

Can you elaborate on your partying with Constantina Dita?

All I can tell you is that there was a mutual coming together at the VLM post marathon party.



How and when did the ELVIS series start? How did it develop over the years?

It started in 2007 at a meeting in Barking's Britannia Pub (sadly now no more). Some local races were poorly supported as there was no cohesive policy to support them with runners from local clubs racing far and wide instead of supporting each other.

Barking, Dagenham, H90 and Ilford AC were the first clubs to join the series with Orion coming in a year later. Then I believe it was ELR, Eton Manor followed by East End RR and latterly Harold Wood RC as our notoriety spread. The ethos is to boost numbers as much as possible to generate revenue for the clubs whilst at the same time keeping entry fees as low as possible. Latterly it has evolved into an Elvis Community of local Clubs with numbers up in the 300/400s.



What's your view of the Essex Way? What has been your involvement?

Its an absolutely brilliant day out and arguably just as important in the Essex Calendar as any championship event . Founded by Thurrock Nomads over 35 years ago the race began with just a handful of teams which has now progressed to well over 80. The Nomads handed over control to the clubs where Harwich, who still run the web site, Springfield Striders and Brentwood RC have all at sometime been involved. Then about 10 years ago Sally Gillam took over as the main contact for organising the event with myself officiating as scorer and referee.

You mention coming to the track and also training over Hainault. What would you consider to be the real home of IAC?

Chigwell Row is the spiritual home and we now actually own the freehold of both the building and the land. Many think the track is our home – yet that is owned by Redbridge and run by Vision. I guess many would also view some of the local pubs as the Club's spiritual home with The Joker, The White Horse, The Cauliflower and the Red Cow featuring largely in their social histories.

What was the rationale behind starting the Harriers group?

This was really designed as a recruitment initiative to advertise the Club and to attract more runners to join. What better place to advertise Ilford AC than Ilford's premier park Valentines which many runners already used. The group was also set up for established members to either enjoy their own run on a Wednesday training night or just to help out with new recruits. So whatever the level runners could benefit from the group whilst at the same time breaking down barriers and bringing various sections of the Club together.

You have been involved with other clubs. Is there anything Ilford can learn from them?

Yes.... All clubs are diverse and operate with different mind sets and targets. However I cant help but comment on how certain clubs have embraced the legacy of the post marathon running boom in boosting their numbers. ELR and EEER have been particularly successful with their recruitment and further afield Springfield Striders are now all massive clubs who had a mere handful of members 20 years ago. Although I'm really talking about Road here the same can be said about Track and Field and even race walking in that we must continually assess our recruitment policies and keep them up to date.



You were one of the original organisers of the Valentines parkrun, are you happy with hows its grown, or is it a beast that is now out of control?

I certainly think Ilford missed out on bit of a trick here and although there have been attempts to recruit from Valentines many potential members were attracted to other Clubs (eg Barking, ELR and Dagenham) that pushed their cause more than Ilford did. People certainly have different views on parkrun and its not everybody's cup of tea but my view is that it is what it is and provided people don't see it as more important than turning out for their Club on a weekend then that's fine and it gives runners a chance for some free competition. I wouldn't go so far as to say it's a beast out of control but parkrun is certainly allowed to bypass some of the restrictions, controls and paperwork required in putting on a normal running event.

The Elvis series continues to be a success, writing this whilst watching the Tour, could you consider yellow vests for series leaders, hill points etc, maybe an Elvis relay or a summer track fixture?

I did actually consider something like this as it is a good idea. However the problem is we don't actually know who the real leaders are until 5 out of 8 races are completed. There was a relay at H90 held at Harrow Lodge Park in the early days of the series...maybe we could think about another one once we are back to proper competition.

What happened to the famous red shoes that won the boxing day handicap, were they retired unbeaten?

Ah yes the PB Walsh Targas with spikes on the front and studs at the back. Perfect in snow and ice. Waiting for the next snowy one if ever this global warming is over- think I still have them somewhere.

Why do you think relays have mainly disappeared from the road racing calendar?

I'm not sure why.... Maybe runners these days more concentrated on individual performance but my view is you cant beat a relay for team spirit. I loved being involved with putting on the Essex Road Relays at Harwich for 5 years.

If you could magically appear inside your own body and rerun an old race to get a better result, which race would it be?



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Nothing really springs to mind although I guess I could have done better in that Essex Vets XC race I mentioned.

You mention about twice not getting a prize due to errors, but what were the best and worst prizes you won?

The Limes Farm trophy was pretty small and untasteful...I've had bigger and better momentos for just finishing.

Undoubtedly the best was a giant bottle of JD which I won at the Brockenhurst Horse trials in Hampshire and presented by Ester Rantzen. Basically this was a race over a show jumping course that the horses had previously been round. The ground was therefore pretty churned up but it was also great fun trying to get over some of the jumps and I seem to recall a massive great bank we had to scale at the end.

Here's another couple of contenders for best and worst prize:-





Who was the character Billy 2 Chairs ? And did his influence over the years affect your athleticism ?

The management of the old Dolphin in Romford where we used to get changed for a lunchtime run graciously enhanced the sumptuous(Not) and claustrophobic gents changing rooms by the addition of 2 chairs on which to hang your clothes. TK and myself always tried to get over there before an old bastard named Billy who used to do weights grabbed them. We were seldom successful and he never offered even to give up even one of them. Hence he became known as Billy two chairs. I guess in a way it did improve my athleticism as it was always a mad dash to get over there before they were gone.

Can you remember in what circumstance how you came to meet the Ilford AC Running Legend LOL that is Terry Knightley at work at Save And Prosper ? And if you had not met him on that fateful day what do you think would have happened to your beckoning Running Career ?

Yes we were in the changing rooms in the Dolphin and there he was - holding Billy 2 Chairs by the throat. If it wasn't for that fateful day I would undoubtedly have had a LIFE and who knows may still have had a wife as well.....come to think of it Thanks mate!

Have you a photo of Limes Farm 4 Miles Trophy or is the trophy stored at Fort Knox ?

I've rummaged through my loft et voila - pretty special huh? No expense spared. Kinda puts an Oscar to shame.



Worst Injury ?

Long term Achilles soreness

How Many County Medals in the Clarke household ?

I'm assuming the source of this enquiry emanates from Silverware-on-sea. My answer is I've never counted them ...it's a bit like counting your money....you can never get enough.

You play the guitar TK so here's an adaptation of "The Gambler" by Kenny Rogers with words and chord changes which you can play while you are next contemplating "The Shrine"

You got to **[D]** know when to hold 'em, **[G]** Hope Kim aint sold 'em,



[G] keep the shuffle going **[D]**when you just cant **[A]** run.

You never **[D]** count **[Em]** your **[D]** medals **[G]** while you're still**[D]** in motion

There'll be **[G]** time enough for **[D]** countin' **[A]** when the race is done **[D]**

Have you ever had an 'Essex 20' haircut ? That is a shaved head to help you stay cool in the forthcoming race ! And occasionally make you like 'hard' to the opposition ?

No never wanted it or understood the logic of itcold enough out in the wilds of Essex in February without having a shaved head with your ears flapping in the wind.

What was your favourite leg of the Essex Way and why ?

Think I've done all the legs in my time either raced or reccied them but hard to say which one is my favourite. They are all quite different and have their own merits. I guess since I've been scorer/referee Leg 1 Epping to Ongar has become my favourite as I can get my run out of the way early before officiating and following the race through to Harwich.

Favourite Cross Country Course of all time?

Weald Park perhaps. Orion 15 is a classic. Ally Pally or maybe One Tree Hill. Parly Hill deserves a mention although the mud literally stinks with all the rotting spikes it has sucked under never to be retrieved again.

What is your current training programme ?

Rise from my slumbers. Check out achilles. If still vaguely attached and can hobble to car drive over Wrabness woods and attempt forward motion. If the pain aint too bad, carry on for 45mins to an hour - distance and speed immaterial at the moment.

Do you think you will ever give up running ?

I guess I'll have to one day. My last request is to have a Garmin strapped to me so my new route (hopefully upwards) can be uploaded to Strava.



In your humble opinion How has Ilford AC changed over the last 23 years ?

It certainly has become more inclusive. I think initially it suffered from a little bit of elitism; whether this was true or not is inconsequential as when I joined it was certainly the running community's perception of it which I guess was a criticism shared of any athletic club with a track and field arm. Back then there seemed to be more emphasis on track and field with many more meetings held at Cricklefields than nowadays. Now the emphasis seems to be more on Road and XC but it is good to see lately a T&F revival with more and more good coaches also beginning to emerge across all levels and disciplines. Obviously we still would benefit from even more. Hopefully the old feeling of "I'm not good enough to join an athletic club" is now a thing of the past and the Club now embraces all.

Got any more classic and hilarious stories from the archives of running to share with the readers?

There's plenty from my memoirs but I'll give you 3 for now.

The first one involved a trip up North to Bradford for the Intercounties 10k. A group of us including Malcolm Muir, myself and Geordie Barker (Havering and TGT) managed to gatecrash a wedding reception held at the hotel in which we were staying. I'd already sank a few and when confronted at the door with the enquiry "are you connected with the wedding guys?" I had the presence of mind to reply "Connected? I bloody paid for it". That seemed to do the trick and we ended up playing pool(not a euphemism) with the bridesmaids until

about 4 in the morning. I don't think Malcolm was keen to get to bed anyway being paired up with Matt Flannelly of Woodford Green as a roommate and would have to have slept with one eye open.

Naturally enough on race morning we turned up quite late for breakfast running the gauntlet of some very disapproving looks from the Essex table including legends Howard Williams and Team manager Newman Sargent. They were all ready to heap some considerable blame on Malcolm and myself and especially me had the teams not done well but we both confounded them by running blinders and I actually came away with a British Vets medal.

The second one involved one of TK's greatest rivals Pete West of Colchester Harriers in the Ipswich 10 miler. Three races start at the same time the 5,10 and 15 all doing either 1,2, or 3 laps of a circuit around the Ipswich Jaffa stadium. Consequently it isn't always easy to know who in front of you is in what race. Pete West was close to the front runners and mistakenly thought the person in front of him was in the 5 miler. Entering into the stadium and all down the finishing straight he commenced to give it large, culminating in the most extravagant of what he thought were victory celebrations...you've seen the one - drawing imaginary pistols out of his holster, making bullet noises and then blowing the smoke away. You should have seen his face when he found out he was only 2nd. Since then we always refer to him as Pistol Pete.



Third is yet another story at somebody else's expense I'm afraid. Back in the day there was a notorious pot hunter from Thurrock Harriers by the name of Dave Sifford. Dave not only rejoiced in winning a pot but was willing to travel miles from his own patch to do so. On this particular occasion he turned up at Raphaels Park in the old Victim Support 5 miler that was held more or less on the same route as the Elvis H90J Race. Anyway Dave duly emerged victorious but the prizegiving held a nasty sting in the tail for him. Terry and myself had already received our pots when they announced Dave as the winner. Then just as he's



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preening himself for his journey up to collect his prize an errant football from a game adjacent to the shelter lands smack in the middle of the presentation trophy table taking out Dave's and every other trinket left. Broken metal limbs and bodies shot everywhere. I think the Romford Recorder featured a picture of a crestfallen Mr Sifford clutching his multipart spoils with a tube of araldite in his hand.

You “dabbled” in race walking with a debut at Ilford’s Chigwell Row 10K winning a “1st Novice” prize. You were tempted to show up twice more, which also brought rewards. You described it as “mincing” in your always entertaining reports. What do you recall about your brush with race walking?

The main thing I remember was trying to keep up with the leaders at the start and failing miserably...so much so that I even got warned a couple of times for my extravagant “hey ho sailor” style. I soon settled into a more leisurely brisk Sunday afternoon walk being soon joined by my comrade Sally Gillam. As we came through Chigwell village for the last time we noticed a lady racewalker gaining on us fast from behind. I suggested to Sally that we should crack on a bit to keep ahead and managed to increase the “mince” to pull away until the finish. In the hut afterwards an official complaint was lodged by the lady in question saying that Sally as third lady had been paced by a man. It made us laugh as this was our first outing and we were just not taking things that seriously. I think Sharpie also suggested that Sally get a call up for Essex which made us laugh even more.

I've got nothing but admiration for racewalkers – its probably not so bad in these enlightened times but I often think of the abuse that they must have suffered training around the streets of the A13 corridor especially those mincing around in their union jack shorts, often the preferred garb of many.

Ilford, like many clubs now, has a much larger number of what you could call ‘casual’ runners, that is those that will race more for the enjoyment rather than put in all the hard work and sacrifices that it takes to get medals. Would you agree with that and do you think it’s a welcome addition to the sport?

Yes Ilford AC has changed and now embraces “casual” runners. Thats fine by me as long as people are deriving both fitness and enjoyment. We cant all be worldbeaters and we have to move with the times and recognise that not everybody wants to train like a maniac. That's not to take anything away from those that still want to put in the hard work and progress. Do I think its a welcome addition to the sport? To me the sport and the club can exist on all levels and is better for doing so. Gone are the days when people are turned away from the



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track for not being good enough...that's pure elitism and hopefully no longer present at Ilford AC.

Do you have a favourite trainer / sports watch?

I use a Garmin sometimesbut don't upload or anything like that. Sometimes I think we can be too addicted to technology with recording times and distances and it is often beneficial to run without a watch at all and enjoy the freedom.

You are involved in the organisation of a few races. What is your favourite? Elvis Ingatestone, Essex Way, Hilly 5, 10miler, Essex Relays.

Again I don't have a favourite. They all have their own merits and have been successful over the years so that's good enough for me.

Of all the runners you have trained with over the years - if you could pick a men's and women's 4 x 1 mile relay team of runners in their prime - who would be in your 2 teams of 4?

Sorry I cant really answer this as Ilford have had so many great runners over the years it would be unfair to leave some of them out.

Before the days of smartwatches how did you measure the distance of your training runs, and have you ever been involved in having to measure a course with a measuring wheel?

I think your brain develops its own clock and you get to know the distances and speeds. I can vaguely remember in the early days clocking some of the road distances by driving them in the car just to confirm. Of course this is a bit more difficult in the forest unless you've got a quad bike.

I've measured lots of courses with a wheel. Its quite amazing how the distance varies depending on the racing line. This means you have to go round the course at least 3 times and then take an average. This maybe explains why you guys with your tech watches sometimes think the course is either a bit long or a bit short. Its not if measured in this way. I've also worked with official Essex course measurers Clive of Benfleet and Mark Jefford who both went round several times on a calibrated bike to measure and remeasure the Valentines Park 5k course. On both occassions it took all morning and that was just for 5k. These guys



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generally work for free sometimes not even claiming their travel expenses.

Gary Floate or Terry Knightley - Who has had the worst haircut in your time at the club - or are there indeed any other contenders?

The Knightley "Wurzel" does take some beating . Gary's is just "retro". Then there's the double pony tail brigade - "Pony Tail" Pete Whiting and "the little kiddy with the Pony tail" , Malcolm Muir from years ago, both now thankfully better groomed. Rob Sargent's unkempt mane often comes into the reckoning. We forgive some old pictures of Andy as that was back in the day.

Fantasy dinner party - Alive or dead (but they would be alive for the dinner party)

3 athletes

3 footballers

3 Ilford members

3 'celebrities'

Name them - and what would you cook them?

This is really hard as I would want more than 3 of each. I think I would throw a proper fantasy party instead. Most of the people Ive already mentioned would be there but I would also invite a lot more. I also would include people like Ken Dodd, Joanna Lumley, Gazza, all of the Goons and Alf Tupper, the comic hero "Tough of the Track". Below is a selection of some of Alf's greatest battles against some of Ilford's finest. Can you name the Ilford "toffee-nose" who Alf is chasing?:-



I wouldn't and couldn't cook them anything fancy and with Alf there it would have to be a Fish n Chips supper wrapped in a newspaper.



How did you feel about Jimmy Greaves being left out of the World Cup Final, and do you think the decision was justified with Geoff Hurst scoring a Hat Trick?

Gutted at the time as he was targeted and purposely kicked in an earlier round and had recovered from his injury ready to return as England's most potent goalscorer. Yet 50 years later I guess I can see the logic in Sir Alf's decision, why change a winning team and all that and after all we won, but you never know do you...with Greavsie playing it might not have even gone to extra time. Personally I liked Hurst and would have actually played both him and Greavsie and left out Roger Hunt.



And now inevitably the alcohol related questions - anyone would think I have a reputation:-

In your opinion and vast experience Do you think drinking copious amounts of alcohol before an event enhances your race performance?

Of course not but I've greatly enjoyed trying to prove it does. Anyway life is a balance and to sacrifice a good night out for a few seconds off your time the next day seems folly to me. Still got a British Vets medal at Bradford 10k to prove you can still run well after a night on the lash.

What is your nearest pub nowadays out in the wilds of Essex and are you a regular attendee ?.

Nearest is The Castle...4 doors away and at end of Essex Way Leg 9. You wont believe it but I don't go in there much and no I'm not banned.

If you were locked in a pub overnight and could have 3 Ilford athletes in there with you, who would they be, and in order who would pass out first and last?

Bill Fothergill was a 100 pints and a 100 miles in a week man so he would have to be there, then obviously Peter Clinch who could certainly hold up a corner although generally ended up sleeping in a gutter. The third would have to be Malcolm whose performance at the Chelmsford beer festival one year was legendary - it took me 30 minutes to walk him from the corner of his road to his house 20 metres away that night. So Muir would definitely go first but it would be a close thing between the rest of us and would probably depend on what we were drinking.

Would you consider doing any of the following races / would you have wished they were around when you were at your prime?

Beer mile

Marathon du medoc (wine marathon with great wines on offer as you go round)

Beer lovers marathon <https://beerlovermarathon.be/>

How do you think you would have done at his running and drinking peak in these



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races?

Well up for all of them.

Judging by some of these questions I suppose a lot of people would have put their money on me.