, mixing things up regularly and varying your running surfaces also makes your joints more robust ...”

The chapter on ‘assessing strengths and weaknesses’ is 36 pages long, and is very well illustrated, with many good photographs showing not only how to do various exercises, but also showing common postural errors which can lead to injury. A runner who always carries out strength and conditioning exercises on their own may not realise that their posture is incorrect, which is why it is advisable for runners to do some sessions with a qualified coach or personal trainer. Blagrove also observes that “the ability to flex (or hinge at) the hip whilst keeping the lower back in a neutral position is probably the most important of all fundamental movement skills. When bending over to pick up an object, or lifting the knee when running, it is crucial that the stress is placed on the gluteals and hamstrings rather than the lower back. The gluteals and hamstrings (often referred to as the ‘posterior chain’) possess a huge capacity for handling and developing force, whereas the structures around the lower back are comparatively weak.” He illustrates this with some good photographs of a female runner in the position which many yoga teachers refer to as ‘dekasana’, but which Blagrove himself refers to as an ‘arabesque’ (although the head and shoulders are held significantly lower than they are in most ‘arabesque’ poses).



**‘Dekasana’ (which Blagrove refers to as an ‘arabesque’)**  
**This is a good way to test a runner’s balance and ability to hinge from the hips**

The second part of the book deals with strength training. A short chapter entitled ‘dispelling myths’ is followed by a long chapter (55 pages) on ‘resistance training’ and a shorter chapter (20 pages) on ‘plyometric training’. The chapter on resistance training observes that



“mastering technique should be the main priority in every exercise you perform. Loading up on exercises too soon, or simply ‘going through the motions’ is likely to result in a poor posture being adopted or an incorrect movement pattern, both of which risk injury ...”. Blagrove also comments that “single-leg resistance training offers a number of important benefits that exercises on two feet cannot. Lunging and step-up exercises will develop high levels of strength in each leg, correct imbalance and challenge your stability”.



**Blagrove recommends single-leg gluteal bridges to strengthen the gluteal muscles**

The chapter on plyometric training observes that “hopping and bounding develops your explosive hip strength and single leg stability through movements very similar to running”. Blagrove also comments that “by far the most important technical error to be aware of during any plyometric exercise is landing in a collapsed knee position. ... It is important that if you feel or observe your knees collapsing inwards when landing from a jump, hop or step that you lower the intensity of the exercise.”

The third, and longest, part of the book deals with conditioning exercises. In the introduction to this part of the book, Blagrove observes that “making a decision as to the important areas to target with tissue-conditioning exercises isn’t as straightforward as you might think. Knee injuries that account for around a quarter of all endurance runners’ injuries are a good example of how simply finding an exercise that loads that joint won’t work well. The reason a runner suffers from knee pain could be due to many issues, including landing in a knee valgus (inward collapsed) position, weakness in the gluteals, poor foot and ankle mobility, an aggressive heel strike action, or a muscle imbalance between quadriceps and hamstrings.” The introduction to this part of the book is followed by six chapters dealing in turn with trunk training; foot and ankle conditioning; hamstring conditioning; gluteal stability; technical running drills, and mobilisations and stretches. The chapter on trunk training observes that “a common misconception about training the core is that one or two muscles hold the key to trunk stability and control. Often the term ‘core’ is interpreted as meaning the abdominal (six-pack) muscles, probably because these are the most visible and impressive-looking! This muscle group is responsible for flexing the spine, so is used heavily during exercises such as a sit-up. However, performing dozens of spinal flexion exercises in an attempt to condition this muscle group is actually very unhealthy for the spine, and will eventually lead to lower back injury.”

The chapter on foot and ankle conditioning observes that “attempting to fix a problem in your hips or back by wearing a pair of running shoes that changes your foot position is likely to lead to compensation somewhere else, which ends up doing more harm than good! If you

are diagnosed as being a 'pronator' or 'supinator' it would be advisable to be screened by an experienced physiotherapist, or to visit a gait analysis lab, where a more rigorous assessment of your whole running action can be performed." The chapter also includes a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of running barefoot (or in minimalist shoes). Blagrove's conclusion is that readers should "carry on running most of your mileage in running trainers that are suited to you, but incorporate some barefoot conditioning drills to help strengthen your feet and mobilise the joints" and "ensure you spend as much time as possible doing everyday indoor activities without shoes on". (One of my few criticisms of the book is that I was somewhat surprised that, in connection with this discussion, Blagrove makes no mention of yoga: my personal experience has been that one of the main benefits of yoga is that it has helped me to become accustomed to exercising and balancing with bare feet.)

The chapter on gluteal stability observes that when people spend long periods of time sitting, the gluteal muscles tend to weaken. Blagrove observes that every time a runner's leg strikes the ground, "the gluteus medius and minimus in particular perform an isometric contraction to prevent the thigh bone (the femur) from collapsing inwards ... If the glutes aren't sufficiently strong and well-conditioned to cope with repeated landings, the femur will get pulled across and rotate inwards, which loads the knee in a vulnerable position ... Unfortunately for female distance runners, the risk of knee valgus and patellofemoral injury is significantly higher as compared to male runners. Due to their disproportionately wider hips, women have a higher Q-angle than men, which means the angle of the femur relative to the femur is greater. ... The importance of glute strengthening for female endurance runners cannot be overstated!"

The final chapter in the third part of the book deals with mobilisations and stretches. Blagrove observes that "repeated muscle contractions, particularly of the eccentric type, cause damage to connective tissue. During the running stride, the muscles in the legs are subjected to repeated eccentric loading, and this often leads to feelings of soreness. ... To 'iron out' these adhesions in overstressed muscles, the best advice here would be to have a massage a few times a week! For most runners, however, this recommendation is unrealistic both practically and financially. The next best alternative is to use 'self-myofascial release' techniques, which is a fancy term for self-massage, usually using a foam roller."

At the end of a discussion of stretching, Blagrove comments that "prior to a run, a series of long-hold static stretches to remove passive stiffness may not be a good thing and probably won't lower your injury risk, whereas long-term static stretching is still likely to offer benefits to mobility. However, unless you have a personal preference for a few short-duration static stretches prior to a run, it is recommended that you leave your static stretching until after your workout and stick to dynamic mobilisation to prepare for your runs."

The final part of the book is entitled 'organising your strength and conditioning'. It consists of a 19-page chapter on 'planning your strength and conditioning' and a chapter of case study examples. In the introduction to this chapter, Blagrove comments that "magazines and internet pages are filled with suggestions on the best exercise or training session for runners to perform, but it is no coincidence that recommendations always differ. A magic formula simply doesn't exist. ... The prescription of training activities and combinations of exercises, volumes and intensities should be individualised for every runner. When training background, injury history, personal constraints and screening results are taken into account, each individual will require a bespoke training programme that caters for their own particular needs."

I found this to be a very interesting book, and I would definitely recommend it to all Striders who would like to take steps to reduce the likelihood of incurring running-related injuries.



## COMPETITIVE HIGHLIGHTS: SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER 2019

On 29 September, Striders staged the 28th annual Switchback race, which was won by former Strider Jay Lidbetter (30:43). Striders dominated the women's race with Jenny Rowe first (36:01), Jodie Gray second (36:46) and Steph Upton third (37:22). In the Folkestone Half-Marathon on the same day, Keith Simpson won the over-70 category in a new club age-group record of 1 hour 50 minutes 42. At Tooting, Kevin Burnett set club over-80 records in the shot (5 metres 02), javelin (9 metres 01) and hammer (15 metres 97).

Rachel Lindley had an outstanding run in the Chester Marathon on 6 October. She was the fourth woman to finish, setting a new club over-35 record of 3 hours 06 minutes 02 seconds, and lifting her to second place in the club's all-time women's rankings. Later that day, Striders had 16 finishers in the first East Surrey League race of the season, in Lloyd Park. Alistair Falconer placed sixth, while Jodie Gray was the seventh woman to finish.

Striders produced a good team performance to place fifth in their first Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season, at Reigate on 12 October. Jenny Rowe ran well to place 24th of the 217 finishers, completing the four-mile course in 29 minutes 16 seconds. Steph Upton was 32nd (30:17) with Nikki Javan 45th (31:04), Ally Whitlock 46th (31:08) and Jennifer Gutteridge 52nd (31:22). Striders' men placed sixth in their Division Two match at the same venue. Alastair Falconer had an excellent run to finish ninth, completing the five-mile course in 30 minutes 42 seconds. Tatsuya Okamoto was 35th (32:30) with Lee Flanagan 42nd (32:56), Rob Lines 53rd (33:22) and Bill Makuwa 54th (33:22). Krzysztof Klidzia was second in the over-50 category and 57th overall (33:38).

In the Surrey Masters Cross-Country Championships at Morden Park on 19 October, Lee Flanagan ran well to finish fourth in the M45 race. Striders placed fourth in the M60 team event, with Jon Dean finishing fifth and Rob Zietz seventh. In the Yorkshire Marathon a day later, Dave Shaw set a club over-55 record of 2 hours 50 minutes 31 seconds.

On 2 November, Keith Simpson ran very well to finish first in the over-70 age-group in the Thames Meander Marathon, starting and finishing at Kingston-on-Thames. In wet and windy conditions, he set a new club over-70 record of 4 hours 09 minutes 07 seconds.

Striders' women did very well to finish third in the second Surrey Women's Cross-Country League Division Two match of the season, at Mitcham on 9 November. They were led by Jodie Gray, who placed 16th of the 235 finishers, covering the six-kilometre course in 24 minutes 43 seconds. Jenny Rowe was 22nd (25:24) with Jemma Zakariyyau 27th (25:55), Jennifer Gutteridge 33rd (26:25) and Nikki Javan 45th (27:13). Meanwhile Striders' men placed ninth in their Division Two match at Wimbledon. They were led by Alastair Falconer, who placed eleventh of the 211 finishers, completing the undulating five-mile course in 29 minutes 39. Lee Flanagan was 54th (32:02), while veteran Krzysztof Klidzia ran very well to win the over-50 category, placing 60th overall (32:12). Andrew Aitken was 71st (32:43), while Matthew Stone ran well to win the over-55 age-group, placing 76th overall (32:55).

In the London Cross-Country Championships at Parliament Hill Fields on 16 November, Striders' women's team placed 18th, led by Jodie Gray, who placed 54th (26:47), with Jenny Rowe 100th (28:07), Jennifer Gutteridge 106th (28:28) and Selena Wong 177th (30:53). Striders' men's team placed 23rd, led by Alastair Falconer, who placed 36th (40:14) with Krzysztof Klidzia 127th (43:50), Matt Stone 151st (44:46) and Luke Burden 251st (47:35).

At Nottingham on 30 November, Debra Bourne completed her 100th marathon. In icy conditions, she placed second in the W50 category, recording 3 hours 56 minutes 54.

## 20 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN WINTER 2000

From 1986 to 1998, the Surrey Cross-Country Championships had been held in December. However, for the 1999/2000 season, the Surrey AA reverted to the previous practice of holding them in January. The championships were held on 8 January 2000, and were on our home course at Lloyd Park for the first time since 1979. On a very muddy course, the men's race was won by Dave Taylor of Herne Hill. South London Harriers won the team event while Striders placed 12th. Striders' team comprised Neil Furze (66th), Gerry Crispie (71st), John McGilvray (107th), Nigel Costiff (119th), Colin Cotton (126th) and Ken Low (129th).

The women's race was won by Zara Hyde of Woking, while South London Harriers won the team event. Striders' women were seventh. Jane Lansdown ran very well to finish 14th. Kate Potter was 52nd, Barbara Gambrill 61st and Michele Lawrence 66th.

A week later South London Harriers held the annual Pirie 10 mile cross-country race. Striders placed second, behind SLH, in the team event. John McGilvray led our team home in 20th place with Ken Low 22nd, Nigel Costiff 24th and Mick Gambrill 46th.

The South of the Thames Championships were held on 22 January at Crawley. Striders were ninth in the team event. Tony Sheppard led us home in 60th place with Gerry Crispie 68th, John McGilvray 94th and Ken Low 100th.

The Surrey Cross-Country League completed its 38th season with matches on 5 February. Belgrave won Division One by just 34 points from Thames Hare & Hounds. Herne Hill were third with South London Harriers fourth. West Four Harriers won Division Two, gaining promotion to Division One for the first time, while Croydon Harriers placed second. Epsom and Kingston were relegated to Division Three.

The final Division Three match was held at Wimbledon Common. Stragglers and Guildford made sure of promotion to Division Two. Striders went into the match in seventh place and with only a small lead over Haslemere Border. We responded well to finish fifth in the match and ensure our survival in Division Three. Tony Sheppard led us home in tenth place while Neil Furze had an excellent run to place 11th, a big improvement on his previous races. Gerry Crispie was 22nd with Bob Ewen 43rd and Ken Low 50th. Our other scorers were 55 John McGilvray, 57 Dave Shaw, 68 Simon Smith, 71 Alan Dolton and 77 Colin Cotton. Haslemere also avoided relegation, by just six points, because Walton, who had been more than 200 points clear of the relegation zone before the match, turned up with only four runners and finished a well-beaten last. They were duly relegated along with Veterans AC. Holland Sports won Division Four with Elmbridge second.

The Inter-Counties Cross-Country Championships were held at Nottingham on 12 February. Jane Lansdown represented Surrey, placing 118th out of 271 finishers. In the Wokingham Half-Marathon on 13 February, Kate Potter set a club women's over-35 record of 1 hour 32 minutes 48 (which has subsequently been beaten by Rachel Lindley).

The Surrey Women's Cross-Country League completed its 21st season with a match at Brockwell Park on 19 February. The Division One race was won by Meredith Pannett of Dulwich. South London Harriers won the match to clinch the Division One championship. They were led by Carol Evans who placed fourth in the race. The Division Two race was won by Sara Stoddart of Holland Sports, finishing ahead of all the Division One runners. Sara's team-mate Maggie Statham was second, while Striders' Jane Lansdown had an excellent run to finish third. Woking won Division Two while Striders placed fifth.



## 10 YEARS AGO: LOCAL ATHLETICS IN WINTER 2010

The Southern Cross-Country Championships were held at Parliament Hill on 30 January. Striders' best performance came from Justin Macenhill who ran well to place 189th of the 806 finishers. Suzy Yates was Striders' first woman home, placing 204th of the 357 finishers.

Striders' women produced an excellent team performance in their Surrey Women's League Division Two match at Wimbledon Common on 6 February. They placed second in the match and climbed to second in the final league table, making sure of promotion back to Division One. Kingston won the match with 90 points, but Striders' total of 101 saw us place one point ahead of Epsom (102), with Hercules-Wimbledon fourth (157) and Sutton Runners fifth (210). Striders were led by Helen Furze who ran well to finish sixth, covering the muddy five-mile course in 32 minutes 35. Suzy Yates was 16th in 33 minutes 30, with Faye Stammers 24th (36:06), Josephine Thompson 26th (36:27) and Alice Ewen 29th (36:39). Our women also showed good strength in depth by having the first B team to finish. Steph Upton was 34th (37:10) with Carmen Somerset 47th (39:09), Hannah Musk 54th (39:53), Linda Daniel 68th (41:26) and Jo Penny 88th (43:21).

Sadly, Striders' men were unable to match our women's success. Competing in the Division Two match at Richmond Park, we were without a couple of our leading runners and had to settle for third place of the nine competing clubs. In the final table Dorking won the Division Two championship with 1358 points, while Stragglers took second with 1371 and Striders slipped to third with 1392, just missing out on promotion after having led the division for three-quarters of the season. Striders were again led by the consistent Matt Morgan, who ran well to finish seventh, covering the five-mile course in 28 minutes 37. Justin Macenhill was next home in 13th (29:29) while Steve Starvis continued his return from injury with 23rd (30:18). Lee Flanagan was 32nd (30:52) and Richard Lee-Smith finished strongly for 36th (31:01). Lee Wadsworth was 56th (32:07) with Barry White 63rd (32:29), Rob Sharpe 67th (32:40), John Foster 74th (32:50) and Mick Turner 76th (33:00).

On 14 February Striders produced some good performances in the annual Sidcup road race (the course was slightly shorter than the advertised 10 miles, and was subsequently lengthened in 2012). Justin Macenhill placed tenth of the 389 finishers (56:47), while Tyler O'Callaghan was 13th (57:35) and Richard Lee-Smith 26th (59:36). This gave Striders second place in the team event. In the Chessington 10K on the same day, Matt Morgan ran a personal best 33 minutes 16, while Helen Furze placed second in the women's over-35 category with a time of 41 minutes 25. The clash with the Sidcup and Chessington races meant that Striders fielded a below-strength team for the East Surrey Cross-Country Relays at Wimbledon Common. Their best performance came from Steph Upton, who produced an excellent run to cover the third leg in 12 minutes 47, which was faster than any of Striders' men. Our other runners were David Batten (13:54), Tom Littlewood (14:17) and Andy Elliott (15:54). They finished 14th, dropping to tenth in the overall league table with two races left.

The Surrey Cross-Country Championships took place at Lloyd Park on 20 February (postponed from January because of snow on the course). Striders did well to have four runners in the first 40 in the senior men's race. Our best performance came from Matt Morgan, who finished 23rd, covering the muddy twelve-kilometre course in 44 minutes 33 seconds. Justin Macenhill also ran well to place 27th (45:23) while Steve Starvis was 36th (46:16) and Lee Flanagan 38th (46:30). Barry White was 75th (51:59) and Graham Williams 105th (65:57). This gave us seventh place in the team event. Our women were led by Alice Ewen who placed 44th, covering the eight-kilometre course in 39 minutes 46. Linda Daniel was 62nd (45:01) and Lisa Jackson 68th (59:01).

## SURREY CROSS-COUNTRY LEAGUES 2010



The late Helen Furze leading our women's team at Wimbledon Common



Matt Morgan leading our men's team at Richmond Park

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