

JOHN (JACK) HAROLD PENNINGTON OAM

Athlete, Administrator, Coach, Renaissance Man

(a shortened version of this paper was presented at the 2013 AMA Championships dinner)

(This paper was submitted to the AMA Board to gain AMA Hall of Fame recognition for our Patron Jack Pennington OAM. The submission succeeded. Jack was inducted into the AMA Hall of Fame {the first administrator recognised} at the AMA Championships dinner in Canberra on Sunday March 31, 2013.)

Jack was born in London (UK) in 1922. He joined the British Army in 1940, serving in India and Burma as a radio technician. He emigrated to Australia (Canberra) in 1958 as a "10 pound pom". He has been married to Dot for 27 years following the death of his first wife. He has a son and two daughters. Jack retired from the Australian National University, where he had been a technical supervisor, in 1986. He had his first race in 1934, his last in 1993. Jack was forced to retire from running by a torn Achilles tendon. He was awarded an Order of Australia Medal in 2006 for services to Athletics.

Some of Jack's major sporting achievements include:

1972 World Record Men 50 1500m 4.22.4 San Diego

1972 2nd Men 50 1500m World Veterans Cologne

1972 2nd Men 50 5000m World Veterans Cologne

1975 4th Men 50 1500m World Veterans Toronto

1975 5th Men 50 3000m World Veterans Toronto

1979 3rd Men 55 1500m World Veterans Hanover

1973 1st Men 50 inaugural Australian Association of Veterans Athletic Clubs Cross Country Sydney

Jack won numerous NSWVAC and VVAC titles at 800m, 1500m and 5000m and placed many times in AAVAC Championships at 1500m. He won NZVAC Championships in M55 800m, 1500m and 5000m, besides running second in USA Masters M50 1500m in New York. He was seventh in the M55 World Veterans Cross Country Championships in New Zealand in 1981. His team won gold.

Not content with being a champion runner Jack was also heavily involved in the administration of athletics. He was a foundation member of the Wirinun Club, later NSW VAC, in 1971. He was a foundation member of the Australian Association of Veteran Athletic Clubs in 1973. He was a foundation member of ACT Veterans Athletic Club in 1979. Prior to and alongside these involvements he was a foundation member of Canberra City Harriers Athletic Club 1960, a foundation member of ACT Cross Country Club 1962, a foundation member of NSW Coaches Association 1964 (Chair ACT branch) and a foundation member of the ACT Athletics Coaches Association 1975. He is regarded so highly by these organisations that he helped found that he has been made a life member of ACT Cross Country Club, North Canberra Athletic Club and ACT Athletics Coaches Association. Not only was Jack a foundation member of these organisations he usually accepted executive positions with them.

But Jack's talents went beyond competition and administration. He is a prolific writer and researcher in athletics and fitness, writing for over 50 years on these subjects. He was inaugural editor of "Veteran Athlete" (Australia) from 1971 to 1979. He was a feature writer and contributor to magazines and journals such as: "The Harrier", "Athletics"(Sydney), "Athletics"(Melbourne), "Condition"(Germany), "Vetris"(UK), "WAVA Magazine"(Canada), "Runners World"(Australia), "Vetrunner"(ACT). He was requested by the author, Len Olsen, to review his 2001 book, "World Masters Athletics". It is worth noting that Jack's articles provided research based evidence for athletes and coaches across the world, with emphasis on mature aged athletes.

It is remarkable that Jack had the time to contribute so broadly, as he was Vice President of AAVAC from 1974 to 1979 as well as its Chairman of selectors, a delegate to WAVA Council 1975 and 1979, Patron of ACTVAC 1994 to the present and Manager of Fitness Testing for Sports Medicine Australia! As if these achievements weren't enough Jack also developed the "Symposium of Fitness and Recreation" ANU 1969 at which he was a major presenter. He developed and organised the inaugural Canberra Fun Run in 1969.

(possible position for continuation next month)

Jack has written copiously for various organisations and presented material based on research that he has been part of. This prompted him in 1995 to write and publish an autobiography that contained some of his published material along with anecdotes and historical matter that recounted his experiences in athletics. That book was "A Life on the Run". It provides major insights into the development of the science of ageing and performance in athletics. Additionally there are elements of the early stirrings of Veterans athletics around the world, Jack being a major participant in it. This book and other material written and published by Jack were seminal to Gloria Seymon's monograph, "A History of the Veterans Athletic Movement in Australia" 1997. Gloria acknowledges 41 references out of 87 are from Jack's work.

In 2007 Australian Masters Athletics Inc commissioned Jack to write an early history of the Veterans/Masters movement in Australia. He completed this work in 2010. "The Evolution of Veteran Athletics 1966 to 1981" expanded on some of the topics from Jack's earlier book and was used by Bryan Thomas as a reference for his work on the development of Veteran/Masters athletics in Australia.

The fact that Jack Pennington's work is the major reference point for understanding the development of Veterans/Masters athletics in Australia confirms him as the outstanding recorder of its history.

Jack has been a significant contributor to evidence based coaching practice through his participation in scientific research in various parts of the world: in Canberra (ANU) with Professor Weatherly, in Germany (Frieberg) with Dr Reindell, in the UK (Exeter) with Dr Travers, in the UK (Salford) with Dr Brooke. This scientific work provided cogent evidence for coaches, athletes and non-athletes on the effects of training on middle-aged men with direct application to Veterans sport. Jack used this material, along with evidence from many sources in his publications (as well as applying it in his coaching). "Veteran Athletes – The Risk Factor" in "The Veteran Athlete", "The Missing Link" in "Track and Field", "Are You Running Too Slowly?" in "Track and Field", and "Human Performance" in "A Life on the Run" are pertinent examples.

Jack Pennington's appetite for work on behalf of athletics in general and Veterans/Masters athletics in particular has been insatiable. He has been at the forefront of the Veteran's movement for over 50 years. His honesty, his knowledge, his curiosity, his friendliness, his desire to assist others to improve are legendary. Through his passion to "spread the word" about fitness, training and athletics, Jack has travelled the world in his attempts to dispel myths and introduce athletics change based on evidence, be it research or experience based. He is driven in his desire to improve people's fitness, performance and lives.

In writing to athletes, researchers, professors, politicians, authors, sponsors, Jack's desire has been constant – to inspire, to educate, to learn. In helping to create from scratch many athletics organisations, not only has Jack exhibited the drive for which he is renowned but also the concern he shows for all as he attempts to provide for the many to participate in fulfilling, friendly, yet competitive ways.

At the same time Jack has been a sounding board and friend to many considered to be legends of our athletics heritage, such as: Percy Cerutti, Ron Clarke, Dick Telford, Pat Clohessy, Arthur Lydiard, Rob De Castella. And his dedication is readily acknowledged by others. ***"Now Jack Pennington is one such philosopher. He is a distance runner's man's man. He is Canberra's Percy Cerutti." Dick Telford 1995. "In forming the Association (AAVAC) one must speak of the men who have put so much into the foundation, for a building must have a sound basis. To try to evaluate each one would be impossible. The foundation stones were Jack Pennington, Wally Shepherd and Logan Irwin"*** Ron O'Neill, ***President, AAVAC 1974.***

Jack's expertise has been acknowledged at conferences and in publications worldwide. Yet with this recognition, perhaps in spite of it, Jack remains completely approachable, ready to discuss and test ideas. This openness to people and change is a hallmark of Jack Pennington's being, demonstrated throughout his sporting life as a coach to many and offering an open house to all. Recently (2012), John Gilmour arrived at Jack's house without notice or invitation, from Perth. Jack immediately invited him to stay as long as he wished. On another occasion (1960^s) Percy Cerutti phoned from Canberra airport late at night and asked Jack to drive him 200km to a Snowy Mountains training camp. Jack responded immediately. They arrived well after midnight.

Jack is loyal without being obsequious, learned without being pompous, sincere without being pedantic. Those who know him consider him intelligent, trustworthy, quick-witted and knowledgeable. He is a true renaissance man of athletics.

Fitting Jack into AMA's criteria for Hall of Fame recognition poses some difficulties. Not because he wasn't an administrator or athlete, he was both. The difficulty arises because he crosses many boundaries beyond these two labels. He was a proselytiser on behalf of Veteran's Athletics. He was a political force on behalf of the movement. He subjected

himself to research programs on behalf of older people in sport, particularly veteran athletes. Through his writings, papers, interviews, discussions, competitions, letters, publications, research, political awareness, contacts, he has probably done more to spread the word and action of Veteran Athletics than any other Australian. He is driven by passion for athletics.

Ray Green