



Martin Etchells RIP 1950-2020

ILFORD AC LOSS

Former long serving Ilford AC Secretary **Martin Etchells** has passed on. Wrote our Essex County AA Chairman : Sad news that former Ilford Athletic Club road, cross-country & steeplechase stalwart, prime instigator of Sportshall athletics and past club General Secretary, **Martin Etchells**, passed away on Sunday 6th September. Believe that Martin had been battling away against cancer since 2011 - Andy Catton. Wrote the Director of Competition at the South of England Athletic Association : It is with great sadness that I have to inform you that Martin Etchells died after a long illness - Linda Whitehead. Olympian Roger Mills wrote : Good bloke, another sad loss. Everyday is a bonus. Former Southend-on-Sea AC walker June Cork wrote : He was an excellent announcer and on the too-few occasions I had the opportunity to work with him found him very professional and very helpful : I learned a great deal about announcing from him. I had no idea that he was unwell though we worked together at the SE Indoors last winter and at the SEAA U20 at Lee Valley the previous season. Other tributes have been received. Martin was both a Director & Honorary Treasurer of the Amateur Athletic Association of England and a former Sussex Athletics President.

R.I.P.

From Andy Etchells:-

Dear family and friends

There has been a veritable onslaught of tributes to my lovely bother Martin and I am sending this to you as someone who has kindly sent words of sympathy to me and/or Mum and Di. You may not have known him well, or even at all, but I wanted everyone who has been in touch to know what all the "fuss" is about. Not exactly the right word, but you know what I mean.

What I append below started as an obituary written by a third party for the AAA (Amateur Athletic Association) website which I have substantially re-written as it had several errors and made no mention of Martin's earlier life as an athlete: he was no slouch on the road in his youth. There's another more "local" obit/appreciation on the Sussex AAA website, complete with a very nice picture of him, and I see this has now been joined by a raft of personal tributes (www.sussexathletics.net).

Nearly every one of these tributes repeats the words *lovely, kind, helpful, gentleman* and he was all of those things while always being a true professional in his approach to all his activities, honorary and otherwise. From a personal perspective, I can also say that he dealt with a probably tiresome, often bumptious younger sibling in a very gracious way. He was a real big brother to me: he paved the way for my running career; let me join in on training runs with his mates when they could have left me behind; and let me crash on the floor of his digs in Portrush, Co Antrim, while at University and later at his flat in Wanstead when I first moved to London. I bought my first car off him, I was his tenant in his first house in Ilford and



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I followed him into the welcoming arms of Ilford AC (IAC).

In adult life, we had great fun collaborating on joint projects such as organising the 100 x 1-mile relay at Cricklefields Stadium for IAC and the London Marathon "Recce Runs" which *Running Magazine* promoted for several years at Martin's sports centre in Wapping. In 1981, we crossed the finish line of the inaugural London Marathon together; he was rightly proud of breaking three hours in his first attempt at 26.2 miles. In 1983, I co-opted him briefly onto the *Running* staff when we took a party of more than 100 runners to the New York Marathon. We took in the sights of the five boroughs and treated our leisurely – for then – finishing time as less important than simply "hanging out", as the Americans would say, and having a good time for three-and-a-bit hours. He will be cremated in his NYC Finisher's T-shirt.

Martin was understated and unshowy and often that can be synonymous for unsung and under-appreciated. I was lucky enough to make a career in athletics, but Martin contributed way more to the sport in myriad ways, all unpaid. People like him are the backbone of much that is good in our society. If you know of someone even remotely like this, please do what you can to let them know they are appreciated: they are not the ones who go looking for plaudits, but they deserve them all the more – and best that they hear it from you before it's too late.

Love from

Andy

Martin Etchells Obituary for AAA website

It is with great sadness that the Amateur Athletic Association has to record the death of Martin Etchells who passed away on 6th September 2020 at the age of 69.

As a teenager, Martin was a member of Stretford AC, becoming a proficient middle/long-distance and cross-country runner. At university in Coleraine, while studying for his biology degree, he took a sabbatical year as Secretary of the Athletic Union, the first flowering of his lifelong interest in sports administration and promotion.

After moving to London to become the first Manager of the newly-opened Wapping Sports Centre, he joined Ilford AC and was soon invited on to the Club Committee where he served as Honorary Secretary from 1977 to 1982. Running in Ilford's colours he posted PBs of 51:18 for 10 miles, 73:25 for the half-marathon and 2:54:06 in the inaugural London Marathon (1981).

It was at Wapping where he first came across Sportshall Athletics, which he continued to support throughout his life. George Bunner, the inspiration behind Sportshall, has said of him: "He was always a pal and you grabbed hold of him when you needed him. He would take his coat off and get stuck in."

He left Wapping to take up the role of Leisure Manager for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, in charge of everything from leisure centres to libraries to parks. After moving to



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Seaford in Sussex in 1991, he took up the post of Head of Leisure Services with Hastings Borough Council (2001-2010). He took early retirement from HBC but devoted ever more time to voluntary work, not just in athletics but also at Eastbourne District General Hospital where he was a presenter (and Hon Treasurer) for the hospital radio station and a stalwart (with his wife, Diane) of the Friends' shop.

His move to the south coast led to his immersion in athletics at all levels in the county. He became Sussex AAA Hon Treasurer, a post he held for many years and also took on this role for Sussex Schools AAA. From 2014-16 he combined his role as Treasurer with that of President of Sussex AAA.

He became well known as a commentator at national athletic events, including the Special Olympics and Island Games, but always remained willing to help out at children's events such as Sportshall and the AAA Tom Pink Relays, travelling the length and breadth of the country to do so. He was a "Gamesmaker" at the 2012 London Olympics, working inside the Olympic Stadium, and also officiated at the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. He played an important role in the London Mini-Marathon for more than a decade.

In 2010 he became Treasurer of the AAA and continued in this post until ill health forced him to retire at the AGM in March this year.

In his last few months, despite undergoing treatment for cancer, Martin did much of the preparatory work for [The Athletics Museum's website](#), which is now up and running. Jane Ainsworth, the AAA Research Associate said: "His support for the project was inspiring and I will do my level best to make sure that the museum reflects all that is good about the sport to which he contributed so much".

Martin demonstrated his love for the sport of athletics through a lifetime of volunteering: he has been a loyal, reliable servant to athletics and will be sorely missed.