



Tony Nixon

**Name:** Tony Nixon

**Born:** 14-12-1947

**Date Joined:** 1962

**Personal Bests:**

400m 52.1 (51.7 R)

800m 1.55.0

1500m 3.51.0

3000m 8.26.9

5000m 14.34.5

2000s/c (steeplechase) 5.54.2

3000s/c 9.00.4

**Road**

5k 15.10

10k 31.54

**First Club Race:**

Novices CC at Chigwell Row, Oct 1962

**Favourite Race:**

No particular one.

Liked Cross country, 1500, 3000, and Steeplechase (never an enthusiast of road racing, or training, although I did a fair bit of it).

Always at my happiest on the country.

**Notable Performances:**

1. Winning the Essex Senior 1500 in 1974 (3.53.0). It was very special to me and my coach Alec Tiffin. Defending champion Tim Pribul (WG) 2<sup>nd</sup> and a young Andy Catton 3<sup>rd</sup>.
2. Winning the Reynolds Garrett CC, Southampton, 1973.  
It was a prestigious cc event with a top-quality field.  
2<sup>nd</sup> was Roger Brown (Bournemouth), 9<sup>th</sup> in the National CC 6 months earlier,  
3<sup>rd</sup> was Neil Coupland (Southampton), the only person to win the Southern Senior CC



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3 years in a row, + 13.30 5k & 28.06 10k track, **4<sup>th</sup>** Andy Catton – need I say anymore,  
**5<sup>th</sup>** Ron McAndrew (Reading) GB International Steeplechaser,  
**6<sup>th</sup>** Derek Coates,  
**8<sup>th</sup>** Roy Gill.

What an Ilford team, 4 runners in the first 8 in a top quality field.

3. Winning the 2,000 s/c at the Inter counties Junior match, 1966, at Hornchurch, and defeating the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> placers in the AAA Junior championships.
4. Winning the 2000 s/c at the 'Leyton Floodlit' meeting the following week and defeating the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> placers in the AAA Junior championships.
5. The Ilford Youths team win at the Essex CC Champs in 1965. A joyous day for me, Steve Richardson, Keith Phillips and Roy Snow, but most of all for our coach Alec Tiffin. This win was poignantly repeated last year by our current crop of hugely impressive youngsters.
6. Winning the club 10mile cc Champs 3 years in a row, the first person to do so.
7. Coaching son Robert to Essex Senior 1500 win in 2001. The first father and son to lift the Essex mile/1500 trophy. The trophy goes back 100 years so it was our own little bit of history that will last forever.

### **Biggest Disappointments:**

1. Not winning AAA Junior 2000s/c 1966. I was not well on the day and came 4<sup>th</sup>. It was the only s/c I lost all year. Raced AAA Junior champion 3 times and beat him twice, but not in the one that mattered.
2. Being away in Southampton for 9 years and missing the Ilford golden years of the 70's/80's.  
I remained a 2<sup>nd</sup> claim member during that time so that I could, and would, always do the Essex Championships.
3. Not being diagnosed with Coeliac disease until I was 32. I think this was the main, but not only, reason for my often erratic performances. Andy (Catton) perceptively observed that nearly all of my PB's were done in my mid-thirties.

### **Typical Weeks Training:**

I'd average two, sometimes 3, runs on the country – 5-6 miles and invariably with hills, plus 2 track sessions per week.

I never did high mileage, but I would always run fairly fast (till I hit the hills). I'd average about 20-25 mpw in Summer and 25-30 in winter, occasionally a bit more.

Track sessions were typically 3 miles of effort e.g. .6x800, 5x1k, 4x1200, 8-12x400,



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Pyramid session.

Also, a fair bit of speed work in the summer e.g. 6×200, 4×400.

One of the best sessions was at Cricklefield on the old cinder track, in preparation for the Essex Champs 800 – 3×440 X 1 lap jog, 54.5, 53.5, 52.5. The outcome – just beat 2 minutes and never made the final! It just goes to show that in athletics, “even the best laid plans .....

### **Favourite Sessions:**

Probably the staple diet sessions e.g. 6×800, especially when I was running well.

### **Who are the most Famous Athletes you Trained with or would like to train with:**

I've trained with Neil Coupland (13.30 5k, 28.06 10k) and Pete Lewis (1.47 800) at Southampton, Adrian Mussett (Colchester) and Andy Catton (whenever possible), Roger Mills (pre race walking days).

The athletes I would most liked to have trained with regularly were the Ilford athletes of the 80's e.g. Andy Catton, Derek Coates, Gary Webb, John Batchelor, Roy Gill, Brian Meadows, Kark Hick, Adrian Gilham, Andy Etchells, Andy Nichol, John McKenzie etc. What a special time, with so many quality runners. It must have been really uplifting to train in that kind of atmosphere.

### **Other bits:**

I have a bit of an Ilford A.C. family. As well as son Robert, my wife and younger brother Joe ran for the club. Pat was a swimmer and Joe a footballer, but they both won District and Essex Schools championships and ran for Essex at the English Schools in Blackburn, 1967. Pat ran 800 and Joe ran 1 mile. Both were just out of the medals. Pat ran for England Schools against Canada and France in Ottawa and Toronto as part of the Canadian 'Expo 67'. She also won the 800 against France at Annecy.

Joe made the final and came 6<sup>th</sup>. He went on to play professional football at Spurs, QPR, Orient and Peterborough, but never 'made it'. He emigrated to Australia and played there, his claim to fame being that he scored the winning goal in the Australian cup final.

### **How would you improve the sport?**



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1. Really value coaches. Provide appropriate training for them, support them and help them to develop.
2. Ensure the athletes work hard, but also make sure the sport is fun and enjoyable. This is important in so many walks of life. My philosophy, metaphorically speaking, is that you will run well when you are laughing. So, coaches, as many of you no doubt do already - make your athletes work but make the sessions as enjoyable as possible.

### **Favourite Athlete or Sportsman:**

1. Trevor Brooking. Not just because he is my football hero, nor because he has shown loyalty in a profession that is devoid of it, but because he is a thoroughly good human being. (P.S. Some of you may not know that although he came from Barking, he went to Ilford County High School, so we can claim a bit of him as an 'Ilfordian')
2. Andy Catton. Whereas Trevor Brooking had the luxury of a professional sports career, Andy achieved the heights that he did whilst undertaking a demanding full-time job in the City, managing a family with four very active children, and an athletic club! A great friend and a remarkable man. (And if that doesn't get me a pint, I don't know what will)

### **What other sports do you follow:**

Football (Come on you Irons).

Cricket - big Essex fan. As a youngster I'd always go to the games at Valentines Park.

Rugby Union.

Also, an active Kayaker, mostly on the river Stour.

### **Best Country Visited:**

Italy

### **Favourite Food & Drink :**

A 'Sunday roast' (in winter) and a pint of Adnams IPA

### **Favourite TV Shows:**

History and Geography programmes

### **Last Film Seen:**

Trautman (the story of German POW Bert Trautman)



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**Last Book Read:**

Birdsong (Sebastian Faulks)

**Favourite Band Singer:**

ELO (and Andrea Bocelli)

**Last Album Bought or Downloaded:**

Buddy Holly re-mix (with London Symphony Orchestra)

**Last Concert Attended:**

ELO at Wembley

**Any Pets:**

Freddie (Yorkshire Terrier)

**What are your aims for next season:**

To still be here.

**Tell us a Joke:**

There are three kinds of people: Those that can count and those that can't.



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Essex youths cc champs 1965. Keith Phillips, Roy Snow, Steve Richardson, Alec Tiffin, Tony Nixon



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Southern youths cc champs 1966



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Essex Jun. 2k sc 1966. 2nd Peter Fulcher, Chelmsford



Essex 1500 1974.



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Essex Vets 1500 1991



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Up The Hammers

- 1. You forgot to include Ernie Forsyth in the 80s training group and also the Essex vets road relay silver medal team of McKenzie, Nixon, Catton and Forsyth 1996.**

Ah, how could I forget that race! We decided we would front load the team to 'Fly the flag' for Ilford and leave Ernie to 'fend for himself' on the last leg.

John ran the first leg really well and brought us in a close 3rd, I just took us into the lead and Andy really extended it.

So, it was all down to Ernie!

Well he almost delivered the win. Whether he was lifted by the support or just plain 'running scared', I don't know, but he had a great run and held on to the lead till just before the end. Ernie's finest hour.

- 2. Seriously though how do you think that our athletes can once again achieve the heights that we enjoyed in 70s and 80s.**

It will be very very difficult to match the 70/80's team, but it can be done, if,

- a) Our youngsters keep on developing
- b) We train really well and regularly
- c) We bond as a team, like the 80's team did
- d) We can attract some more quality runners.

Team spirit is a key factor.

- 3. We currently have a great crop of youngsters, what advice would you give them for future success.**

Ron Greenwood used to famously say 'simplicity is genius'. So, don't try and over complicate things. Enjoy the sport. Enjoy the friendships. Look forward to training with your mates. Have



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a laugh, but train seriously and maximise your ability. You will have good times and almost certainly not so good times, but consistency is the major key to success, so in the bad times just 'stay with it'. (Also see below).

**4. Seeing as your average weekly mileage over your career was around 15 miles a week (being generous there) why do you think you were able to produce such great times and performances, especially as a veteran ?**

The career average miles may be correct(?), but when I was running regularly, I would average about 25 in Summer and 30 in Winter. A lot of that was good quality running which is vital, especially if you are not going to do high mileage. That was exactly the same for me as a veteran. I also did circuit training as both a Senior and a Vet which helped enormously with leg strength. I remember Fred Plum (Pam's coach) saying that if you could Military Press your own bodyweight you were 'strong', and I could do that without ever really doing any weights. I also learned a lot from Mike Smith in Southampton. Mike coached a 400m runner at every Olympics from 1964 to 2012 and so was a man to be respected. I'd had enough of running at the time but wife Pat badgered me to do something, so I joined Mike's circuit training group in a church hall in Southampton. What was striking was that there was no fancy gym equipment, just harness's and chairs. Yet at the end of the session really top quality athletes e.g. Todd Bennett, Iwan Thomas had done a multitude of exercises, had worked, and I mean really worked, every muscle in their body and were in a heap on the floor. Watching those top athletes in that church hall working so hard really brought home to me that it's not always what you do that matters, but the way that you do it.

So, the circuit training, at my peak, contributed to my high(ish) level performance. However, the key factor was probably just physiology - I didn't weigh much, had good lung capacity and was 'relatively' strong.

**5. I see you went to Southampton for 9 years (What was the transfer fee?) Why was that and did you train with another club in that area during that time? And how come you returned?**

No transfer fee and I didn't go by choice. I'd just finished a DMS & Personnel Management course at Salford University and couldn't get a job at home but got one in Southampton. Having said that, I really liked Southampton and Chandlers Ford where we lived.





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I stayed with Ilford for a couple more years but felt obligated to join Southampton & Eastleigh, which I did, and switched to 2nd claim Ilford. Alec Tiffin continued as my coach and it must have cost him a fortune in telephone calls. I enjoyed Southampton immensely, and what was interesting was that most of the middle-distance group joined in and followed Alec's sessions. However, although I enjoyed Southampton, I really wanted to get nearer to home and was happy when I got a job in Ipswich, moved to Stratford St Mary, Suffolk, (+ by then, 2 children, Robert & Paul), and re-joined Ilford 1st claim.

## **6. What's happened to your son Rob who used to be a regular at Ilford AC races ?**

Robert did a Chemistry degree at Birmingham Uni, and then got a research/Lab job with AstraZenica in Loughborough. He lived in Nottingham and joined Notts AC. Astra Zenica then closed the plant, and Robert changed career and trained to be a Primary Teacher at Leicester Uni. He's now teaching in Abu Dhabi (+ Teacher wife Louise, and 2 children). He's not running these days - he's put on too much weight, although he does play 5-a-side football. He still wears his Ilford vest if he ever goes for a run. His 7-year-old son Oliver likes to run and already has his Ilford vest!

## **7. What are your best 'Veteran' athletic achievements?**

Winning Essex vets1500 a couple of times and the Essex V60 cross country.

Topping the UK V70, 5k and 10k road and Parkrun rankings, and also 1500 in 5.18.5 aged 71 (the only track race I did).

The 10K (40.00) was probably the best age-related performance. It was 50 seconds faster than the next V70, UK cross country champion Bill Sutherland from Inverness. (Andy and I almost went up to Inverness for those championships, but it was too much hassle! I regret it). I also won the Essex vets 1500 a couple of times.

I never joined the British Masters association and never did any BMAF Championships.



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**8. Current training schedule?** I'm not running at all. Zero miles. I haven't said I'm retired, but at 72 I don't think there is going to be a comeback.

Over the the two previous years I'd run 5 miles three times a week on the country. I never ran on the road if I could avoid it. I mostly run on grass along the Stour valley. All runs would include hills, some big hills, that I would try to run up fairly hard. I would also always pick up the pace on the way home, and run the last 600m pretty quick, as though it were a race.

**9. What was your full time job when you were in your prime and how did you fit your training around that?**

I worked in Hampshire and then Suffolk in Education & Children's Services. I usually trained 4 times a week, including track sessions, so there was no real issue, although fitting in training around the children's activities could be a problem. They both played football from 8 to 16 and Pat and I always went to their matches, so it could sometimes be complicated. Robert was more of a footballer in his early days - the leading goal scorer in the Suffolk and Ipswich league in his age group most years. He had no great skill, other than putting the ball in the net, but tremendous reactions/speed. Younger son Paul was a significantly more talented footballer (played for Suffolk schools) but preferred fishing!

**10. Your 5K And 10K Road times are very impressive ! What date and where were they achieved?**

5K 15.10, Felixstowe Promenade, 24/03/86.

10k 31.54 Nike Grand Prix, Battersea Park, 12/03/86.

I think the 5k is very good, but the 10k is substantially less so.

I've never been a great enthusiast for road racing, apart from road relays - they were always exciting. I can only remember running 4 10k's - Ilford (twice), Southend and Battersea Park.

What many people don't really remember is that going back i.e. pre metrification and UK road ranking lists, racing was much more varied than it is now. You had famous races over distances of 4,5,6,7,8,9 and 10 miles! Then 'metrification' and ranking lists arrived, and races became, more or less, standardised at 5k,10k half & full marathon, with the odd 5 mile.

My best road race was actually one of those odd distances, the Newbury 9. I came 3rd in 45.07 on a tough course around the Greenham Common USAF base. It was also a fascinating



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race because it took place at the time of the women's peace protests and their peace camp went nearly all the way around the course. I' never been cheered so much! Quite surreal!

**11. Have you ever run a half or Full Marathon? If so what times and where?**

I was unwisely persuaded by Andy to run the Roding Valley, without the appropriate training. I did two 13 mile runs and thought that would get me round, which it did in 71.34. I attempted the 1976 Harlow marathon but dropped out at 20 miles with a knee ligament injury. This was also ill advised. I had done just two 20 mile runs in training. I had previously done a 25-mile charity run with Frank Gamwell (Essex 20 mile champion) which was ok, but it actually gave me a really false awareness i.e. running the distance and racing the distance are two very different things. Both races confirmed what I already really knew - you shouldn't do distance races unless you are prepared for them.

**12. Favourite Park Run and PB from that ?**

Fastest is 19.13 (aged 68) at Great Cornard, Sudbury. Favourite course is Chantry Park, Ipswich - really great grassland running, but hilly and not fast. I ran 19.23 there. Felixstowe prom is great (in the summer) if you want to run fast times and have a dip in the sea after.

**13. What is your worst Injury?**

Lateral knee ligament injury in 1967, the day after coming 14th in Southern Junior Cross country as a first-year junior (Parliament Hill). It was a real 'downer'. It kept me out of action for months, probably because I came back to running too soon, several times!

**14. Did you, or do you, do any strength and conditioning or core training?**

I only seriously did this one winter/spring in Southampton and it did make a big difference (see 4, above).



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To add to the significance of this, in the Spring Mike Smith called me to see if I would step in for someone who had dropped out of SCAAA team to race 3k at Oxford university. I had done very little running at all in the winter, but I ran 8.45. I put this down to the fitness generated by the winter of intensive circuit training, including a lot of lung bursting exercises. Mind you, don't misconstrue this; Running is more important than circuit training, but circuit training, without any doubt, definitely helps. It's 'essential' for sprinters, 'important' for middle distance runners, and 'helpful' for distance runners.

**15. Did you or do you have a stretching regime?**

I never really did so when I was younger, but now I try and stretch regularly and have a routine that starts with the head and works down to the calf and achilles.

Sprinters do this all of the time, middle distance runners most of the time and distance runners not enough of the time. They should do so, it helps prevent injury, but always first make sure you're properly warmed up first.

**16. In your heyday did you follow a particular diet?**

No. I used to eat all the wrong foods e.g. pastries and pies and was always ill. I didn't know I had Coeliac disease which was causing all the stomach problems. It was diagnosed when I was 31 and I'd fully recovered by 32/3. As a result, as Andy Catton observed, most of my best times were set in my mid-thirties. Now I don't just have the necessary gluten free diet, but generally eat much healthier than I did when I was younger.

**17. Your enthusiasm while watching races with Ilford AC Runners is fantastic - have you always been like this? Keep it up it's Inspiring to hear!**

Yes, I'm afraid I have. As far back as our youth team track and road relay days we would always be out on the course/track supporting and cheering on our club mates. Hopefully I'll be able to support for a few more years yet. Now Pam has retired we'll probably form a supporter's club.



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**18. I remember in 1998/99 you coached a Colchester Harriers Runner Richard Gaine - how did that come about?**

Dave Wright at Colchester Joggers had seen me at a few races and tried to get me to join. Knowing that was not on, he got me to just come down and run with them on a Friday night. After a few runs and a few beers and general chat about running I joined them 2nd claim. They were so open, welcoming and inquisitive about training and asked me if I would help with coaching. So, I coached what was a talented group, including Richard who became a good friend, and also Essex V40 cross country champion. The group got better and better over the next two years and the notion that they were joggers was laughable. Within a few years they went to the National Road relay at Sutton Coldfield and finished 18th, 1 second behind a very strong Basildon team. If ever you see Dave Wright, ask him about the race, and then stand back! Nothing sets him alight more than that race. He was, as Robert was, certain he got the Basildon guy on the line. Anyway, I coached all of the team, except Adrian Mussett. Richard was very good but wasn't the best natural talent in the group. Adrian Mussett excepted, Tim Bartrum was the most talented and went on to come 3rd in the Essex CC champs, at Woodford, behind Nick Wetheridge and Neil Bangs.

**19. Please describe in your opinion how Ilford AC has changed over the years you have been a member.** I find this difficult to answer because I am not at the club a lot. What I know hasn't changed is that there is a lot of talent in the greater Ilford area that doesn't always come into athletics and so the links with schools and the press side of our activities need to be a key focus. (some really good stuff lately).

**20. What's happened to all your trophies?**

Most were returned for subsequent winners. Others are in the loft.

**21. Who was your Greatest Rival in the Club in your Prime?**

Roy Gill and Andy Catton. At that time John Batchelor was 'out' with a long-term injury

**22. Can you remember the first time you met Sir Andrew Catton ? Did you**



## **become friends straight away ?**

It's odd, but I really can't remember. You'll have to ask Andy, but I think it would be around 1970? There is also something uncanny to add to this this. Andy and I have been friends for about 50 years but it wasn't till this year that we discovered we were brought up just a mile away from each other. Andy in Barkingside and me in Newbury Park!

### **23. Greatest Local Essex Runner? (Male and Female)**

Eamon Martin (edges it over Rob Denmark) and Sally Gunnell.

### **24. You used to organise the 'The Constable Country 5 Mile Race' out in Stratford St Mary years ago in the early 90's and the entrants were of the absolute cream of Essex Runners at the time. How did you manage to attract such a high quality field? Very few clubs are as strong as they were in the eighties and even the best clubs are not as strong as they were in the eighties.**

As far as I can make out the Constable Country 5 was the original 'Friday 5' in the country. The idea partly came from the Colchester Joggers Friday night club run and the drinks sessions afterwards. Some great evenings, so I thought I'd take the idea into a formal Friday night race, which as many will know, spawned a whole plethora of Friday 5's. The race itself was secondary to the social side but, probably because of that, it just 'took off'. Paul Spowage (Colchester Joggers) won the original race. I'm not sure of the exact sequence thereafter, but Andy and Derek Coates jointly won it and set a new course record of about 25.20? Amin Kokai then appeared and took it just below 25, and then Adrian Mussett took it down to 24.48 (I think). There was some really high class running, but the social part was even better. As for your other observation/question, 'why is athletics not as strong as it used to be' - I'm not sure. It could be there are now more sports and activities that people can do? It could be that athletics is too tough? It could be that work is so much more demanding for people these days and they 'don't have the time'? It could be athletics just doesn't have the glamour of other sports. I really don't know, but probably it's a mix of all of those.

### **25. Tony you already answered this to me directly, but looking back, how disappointed were you never to knock that half a second off your 3000sc time to have a sub 9min clocking?**

I bet this Q is from Gary Floate. My 9.00.4 steeplechase best was done at Crystal Palace running for SCAAA v Wales v Combined Services v British Police. Roger Bean, who was running for the police, had won in Prague the week before in 8.38 so was



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favourite, but I felt really good and was right with him and comfortable with 600m to go. As we passed the shot putt circle Geoff Capes shouted out “Go on Roger, you can beat that little squirt”. I was about to take the race on, but now I just wanted to make sure I won. So, I sat for another lap and just as we went by the shot putt circle I took off and won comfortably. Had it not been for Capes I’d have gone earlier and I’m sure I would have got under 9 minutes. Disappointing, but such is life!

**26. In your prime, who would have won a 1500m race between you and your son Rob?**

What a question! Never ever thought of that before, but I think that if it was slow Robert would definitely have won - he’s run 22.7 for 200 and I couldn’t cope with his basic speed. However, if it was fast I might(?) have won. Overall, I think if Robert hadn’t been plagued with injuries he certainly would have been much better than me up to and including 1500..