

*“ It is only by looking at our history that we discover the future.”*

*Michael Parkinson*

One of the great legacies of the 1970 Commonwealth Games was Meadowbank Stadium. The echoes of these Games had barely subsided when Yvonne Murray walked through the revolving doors at the main entrance as a youngster to train and begin a journey that would take her to unimaginable glory.

Spotted by Science teacher and thrower Bill Gentleman while playing Hockey at Musselburgh Grammar School, Murray took to running like a duck to water.

In 1981, the sixteen- year -old won the British Schools 3000m in 9:30.0, a best performance. The following year, Murray was selected to represent Scotland in the Brisbane Commonwealth Games over 3000m. On her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday she finished 10<sup>th</sup> in the final clocking 9:24.45. The winner was New Zealand’s Anne Audain who broke the Games record running 8:45.53. Murray also ran 4:18.36 a few days later finishing fifth in the heat of the 1500m behind Christine Boxer who went on to win the final in 4:08.28. Murray also set the British Junior 3000m record and was 6<sup>th</sup> in the European Junior Championship 3000m in 1981.

The seemingly frail looking lass with a strength core of iron forged by methodical systematic training and racing was prepared for her next challenges. Murray also had tough mental combative qualities, perhaps partly acquired, by fighting through the cruel icy winds of the North Sea near her home while training in the winter months.

On the roads on the outskirts of Musselburgh, Murray progressed to arduous 5 x 1mile repetitions together with short recoveries. She did the running, her coach did the car driving and timekeeping! Her conditioning and quality track work was undertaken at nearby Meadowbank and she was often seen on the soft meandering tracks alongside the River Esk with other members of the School athletic club, stop- watch in hand. Gentleman often paced her over 200metres interval repetitions or the latter stages of her 600m runs at nearby Meadowbank. Murray was a prolific racer and the phrase “wrapped up in cotton wool” never applied to her. She raced regularly for Edinburgh AC and

often supported the Edinburgh Schools Cross Country League with her presence. Some thought that burn out might be an issue but on the contrary, Murray was building a huge reservoir of strength endurance to take on to the world stage.

In 1983, Yvonne Murray defeated Paula Fudge, the first official women's 5000m world record holder, at Meadowbank in the UK 5000m Championships. Two years later she finished second behind future Olympic silver medallist Wendy Sly at the UK Championships in Cwmbran over 3000m to fully establish her self amongst the British women's distance running elite. However, the arrival of Zola Budd from South Africa in 1984 was to pose the greatest threat to Murray's ambitions. Even so, the media circus that followed Budd was to give UK women's distance running massive exposure. Although Murray was almost 20 seconds slower than Budd, Gentleman confidently reassured her that she would soon reach and eclipse Budd's world class times.

After leaving School, Murray's boss at work built her a shower and she continued to train with the Musselburgh Grammar School Running Club at lunch times. The basket that contained trainers for "anybodies use" was also becoming very exotic through her sponsorship deal with a well known sports brand. Murray also gained chicken sponsorship from a local butcher. It was light years away from Budd and ninety thousand dollar Olympic re-runs- the fee reported that Budd received for running against Mary Decker after their unfortunate 1984 Los Angeles 3000m clash when Budd accidentally tripped Decker up and finished tearfully after being booed by a hostile and unsympathetic US crowd.

In 1986 Murray set a new British and Commonwealth Games record finishing second behind Romania's Olympic champion, Maria Puica over 2000m at Crystal Palace. Importantly, psychologically, Murray had also beaten Zola Budd. Let the Games begin!

### **Commonwealth Games - Edinburgh**

The XIII 1986 Commonwealth games in Edinburgh were boycotted by half of the 54 nations and suffered financial hardship. The weather was guaranteed, the choirs were even given tartan umbrellas at the opening ceremony. Even so, in retrospect the crowds at these Games saw some of the greatest athletes of all

time in action. A certain Steve Redgrave became the first man in rowing to win three gold medals at one Games at Strathclyde Park. He took the traditional ducking for his troubles. The track and field also had its fair share of legends on show. Sally Gunnell won the 100m Hurdles, Tessa Sanderson left Fatima Whitbread sobbing inconsolably as she unleashed a dramatic late winning Javelin throw (Official Neil Donachie tried in vain to console her), a slighter built Ben Johnson won the men's 100m, Steve Cram majestically won the 800/1500m double while in a gesture reflecting the ethos of the friendly Games, Edinburgh's Paul Forbes moved across to lane two to allow a struggling Sebastian Coe through to qualify for the men's 800m final (Coe withdrew from the final) and Daley Thompson cheekily survived a pole snapping in the pole vault to win the Decathlon. Tom McKean held onto Cram's vest-tail to collect silver in the 800m, Geoff Parson's won silver in the High Jump, Sandra Whittaker took bronze in the Women's 200m and the Mens' 4x100m won bronze. Welshman Steve Jones finished third in the 10 000m and Steve Ovett, the only British athlete to win major championships over 800m, 1500m and 5 000m, said goodbye with his wave as he glided off the top bend to take the 5000m title, and the "blue chips of ice" melted on the podium. Left in his wake on that August day were Tim Hutchings (13:11.5, 1984), world cross- country silver medallist, and Jack Buckner who won the European gold the following month in 13:10.15.

John Graham went for gold in the men's marathon and led the race at Prestonpans before being overhauled by Australian legend Rob De Castella, eventually finishing fourth as he had done at the Brisbane Games in 1982.

Yvonne Murray fought hard in the Women's 3000m but was over powered by the Canadian's Lynn Williams, future world-cross country champion, and Debbie Bowker on the home straight. Even so, it was a massive improvement from her tenth place in '82. The following day, Liz Lynch (McColgan) wore down the threat of New Zealand's Anne Audain to win gold and take 35-seconds of the Commonwealth record. Murray had another rival to keep an eye on and she was rather local.

To end the track season, Murray took another great step forward taking bronze at the European championships in Stuttgart, taking 5:76 in her heat and a further 12:41 seconds in the final of the 3000m.

## **The Olympic Cauldron - Seoul, South Korea**

*“The past was bad, the future hid; it’s good or ill untied, O*

*But the present hour was in my pow’r....”*

*Robert Burns, My Father Was a Farmer*

The 1988 Summer Games were the second summer Olympic Games to be held in Asia and the first since the 1964 Summer Games held in Tokyo, Japan. 160 nations took part, but these were the last Olympic Games of the World’s dominating sport powers, the Soviet Union and East Germany, as both ceased to exist before the next Olympics.

Murray improved her 3000m PB by 8:13 seconds to take bronze in the final of fifteen, thirty-five athletes competed in the event altogether.

### **Olympic Women’s 3000m Final - September 25<sup>th</sup> 1988**

1 Tetyana Samolenko (URS) 8:26.53

2 Paula Ivan (Rom) 8:27.15

3 Yvonne Murray (GBR) 8:29.02

Athletes behind Murray included Yelena Romanova (URS, 4<sup>th</sup> 8:30:45), Natalya Artyomova (URS, 5<sup>th</sup> 8:31:67). She had effectively pierced the iron curtain. Wendy Smith-Sly (7<sup>th</sup> – 8:38.43), Lynn Williams (CAN, 8<sup>th</sup>, 8:38.47), Annette Sergent (USA, 12<sup>th</sup>, 8: 49.14) and Deborah Bowker ( CAN, 15<sup>th</sup>, 9:11.95) were others in a high quality final. If anybody doubts how hard it is to win an Olympic medal just ask the world marathon record holder, Paula Radcliffe.

Murray’s preparations included treadmill running amongst equatorial plants in Edinburgh’s Botanical gardens hot-house to acclimatise to the heat and humidity of Seoul. Walker Don Thompson had likewise turned on the hot taps in his bathroom to create the conditions he would face in Rome in 1960. His ingenuity was rewarded with an Olympic gold in the eternal city.

IN 1989, Murray became the first British woman to win a world cup event and in 1990 won the European title in Split Yugoslavia, with a devastating kick from 500m out to catch the Russian Yelena Romanova out and she held on by 5 metres in a time of 8:43.06. Murray had in her armoury an 800m PB of 2:00.80 '87 and a 1500m best of 4|:01.2 "87 (Bislett).

She won a further silver medal at the European Championships in the 3000m in Helsinki to give her a full set of medals while alongside Tom McKean she took gold (3000m) at the World Indoor Championships (3000m) in Toronto in 1993. She was the first British women to win a world indoor title.

Although she led the Olympic 3000m final going into the final lap in Barcelona in 1992, she faded to finish 8<sup>th</sup>. Following a sciatic nerve injury, Murray did not bid for an Olympic place in 1996.

Murray won a Commonwealth silver over 3000m in Auckland in 1990 and completed the set, like her European medals, with an emotional golden1000m run in Victoria in 1994 as the sun set on her athletic career.

Yvonne Murray also won five Scottish and AAA outdoor titles. She was awarded an MBE and was inducted into the Scottish Sports Hall of Fame in 2007.

The seemingly wee fragile lass from the honest town of Musselburgh had done *guid*. The now aging old lady of Meadowbank Stadium would have smiled as she had once again witnessed and helped to write another chapter in Scottish sporting history.

## **Yvonne Murray Honours**

### **Olympic Games**

1988 Bronze 3000m Seoul

### **European Championships**

1990 Gold 3000m Split

1994 Silver 3000m Helsinki

1986 Bronze 3000m Stuttgart

### **Commonwealth Games**

1994 Gold 10,000m Victoria

1990 Silver 3000m Auckland

1986 Bronze 3000m Edinburgh

### **World Indoor Championships**

1993 Gold 3000m Toronto

### **European Indoors**

1987 Gold 3000m Lieven, France (8:46.6 - CBP by 7 seconds)

1986 Silver 3000m Madrid

1985 Bronze 3000m Athens (PB by 22 seconds-Aged 20)

Murray followed her 1987 European indoor win by breaking the British indoor 2ml record at Cosford. In 1987 she set a Scottish indoor 800m record- 2.04.1. This stood for 17yrs.

Only in 2011 did another British female, Helen Clitheroe, win a European 3,000 indoors title-24years after Murray's performance.

Murray also won UK titles over 3000m in 1985 and 1987. In 1983 she won a further UK title over 5000m.

I had the good fortune to run against Yvonne Murray once and trained with her on a few occasions. She had a determination and will power that is rare. I'm just glad my outings with her were on the roads and not in a boxing ring as I would not have been around to tell this tale.

Brian Aitken