

In a Galaxy Far Far Away by Tom Macklam

My running journey started “a long time ago in a Galaxy far, far away”. Bonus point if you can name the film?

Coming from a large family of cyclists, my uncle representing Team GB in the Milk Race in the 1960's and cousins setting national standard records, I struggled to get into the top 5 finishers on “family” ride outs, which is somewhat demoralising to a young boy in the early 1980's. Maybe my Dad was in the same place, as he and my Mum became founding members of St Theresa's Athletic Club (STAC) in Leeds.

About this time, I broke my collarbone playing rugby, could not grip the bike handlebars for some time and was banned from playing contact sports at school for 6 months. The cry of “Macklam you will have to go and run around the pitch for an hour” was a regular call in PE lessons.

So I trained more with STAC and at the age of 12 pestered my Dad to run with him in an early incarnation on the Temple Newsam Ten (TNT), only to be pulled off the course by a marshal in the last mile for being under age! However, I had found something I was good at.

I ran all distances from 100m right through to 5 miles - 10k was not a regular distance back in those days so soon after decimalisation! I represented the City of Leeds at the Yorkshire Championships at 200m and 1500m on the same day, beating at least two athletes who eventually went on to run in the Olympics, and did the 4x100m relay at the end of the day too.

As the torch relay to the 1986 Commonwealth Games made its way to Edinburgh, I was selected to run the leg through Leeds City Centre and ended up on the front page of the Yorkshire Evening Post in very short shorts.

Things ramped up quickly and got serious based on the level I was running at. This caused me some anxiety issues for various reasons, to the point where I no longer enjoyed being in the environment anymore and maybe my moment passed.

After a period away and an ill-advised foray back to Rugby with Moortown RUFC, I returned to running in my mid-twenties but never regained the ability to “compete” once more. Since remarrying, moving to Pontefract and joining ARR I have a newfound love of running but from a different perspective. Although my legs will not do what they once did, my heart is still there and I enjoy the social and competitive set up we have at Ackworth.

In the current COVID crisis, my mind and waistline has benefited greatly from running in the wonderful countryside where we live, with my beautiful wife before a full day working/zooming from home. I believe in fate and synchronicity. Everything happens for a reason to make you the person you are, but still think I should do sub 7min in the mile challenge, even at nearly 50!

Now you will want to know what my time actually was in the recent ARR mile challenge: 7:09.

And ‘lifetime best’? In May 1986 at the West Yorkshire Track League I did a mile in 4:19, very much a galaxy far, far away, if not another dimension!!!

Tom Macklam, May 2020.