



Gary Coombes

Name: Gary Coombes

Born: 23rd February 1972 – age 49

Date Joined: April 2018

Personal Bests:

Parkrun: 16.35 (2020 Raphael's Park)

5k: 16.25 (2019 Hyde Park)

5m: 28.22 (2018 Wix)

10k: 34.31 (2019 Southend)

10m: 55.59 (2019 Stebbing)

HM: 76.21 (2019 Pleshey)

Marathon: 3:43 (only ran one back in 2005 – it hurt so bad I vowed then and there never to run another!)

First Club Race: Memorable Little Bromley 10k Essex Champs race in 2018. Managed to nip ahead of clubmate Steve Philcox that day and finished with a then PB of 36.10

Favourite Race: So many to choose from! I love all of the Essex County Champs Road Races as they are always highly competitive and I have a 100% record of pb'ing every time I run one! If I had to pick one it would be the 'Stebbing 10'. For sheer enjoyment, I've always loved the low-key 'Mercury 10' race put on by Orion Harriers which is a tough 10 miler race taking in a picturesque route in and around Epping Forest.

Notable Performances: Stand out for sure was winning Essex County V40 Gold for my 5th



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place at the Stebbing 10 miler back in 2019 in 55.59. Not sure I could have run any better that day.

I also fulfilled a lifelong ambition to run under 17 mins for 5k. First achieved at Hackney Parkrun when I squeaked under this target in 16.59! Later on, I managed to improve that time to 16.25.

I was immensely proud to be crowned the V40 Elvis series winner in 2018 and retaining it again in 2019.

I have also won the Orion Forest Five mini 3 race series v40 winner twice.

Obtaining a Series 3rd place in the v40 category for the Essex Cross Country Series was also a huge honour given the quality of the fields in those races.

Biggest Disappointment: A constant stream of injuries always seemingly struck when form was reaching a new high. I've learned from those setbacks the hard way! Race-wise, I felt flunked the 2019 Essex XC Vets champs. Was in good form at the time but couldn't get going and finished well below expectations.

Typical Weeks Training at your peak. 55-65 miles.

- A good number of tempo 10k ish runs would form the basis of most week's training. Sometimes going out twice a day.
- 2x track sessions - relatively low volume at each
- Long Sunday run over Hainault of around 12-15m.
- Park run some weeks followed by steady miles
- A hill session to retain core power and strength

I'm managing fewer miles currently but am trying to focus more on quality sessions.

Favourite Sessions: Working with Gary Floate and the younger group of athletes was often humbling but the payoff was huge! I can't forget coach Robbos's summer sessions over Hainault Forest which are always hugely enjoyable. These days running around Leigh-on-Sea with Terry Knightly has become something I really look forward to. He has so many great



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stories and thanks to him I now know lots of great routes around the area.

Favourite race distance. 10 miles

Favourite event - Track, Road, or Cross Country: Road closely followed by XC. Not a massive fan of the track but have tried a few events including getting talked into running the steeplechase which I still have the occasional nightmare about! Those hurdles are so high and... yes I did fall into the water on the very first lap!

What advice would you give our current crop of youngsters: Consistency is key for those that want to improve or compete at a good level. Attend sessions regularly and listen to your coaches who have a wealth of experience. They have been there and done it. Their experience is invaluable so tap into as much of it as you can. Also, take time to appreciate that you can run and run well – not everyone can! Enjoy making friends and extending your social circle through the sport and finally, appreciate the excellent health benefits our great sport provides.

Who is the most Famous Athlete you Trained with or would like to train with:

'Rocket' Ronnie O'Sullivan is the most famous I've had a run with but I appreciate he isn't a famous athlete. I would have liked to have been on the same track as Steve Ovett back in his heyday. You were either an Ovett or Coe fan back in those days and Steve's working-class background and gritty attitude was something I felt I had more of an affinity with.

How would you improve the sport: Whooa! Big question! Like every one of us who loves athletics, we can see that the sport at the ground level requires a bit more funding. Tracks and stadia around our general area are often in desperate need of maintenance and you only have to look at our Cricklefields facility to see it needs a bit of love – particularly the all import track surface. Ensure athletics is on the school curriculum and there is a clearly defined path for those that show talent/interest/commitment.

You only have to look at what the likes of Parkrun has done to the sport to see that good ideas can make a real difference.

Favourite Athlete or Sportsman: Daley Thompson was probably my favourite UK athlete whilst growing up. The way he dismantled the opposition with incredible athleticism was a joy to behold. He was also great at sports psychology and seemed to enjoy playing mind games with his fellow competitors! I was also a big fan of cricketer Ian Botham during his best years. Particularly during the famous Ashes series in 1981.



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What other sports do you follow:

- Football
- Athletics
- Rugby Union
- Boxing
- Cricket
- Snooker

... Most sports really but not a fan of motorsport.

Best Country Visited: Loved beach holidays in Turkey where I visited a good few times, but a trip to St Lucia many years ago was the highlight – just fabulous.

Favourite Food & Drink: I'm lucky enough to enjoy a wide range of different foods. I can literally eat anything! A traditional Sunday Roast still ranks high on my list but I do really enjoy a spicy Indian meal and Lamb Rogan Josh is amongst my favs. More recently I have introduced more fish into my diet and I enjoy knocking up a good quality fish pie absolutely stuffed with cod, prawns, and salmon!

I have enhanced my cooking skills during the lockdown period and even enjoy a bit of baking now. Inspired in part by Pam and Jim Newlands fabulous bread pudding!

Favourite TV Shows: 'Breaking Bad' still right up there as one of the best things I've ever watched.

I love detective shows and 'Bosch' and 'Luther' are two of my favourites. I'm also a big fan of real-life crime documentaries and who doesn't like the nature shows that legend David Attenborough has been churning out for most of my lifetime.

Last Film Seen: 'Without Remorse' on Amazon Prime.

Last Book Read: 'Harrier 809' Story of Britain's Legendary and innovative Jump Jet.

Favourite Band Singer: Robert Plant of Led Zepellin – an amazing frontman to an amazing band. You surely would have to include Bob Marley as one of the most influential frontmen of



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any era.

Last Album Bought, Downloaded, or streamed: Was playing a bit of Aretha Franklin recently so probably that.

Last Concert Attended: Southend-based modern soul band called 'The Milk' at Islington AH. Great band have seen them 4 times now!

Any Pets: No not a per lover I'm afraid! I did grow up in a busy household and we always had a family dog and a few cats. I used to love taking one dog out for a walk in my younger days and those that know me won't be surprised to know that I enjoyed 'racing' with it! I'd throw a tennis ball one way whilst sprinting off fast as I could in the opposite direction! I was always caught but the dog loved that!

What are your aims for next season: Consolidation really. The lockdown has changed some of my perspectives. I love running but perhaps now I'll calm down a bit with regards to competing in so many races. The one motivation I do have is to be a competitive V50 which will happen in Feb 2022. I have viewed some of the Ilford men v50 records and I feel if I remain fit I can certainly run times that will get me well into the top 10s across a variety of distances! If I can bump my now regular training partner Terry Knightly down the list a little then that will add to the banter we already share during our weekly runs around Leigh! ☐



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FOLLOW UP

Why did you initially start running

I have always enjoyed taking part in sports. Football was my passion as a lad growing up. I played striker as a lad but eventually ended up playing on the wing. I trained with the West Ham academy at the age of 13 when John Lyall was Manager. Obviously to achieve anything at football means you have to be prepared to run a fair amount so I suppose things began there.

Later on, I started running to break up the monotony of regular gym workouts. I remember running about 12 miles a week at first. I usually ran one or two half marathons a year but that was it in terms of races.

I ran in one of the first Parkruns over at Raphaels park with my son Nathan back in 2015. Being a competitive soul I decided that I wanted to try to improve on my running so over the next few months I ran more and more and pondered joining a club.

What made you join Dagenham 88 Runners

A desire to improve my running times. I originally applied to join D88 in 2015. I recall Ian Cummins replying back to my email telling me to come over. I left it another year before I showed up!

I quickly fell in love with the club running scene. Club runs, track nights and my first race appearance – the D88s Elvis 2015 race.

Why did you leave Dagenham 88 to join Ilford AC

To challenge myself and improve further as a runner. The Daggers were a great bunch and two seasons there provided me with all I needed to know about the local running scene. I had a lot of fun but participating in team-based running events started to disappoint me. We often could not get out 4 scoring runners. I started to take notice of the happy-looking Ilford AC bunch who were in attendance at most races. Coach Robbo started to provide help, encouragement, and advice. I started to get closer to the Ilford contingent and it just seemed



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the right time to join in 2018 rather than sign up for a 3rd season with the Daggers.

How did you get your Marathon place in 2005 and did you do much training for the actual race

I received a place via the ballot. I did quite a bit of training but I wasn't a club member back in those days and just relied on basic advice provided by fellow gym members and stuff I'd read on the internet!

I maxed out in training at 20 miles. It wasn't enough in hindsight and I struggled badly on the day. Legs started to seize up as early as mile 17. Whilst the fans and general support were memorable the pain far outweighed those positives! I just decided it wasn't for me after that. I love running but if I'm honest I don't enjoy it enough to want to be out on my feet for 3 or 4 hours! However, I do of course admire those who put themselves through it!

Tell us what other sports and training have you done in the past

I mentioned football in a previous question. I played for teams from the age of 11 up to 28 years old so quite a chunk of my sporting life was dedicated to playing. I decided to call it a day when I partially ruptured my cruciate ligament playing at Barking FC in 1999.

Beyond that, I played cricket regularly up to the age of 15 - making a name as a bit of a demon fast bowler! I played a bit of tennis during the summer months and I was regular down the snooker Halls at Stratford, Upton Park and Barkingside!

Favourite Park Run and Why

In terms of a Parkrun course I quite like Harrow Lodge as it's always a great workout given the undulating terrain. It's never about running a fast time there and I think because of that I enjoy it more.

My single favourite Parkrun was on New Years Day 2020 over at Raphaels Park when I ran a v45 course record of 16:35. There was a record number of runners in attendance that day (over 500) and it seemed like at least half the field were cheering me on! It was an amazing feeling and its something I don't think I'll ever forget.



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Favourite Running shoes and why

Predictable I know but I'll have to go with Nike Vaporflys. Truly game-changing footwear but with a bank-busting price tag to match! I do think wearing these have been responsible for a good few of my personal best times!

Also worthy of a mention are my trusty Innov8 X-talon shoes which allow me to run through the muddiest of Forest terrain even in the worst of conditions.

What Job do you do and does it affect your training

I have worked as an IT engineer / Consultant for close to 30 years now. I currently work for a very small company based in London. We have 22 employees in total.

I work in what we call the Project Delivery Team and mostly my role is to take IT requirements from our clients and produce a documented design.

Once the design is agreed I often have to build out the IT components - i.e. servers and networking etc, test it and hand it over to other support teams.

Like many, I have been able to work from home for the past year and this has aided my training. It is now easy to pop out in the morning for a run, get back for a shower, breakfast and still be logging in for 9am start!

I do have to work the odd evening and weekend but usually, there is someone in the team more than willing to take the overtime so I can train consistently most times. I have been lucky in that regard.

What School did you attend and did you excel at sport in it

I went to Manor Road Junior school and then Rokeby Secondary. Both based in Stratford. I was captain of the school football team and that was my main sporting passion during those days. I also enjoyed playing cricket and I was a pretty good fast bowler in my youth!

Do you think losing weight and following a good diet has affected your performances



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Is this a question from Terry by any chance!

The first time I met Terry he commented that I had a good running style but I'd improve greatly if I lost 2 stone!

After my football days were over my primary exercise was obtained from weight training. I lifted heavy weights for a period and I intended to bulk up my muscle mass. I was taking protein supplements and my diet was based on muscle growth. I started to gain muscle but after a while, I realised I didn't like it! I felt bulky, heavy and slow.

During my first year as a club runner, my weight started to come down rapidly and this had a direct impact on my running times. This has continued over the years and yes I can state that the lighter I am the better times I tend to be able to achieve. I do believe though that the years doing lots of weights has given me a very strong core strength which has been advantageous in its own way. Nowadays I ensure I eat well – fish now forms a large part of my diet and I only eat meat a maximum of twice a week.

What's it like Living and training now in sunny Leigh-On-Sea ? And ever swam in the sea there

I love the Leigh on Sea area! The running routes are just amazing. Whether running along the Seafront, through beautiful Belfairs Forest, up and down the extreme hills at Hadleigh Park or just running on local roads... there's something for everyone. I have loved the move away. I have been made to feel very welcome by the local running community around the area and this has helped me settle in very quickly. It feels like home!

Swimming? Not a chance of getting me into that sea! I saw people venturing into the sea during the winter months as I ran past and I thought you have to be bonkers to want to do that!

Greatest Running Ambition

Essex County Gold medals represent the holy grail for me. I was lucky enough to win one in 2019 at the Stebbing 10 mile race. I would like to win a few more yet!

I still have a few PB aims as well. I'd like to run a half marathon in 75:xx and beat my long-standing 5 mile best of 28:22 which I'll be hoping to do at the Pleshy race coming up soon.



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Do you think, injury permitting, you will continue to run for the rest of your life

I'm a bit heavier than the average runner and I have had my fair share of knee-related issues. I would like to run well into my 50s by beyond that I feel I will retire before I'm 60. But... we shall see how the body feels!

I have had to make some allowances to be able to retain some running longevity. I won't run a marathon ever again and even half marathons are a rare event. Day to day my training is more geared towards distances from 5k to 10m. By doing that I'm hopeful I can last a bit longer!

You are a popular member of the club so What is it you like about Ilford AC and it's members

The club for me has a hardworking humility about it. Everyone is very welcoming and supportive. I like the diversity of the club which generally is representative of the local area. It caters for all ages and abilities and whatever your running ability everyone is made to feel welcome.

I have trained with many different people of many different ability levels and I can honestly say its always enjoyable which for me is a key requirement in my running.

How many running club vests do you own

Too many! Eight now I've had a count up!

Ilford

Daggers - former club member

Barking RR - 2 years 2nd claim member

Woodford - joined 2nd claim 2017

Eton Manor - I gave my Hackney Half place to a friend who is a member. He got me a vest in return.



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Victoria Park Harriers – 2nd claim member 2018

Benfleet – currently 2nd claim member

Roding Valley Runners – Gifted from friend Bob Glasgow

How many pairs of trainers in your selection

I have around 25 pairs of trainers in total!

In my current rotation I use;

Saucony Triumph 18s – heavy but cushioned trainer – soaks up road miles

Nike Vaporfly – Race day choice

Hoka Mach 4 – good alrounder. Light and nimble

Nike Infinity Run – Very cushioned, great for recovery runs

Innov8 x-talon 255 – for muddy forest runs.

Have you ever swore at a supporter or official in a race

It turns out that I have! At Writtle (oh yes my favourite course!) I struggled to get up the ridiculously muddy hill and was losing ground after working so hard to get back in touch with my peer group after a poor start.

At the bottom of the hill I was caught by a camber at the bottom of the slope and was heading sideways toward the lake rather than up and over the hill.

At this point, I thought I heard someone shout something along the lines of ‘Oh, come on!’ which made me see red for a moment. I uttered a few expletives out loud, in frustration. I later learned that it was our own Billy that has offended me with his words of encouragement! Oh, how we laughed but I did feel bad actually. Swearing is not smart or



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clever people so I won't be doing that again!

Do your children show an interest in athletics

Nathan is 18 and Kyle is 12, neither have showed great interest in athletics which is a shame. Football has been their passion over the years.

Nathan does like running the odd 5k and his best is around 20:30. He's capable of more! Kyle has more natural athletic ability but hasn't yet done anything noteworthy in terms of athletics. There's still time!

First running club

Dagenham 88 Runners 2016-2018.

Best or favourite race moment.

So many memories!

I think the euphoria of achieving my 5k PB at the last Friday of the month race in Hyde Park ranks right up there. 16.25 I ran that Friday lunchtime – a time I never thought I would be capable of. I was on cloud 9 for a good week after that!

Favourite running terrain

I have a love for gnarly beaten-up off-road trails. The sort in which you get nice views of the surrounding area. Epping Forest is probably my favourite place to run through.

Biggest rival

Orions Bob Glasgow was my main rival during the 2019 season. I tended to beat him on the road and he had the edge over the hills and mud. I enjoyed the rivalry as it brought the very best out of me. We became good friends and I still pop over to Loughton or Epping now and again to meet up with him for a chatty run.

These days I have some good vets near me over Southend way. Matibini Matibini is a very funny guy as well as a talented runner who is around my age. Also Eton Manor vet duo Gazz Towers and Paul Boddey are formidable opponents on their day.



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What football team do you support

Arsenal fan since birth! My family come from the Islington area hence I have a natural affinity with the club.

Doctor Who approaches you and says you can go back and witness any event in history - What would it be?

A few suggestions would be;

Jesus Christ rising from the dead after crucifixion (would answer a few questions)

Egyptians building the Pyramids (how?)

Roswell incident

Man landing on the moon.

England winning the 1966 world cup

Do you still follow the singer Nick Corbin, and what is he up to

Yes I do. Nick Corbin was lead singer of a band called New Street Adventure that started to pick up on a few years ago.

I saw them perform live 6 or 7 times. Sort of a London-esque soul backed with attitude I liked the fact they were a bit different and had something to say.

Nick left the band in 2018 and went solo. His career has hit the buffers a bit since then. However, he recognised me at another gig at Rough Trade record store in Shoreditch and ended up watching the band set with me and my brother that night. That was pretty special! He also got us into his next gig on the guest list which felt quite special.

He released a solo album last year but due to covid was unable to promote it effectively. He also recently started his own record label.



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Are you a big fan of athletics generally or is it more the major events you are interested in

Generally, the major events but I do keep a watching brief on all runners at Ilford AC and some of the outstanding runners in our general area – such as Southend's Adam Hickey.

I have seen you running with your son over Hainault. Has he got the potential to be a good runner or is he more interested in football?

Yes – he's more interested in football – much like I was at his age! Nathan is of heavy build and in terms of running at least, his strengths have always been over shorter track distances. I saw him run a 400m race for his school a few years ago and was impressed with what I saw. I have of course encouraged him to do a bit more running and he now runs 5ks on a fairly regular basis.

I tend to best him over any sort of long distance but short sprints I can't get anywhere near him!

June 28th - You are handed tickets to a mask free no restrictions Led Zeppelin reunion concert, with a meet and greet afterwards then joining the band and roadies for a 70's disco in an old warehouse in Clacton.

You are allowed to bring 10 guests. Are you going, and if so which 10 people are you inviting.

Oh yes I'll be going!

First guest, Terry Knightly – with his hairstyle he'd fit right in! I know he's also a big fan.

Other than that it would have to be a selection of close friends and family members. Just people that I know would enjoy the experience and those whose company I enjoy!

You win a prize on a Radio show. You can choose one of the following -

A home and away ticket for your favourite football club for 4 years, including any cup games

A free pass to any gigs you want to attend in London for 4 years for 2 people



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A ticket to any athletics event you want, anywhere in the world for 4 years.

What are you choosing?

I'd choose the free gig pass I think!

I love going to live music gigs in and around London and I managed 12 gigs in 2019 in amongst all the other running feats I did that year.

I'm a big fan of Northern Soul, Funk but also like a bit of 70s rock and a whole bunch of other stuff in between. I read a fair bit of music press and I tend to pick up on up-and-coming bands that operate a bit under the radar.

I prefer small intimate venues rather than the rock stadium-type gig.

Popular gigging haunts over the years have been; Jazz Café, Ronnie Scotts, Islington Assembly Hall, Union Chapel, and Dingwalls. Rough Trade East is a fantastic record shop that also put on live short sets which I've attended after work on quite a few occasions.

Celebrity dinner party. 6 guests alive or dead.

Who are the guests and why?

What would you cook them and what are you drinking?

Micky Flannagan

Ronnie Corbett

Freddie Starr

Michael McIntyre

Ricky Gervais

Victoria Wood

Why? Well obviously it would be a complete riot! There would be so many humorous stories being told. I don't think anyone would actually notice my cooking!



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I did consider key historical figures, musicians or high achieving sports people but ... I think I'd prefer to watch Freddie Starr doing Mick Jagger impressions in my living room!

I think this lot are a rootsy bunch so I think a good Sunday roast would go down a treat. Beef, Yorkshire puds, an endless supply of spuds and of course thick gravy covering the lot.

Anyone that knows me well would know that I would have Bread Pudding for dessert with custard!

Nothing spectacular drink wise, a selection of fine wine and beers should be enough to keep the laughter going!

Who would win out of you and Wayne Hick in a 400m Hurdles race?

Wayne has seen my hurdling technique so I think he would still have more than enough in his locker to smash me over the distance!

Ilford AC has great runners, like yourself, and has a long history of great runners. If you could somehow (lets assume Doctor Who is involved) appear in a mixed 400m relay race with 1 male and 2 females from Ilford at their absolute peak - who is in that team with you?

Females: Sharon Honey and Pam Jones. Sharon is still an active member of the club these days and ran some pretty serious times in her day. Pam - well she's just an absolute legend, isn't she? It would be an honour and a privilege to be in a team with both of these ladies. I would also live in hope that Pam would bake a fresh batch of bread pudding especially for the occasion!

Male: Someone who is good company and isn't half bad at the actual running. I'd go with Malcolm Muir who in his pomp was an absolute force to be reckoned with.

It would be an interesting team I think!

Why do you think that Ilford AC attracts such a wide range of runners (in terms of ability)

Good runners are always keen to come over to improve, yet we have a large group who whilst they may never win anything feel just as part of the club as those that



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do.

Ilford AC is a very diverse club for one and every member in my experience is made to feel very welcome – regardless of running ability. I believe our members are amongst the friendliest around the local circuit. Running brings people from all walks of life together. Different ages, different backgrounds, cultures and sometimes from different places around the world. Personally I love the diversity and inclusiveness of the club.

We have at least one common bond by being members of IAC and the rest just happens naturally. Many lifelong friendships have been formed through being a member of the club and that can only be a positive thing.

I also like the way the club focuses on our younger runners. Coaches are always on hand to organise sessions, offer training advice, and occasionally throw a comforting arm around a runner during times when things are not going well. The club also has a long-standing history which personally I love. When looking at our past runners achievements you can just tell it's a club that has had real standing and has been a positive influence in and around the local area.

We also have club legend Andy Catton at the helm. A man who has immense respect due to the incredible running feats he achieved whilst running for Ilford AC during his best years. He's also a very humble and approachable person who I think embodies what our great little club is all about. All these things make me proud to be a member of our great club.



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