

HILLS DISTRICTS ATHLETIC CLUB

by Tyson Popplestone



Nikki Donnelly and Holly Noack, 800m

South Australia's leading Athletics Club is leading the way for the development of future stars coming out of the state, and along the way growing in reputation on a national level.

RELATIVELY new to the scene of athletics in Australia, the Hills Districts Athletics Club was established in 1993 to provide an opportunity for the community to participate in athletics regardless of their age, ability, race or sex. At this time it was very clear that junior athletes participating in little athletics were struggling to make a successful transition into senior competition. Noticing this, Graham Davis from the Hills Little Athletics Centre and Tony Diercks from the Plymton Little Athletics Centre, both of whom had children competing in little athletics, got together for coffee to weigh up the options for their sons and daughters who were about to move into the more serious side of senior competition.

The general attitude held by most established clubs in South Australia was to focus more on the 'elite' athletes, leaving many of the lesser developed juniors with nowhere to go after their little athletics days were over. Diercks and Davis came to the conclusion that the only way they were going to adopt a concept which promoted family involvement, team spirit and individual participation, was to form their own club.

Hours of work were put in by two local parents, promoting the concept at local schools, within their own little athletics clubs and in the local media. The response was immediate with several families com-

ing out of the woodwork, each sharing the same concerns for their children who were about to end their time in little athletics. From there a committee was formed, affiliation with Athletics SA was approved and everything was set to go. Then on the 31st of October 1993, the navy green and grey colours of HDAC were displayed for the first time - The Hills Districts Athletics Club was born!

From the time the club was established membership rates grew at a rapid rate until reaching a peak of 120 members in the year of the Sydney Olympics.

Ahead of the Rest

Since 1998 Hills has been South Australia's largest and most successful athletics club. At interclub level, HDAC has won an amazing 78 premier-ship flags, which includes 47 summer successes and 31 winter titles. This proves the diversity of the club, with premierships in all ages, from



Peter Davis

under 14's to over 35's, in both men and women. During the period of 1996 to 2003 the men dominated SA athletics, taking an incredible six A Grade flags. In more recent times the Hills Districts women have been dominant and have just achieved a seventh straight A Grade premiership and a second national club title.

The people behind the club

Graham Davis, who has been the drive behind the club since 1993, came to the sport as a supportive parent, but at the time was heavily involved with coaching and developing table tennis in the hills. Later, Davis decided to focus mostly on athletics and since 2002 he has not only driven the club, but has also coached many of the athletes.

Roger Pedrick, a former athlete hailing from England's Thame Valley Harriers, has looked after the clubs middle distance runners since day one. As

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an athlete, Roger recorded personal best times of 48.6 for the quarter mile and 1.52.6 for 800m. He has also lectured in sports conditioning and exercise physiology at the regency institute of TAFE.

Gary Zeuner, a former national steeplechase representative, coaches a quality group of middle to long distance athletes including Lee-Anne Turner and Jane Mudge. Zeuner is currently ranked second behind Kerry O'Brien on the South Australian all time greats list with his best time of 8.31 for the 3000m steeplechase. Lynn Larsen who has been around the sport

almost four decades coaches the sprinters. Graham Davis is responsible for the the clubs throwers and has also run clinics in the Pitjantjajara lands in central Australia. Davis has recently returned from a two month stint on the small South Pacific island of Niue, where he was sent by the Victorian government to set up a sport development program as part of the Commonwealth Games initiative to assist isolated Commonwealth countries. For his contribution to the sport he was chosen to carry the Olympic torch in 2004 for a second time after already carrying it in Australia for the Sydney Olympics in 2000.

Training venues

The club conducts regular training sessions at two venues in the Adelaide Hills, Heathfield High School and Cornerstone College. Athletes have to make do with typical school ovals and fairly substandard facilities. However, in recent times due to severe wet weather conditions during the winter months, training has been transferred to Adelaide City, where the club has a share arrangement with another Adelaide club. For specialised events such as pole vault, high jump and hurdles, training takes place at Santos Stadium, the state's premier athletics track.

The Athletes

Although the clubs main goal is to increase participation and membership, credit must be given to several Hills athletes that have gone on to compete nationally. Most notable of the Hills athletes to experience the highs and lows of elite competition was 22 year old Wendy Young, who after several years of gold medal success at national junior level in pole vault, cleared a height of 4.40 meters, to record an Athens Olympics A qualifying performance.

Unfortunately, Wendy was not selected in the Aussie team for the 2004 Olympics because she was unable to follow that up with another equally impressive clearance, and even though she traveled interstate and overseas chasing quality competition, she fell short of Athletics Australians selection criteria. Wendy was very loyal



Gary Zeuner

at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Unfortunately, injury impeded any chance of Garlett qualifying. However, he still shares the national under 16 high jump record with Jagan Hames and although he has recently retired from the sport, he still reminisces about his World Junior Championships appearances in 1998 and 2000.

Triple Jumper Michelle Apostolou has also enjoyed National medal success and currently clutches on to the state record with her best jump of 13.19m set in 2002.

Nikki Donnelly is one to keep an eye on in the future. She recently recorded a personal best over 800m in a time of 2.10, finishing third in the open women's Victorian championships held at the MCG.

Club Functions and Awards

The club currently conducts several social events throughout the year, with the most notable being the annual trek to Horseshoe Bay on the south coast, where athletes gather for a friendly training session on the beach while parents and officials share the seasons memorable moments.

During Hills Districts short life it has been selected for many awards, including Athletics South Australia's Club of the Year in 2001, 2002 and 2006, and in 2004 was presented with a South Australia Great Plaque for its commitment to encouraging youth to participate in sport.

With such an amazing amount of success in the clubs short life, it will certainly be one to look out for in the future.

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The Hills Districts Athletics Club offers opportunities for athletes of any age, ability, race or sex and actively participates in all levels of competition during the winter cross country season and summer track and field.

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Training Venues:
• Heathfield High School
Longwood Road, Heathfield
• Cornerstone College
Main Road, Mt Barker
• Adelaide City
Corner King William Street & South Terrace



Barossa half marathon - Jane Mudge



Graham Davis, Athens Olympic Torch Relay



Hills Girls, 2005 Australian Club Champions

Holly Noack - 800m PB 2.08.03