

## JOHN BOAS – SOME PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

First some statistics - John Frank Boas was born 27 February 1941 in Melbourne and started his athletics career in 1957 as a 16 year old school boy. 54 years later, his association with athletics is as strong and as enthusiastic as ever.

I first met John when I joined Ivanhoe Harriers in 1966 and my association with him continued right through my athletic career until I retired from International competition in 1983. Even though I moved onto other things after my serious sporting career finished, John has remained committed to athletics in Australia and to his athletes and his coaching and is even now still involved on a high level as a senior athletics coach.

In 1966 when I first met John, he had already been working within the club as a coach and administrator for a number of years. Even at that stage, his eye for detail and his personal interest in the welfare of each club member were an inspiration to us all. I remember being one of the many club members of that period who regularly obtained lifts to Interclub in John's famous yellow VW. What was the record for the maximum number of people that ever fitted into that car?

John's coaching extended over many venues over many years

- Wallinda Park in Greensborough (distance runners)
- Warringal Park in Heidelberg (distance runners)
- The Olympic Village track in West Heidelberg (everything)
- Box Hill Athletics Track (Jumping)
- Olympic Park in the city (elite athletes).

In fact, it is probably true to say that there has been no one more active over so many years and so many venues. His choice of venues has always been based on what was easiest/best for his athletes, not what suited him. John would travel from one side of Melbourne to the other just to supervise a training session if asked.

John's dedication to his athletes extended much further than the confines of Melbourne. When John was coaching me in my chosen sport of race walking, he regularly travelled to interstate races to support me and ensure my maximum performance. This usually meant that he would drive to such places as Adelaide, Canberra or even Sydney. I was not alone in such personal treatment. John's enthusiasm for his task has never abated over the years. His athletes have always come first.

One of the most most impressive things about John is his ability to coach at all levels of the sport and to coach elite athletes in so many different disciplines. This has been recognized by his peers and by the athletes themselves. So many athletes have sought John out over the years to obtain his expert coaching and insights.

John has coached elite athletes in many disciplines

- **Race Walking**

John coached me throughout my career which included representation at 2 Commonwealth Games, Australian and British Championship wins and multiple Australian team memberships. In fact, John was the inaugural Australian Race Walking National Coach from 1979 to 1981 and was team manager for the Australian Race Walking team which competed at the 1981 World Race Walking Championships in Spain. He was also the National Jumps Coach at the same time.

- **Long and Triple Jumping**

John has had his most astonishing successes in these events, having coached a succession of Australian champions and Australian representatives. Names such as **Dave Colbert, Gary Honey, Ian Campbell** and **Ken Lorroway** are known the world over in Long and Triple Jumping circles. John not only coached them but he coached them from their time as schoolboys right through their careers. John was National Event coach in both these disciplines over a long period of time and has had long associations with most of our top jumpers, male and female, over this period. He is widely recognized as one of the foremost authorities on these events and can still be seen pitside at most of the big competitions.

- **Sprinting**

Since the Jumping and sprinting events are so closely related, it is not surprising to realize that John has coached many athletes to a State and National level in the sprint events. His training for his Jumpers has been

so innovative that on many occasions, they have also excelled at sprinting with no specialist sprint training. I remember Gary Honey winning the 400m at one of the International meets at Olympic Park in Melbourne in his heyday. It took everyone by surprise and his time was the fastest recorded by an Australian that season. Such was John's training regime. On another occasion, in 1980, the Ivanhoe Harriers 4 x 100 relay team (which consisted of 4 of his athletes – Gary Honey, Ian Campbell and Ian Rogers amongst them) won the Victorian 4x100m relay title and ran 40.7 which was at that time just outside the Victorian record.

- **Pole Vaulting**

When Ivanhoe Harriers had a good under-age pole vaulter, John took him under his wing and started to read up on vaulting. In only a few years **Cam Cuthill** had developed into the State Junior champion and John had been instrumental in organizing the purchase of a top quality pole vaulting bag (some \$6000) to develop pole vaulting within the club. John became, by necessity, an authority on pole vaulting. And of course, **Neil Honey** won bronze in the 1986 Commonwealth Games pole vault.

- **Distance running**

John was involved with the club distance runners in the early 1960s since they had no one to coach them. Although he had been a sprinter himself, he was not daunted and soon developed a good squad. From this squad came **Steve Austin** who under John's tutelage became one of the top runners in Australia and subsequently had a long career involving Olympic, World Cup and World Cross Country representations.



*John as coach of the 1981 Australian team which competed in the Racewalking World Cup in Valencia in Spain.*

*Back: Peter Fullager, John Sheard, Harry Summers, Willi Sawall*

*Middle: Sally Pierson, Sue Cook, John Boas, Anne Ryan, Lorraine Young*

*Front: Keith Knox, Mick Harvey, Dave Smith, Bill Dyer*

Suffice it to quote from a club magazine from the year 1978

*This season must go down as one of his (John's) finest on record.*

*The season started in September in Edmonton at the Commonwealth Games. Ian Campbell, one of John's charges, jumped magnificently in finishing second while Tim Erickson took the bronze in the walk. Two months later long jumper Gary Honey jumped 16.06 in the triple, a performance which ranked him in the top six in the Commonwealth.*

*At the Victorian Championships in February, John coached six of the eight finalists in the long jump and five of the eight finalists in the triple jump. In March at the Australian Championships, John had gold medals in the Long Jump and Triple Jump, bronze medal in the 100m, a fourth placing in the Triple Jump and a gold medal in the Junior Triple Jump. He finished the season with 2 members in the Oceania side to compete in the World Cup in August.*

For many coaches, this might be the culmination of a great coaching career but for John, this has been the amazing norm year after year. Such coaching excellence was his consistently over many many years.

Yet this does not finish with John. Apart from his unmatched coaching record, his performance in the administration of the sport is top notch. As mentioned previously, he has held the positions of National Event Coach for Race Walking, Long Jump and Triple Jump and has been on the National Executive of the Australian Track and Field Coaches Association for many years. In fact, he was one of the founding members and was one of the very first coaches in Australia to obtain a Senior Coach Accreditation.

He was actively involved in the task of coaching coaches for many years and was a regular specialist speaker and coach at the various seminars and accreditation schemes run by the ATFCA.



*John giving a hands on presentation at a specialist Long Jump clinic at Henley Field in Sydney in August 1981*

He was also a regular specialist coach in the various Australian teams at Commonwealth and Olympic Games levels. This is due recognition for someone who has put so much into the sport and continues to do so.

Indeed, John's many contributions to the sport of athletics in Australia were recognised at the highest level some years ago when he was awarded an **OAM**.

Now you might suppose that this did leave much time for John to be active on other fronts. Yet, during all this time, he was active in his own career in Nuclear Physics. He spent some years in the 1960s in England with a research position in one of the Midlands Universities. He returned to a research position at Monash University and, eventually moving out of the cloistered realms of university life, he spent nearly 20 years as a Senior Researcher at the Australian Radiation Laboratories in Lower Plenty. Nowadays he is 'semi retired' but is still an Honorary Research Fellow at Monash University and continues his work within his chosen field of Physics.

In fact, to digress for a few minutes, a Google search on 'John Boas' will yield more hits about Physics related research papers than it will in the field of athletics. John has been a prolific author and co-author in his chosen professional field over many years. This is hardly surprising, given that he is the son of the late Walter Boas, one of Australia's leading physicists who had migrated to Australia in 1938 from Germany. You can read about John's father by pointing your web browser to <http://www.eoas.info/biogs/P000243b.htm>. It is true to say that John is carrying on the family tradition.

Of course, any discussion of John's long career would be incomplete without a mention of his brief stint as a teacher. In the seventies, as Federal money for research dried up, John's tenure at Monash University came to an end and he moved onto secondary teaching. He was placed at West Heidelberg Technical School (cr Bell St and Waterdale Rd, West Heidelberg). It was a shell shocked John who turned up for training each night – he would shake his head as he remembered the various encounters of the day. Luckily for us all, the circle turned and John was able to source a position with ARL – his fledgling teaching career came to an end none too soon for John!



My memories of John are many and varied but perhaps none more so than my regular trips to Wills St. in Kew to discuss and plan training. His mother would have a chocolate cake for us to eat and his father would always be there to say hello and then leave us in peace to discuss the esoteric field of athletic endeavour.

In 2007, Athletics Victoria recognised John's vast contributions over the previous 50 years, with a feature on their website. The cut and paste follows

### Celebration for John Boas

Ivanhoe Harriers celebrated 50 years of service to the club by Dr. John Boas with a BBQ and presentation at their track at Willinda Park. John was a 400/800m runner in his younger days but made his mark on the sport in coaching. As well as his regular club coaching duties, John was a former National Jumps Coach. Some of his more celebrated athletes included:

Ian Campbell	Triple Jump	1980 Moscow Olympics
Gary Honey	Long Jump	1980 Moscow, 1984. Los Angeles & 1988 Seoul Olympics
David Culbert	Long Jump	1988 Seoul & 1992 Barcelona Olympics
Tim Erickson	Walks	1978 Edmonton & 1982 Brisbane Commonwealth Games

Athletics Victoria would like to join the Ivanhoe Harriers in congratulating John on his ongoing contribution to the sport.



John Boas (centre front) surrounded by (l to r) Tom Hancock, Gary Honey, David Culbert, Rob Craigie, Ian Campbell and Tim Erikson.

Earlier this year, many of us gathered at Wills St. to celebrate John's seventieth birthday. John was there of course as were the many members of his current coaching squad which is impressive indeed. Some things never change!



Ian Campbell, Gary Honey, Ian Rogers and Tim Erickson with John Boas – Feb 2011

Thanks John from all of us for your many years of dedicated service to Ivanhoe Harriers, to athletics in Victoria and Australia and to the many many athletes (walkers included) whom you have guided through their careers.

Tim Erickson  
30 May 2011