**With the Glasgow Commonwealth Games looming, Brian Aitken takes a look at one of Scotland’s most successful clubs**

Under the shadow of Edinburgh’s extinct volcanic mountainous Arthur’s Seat sits Meadowbank Stadium, the venue of the 1970 and 1986 Commonwealth Games and the headquarters of Edinburgh Athletics Club.

Although the club, through the merging of a number of clubs over the years, boasts present and past Olympians in a wide variety of events, including Allan Wells (1980 Olympic 100m champion), Yvonne Murray (1988 Olympic 3000m bronze medallist), Chris Black (1976 Olympic hammer finalist), Lynsey Sharp (2012 European 800m champion) and Meg Ritchie (1982 Commonwealth discus champion), its remit goes far beyond producing such luminaries.

Last year the club won the UK Women’s League premier title and was voted both the best athletics club in Scotland and the best sporting club in Edinburgh. The club were also UK Young Athletes’ League winners in 2011. In addition, a large number of Scotland’s Commonwealth Games athletics team announced for Glasgow are also EAC members.

The present Edinburgh AC was formed in 2007 through an amalgamation of City of Edinburgh Athletics Club and Edinburgh Southern Harriers (women). City of Edinburgh Athletics Club was formed in 1996 through an amalgamation of Edinburgh Athletics Club and Edinburgh Southern Harriers (men).

Anne Scott, a Scottish international at 400m and now a successful sprints coach, has been the driving force of the women’s national league team for years and much of the success of the team is down to her enthusiasm and commitment.

“A committed group of volunteers and a stable team management set up has created a sense of loyalty among the athletes and is one of the keys to Edinburgh’s success”

Team Edinburgh is a composite of mainly EAC athletes but offering this level of competition to two local clubs – Lasswade, who produced 800m Commonwealth-selected Guy Learmonth, and Corstorphine. They also challenge the best in Britain at under-17 and under-20 level and provide an incentive to this age group to stay involved in the sport throughout the late teenage years when drop out is at its highest level. Many girls within the club are now key members of the successful women’s team.

It was the wisdom of George Sinclair, for many years head coach of Edinburgh Southern Ladies, who saw the major benefits of national competition for this age group and the present generation of athletes owe him for his forward thinking. The team is managed by Moira Maguire, the club president and Olympian, and Keith Ridley, a talented sprinter who competed for the City of Edinburgh.

Enid Johnson and Yvonne Jones are the stalwarts of the Youth Development League and there is no doubt that this competition pathway available from under-13 to senior level provides appropriate level of competition at each stage of development of the athletes.

Behind the scenes are a group of key players who mastermind the induction and coaching set up. Bill Walker fills the role, ably assisted by Jones, who keeps tabs on the induction process as well and coaches.

Many individuals like Walker, Maguire and Elsie Morris, honorary life member of Scottish Athletics, have given up their time freely to the club for decades. Young athlete middle-distance coach Eric Fisher, who ran in the 1970 Commonwealth Games marathon trial, has coached at the club for more than 40 years. His charges have included two-time Commonwealth 800m finalist Paul Forbes and European under-23 1500m gold medallist Jake Wightman, who is now coached by his father, Geoff.

Wightman, incidentally, is one of several top young athletes who are currently coming through the club’s ranks. He won the European junior 1500m title last year and another miler, Chris O’Hare, won the UK senior 1500m title and reached the final of the 1500m at the IAAF World Championships in Moscow.

Pat Sinclair has for many years acted as club secretary and has been meeting convener of successful matches, which has earned EAC a formidable reputation. She is also a club hurdles coach. While the mother of high jumper Jayne Nisbet, Moira, has recently assumed the responsibility of organising officials for matches and produces minutes for committee meetings. Husband Brian organises the transport and hotels, while treasurer Ian Cunningham has kept an eye on the club’s finances for more than 20 years. The organisation even has a catering expert in the form of Gail Wilson, who makes sure everyone is fed and watered during events.

As well has his coaching role Bill Walker has for many years set up and operated photo-finish at meetings, not just at Meadowbank but all over the country. Donald Gorrie, the honorary president, died recently, so Barry Craighead, for many years the club president and still an active starter, has more recently taken over that role.

Athletics team captain, Martin Ferguson perhaps epitomizes what the club’s overall philosophy is all about. He has been a member of the club for 35 years, joining as a 14-year-old in 1979 and racing in 50 consecutive British League matches over the steeplechase and 5000m between 1991 and 2003. He helped the club win four Edinburgh to Glasgow road relay medals, four National cross-country medals and more than a dozen East of Scotland district medals. In addition, he won his first individual Scottish Championship after 30 years, winning the veteran cross country at 45.

Ferguson puts his longevity down to his early coaching by Eric Fisher and the support and coaching he gained from Bill Blair as an adult, not to mention a great team spirit fostered by distance running team manager Alex McEwan.

It is hoped one of the legacies of Glasgow’s Commonwealth Games will be similar to the two Edinburgh Games that undoubtedly played a part in forging and fuelling the athletics engine of athletes, coaches, administrators and volunteers of Edinburgh AC.

Edinburgh’s ﬁnest

Allan Wells

On a sultry Moscow evening in front of 100,000 spectators, Allan Wells won the closest Olympic 100m final ever by defeating Cuban Silvio Leonard, both athletes clocking 10.25. It was only the second track and field gold medal won by a Scot born in Scotland. Wells also took silver in the 200m behind the late Pietro Mennea, who was at the time the world record-holder for the distance.

Wells won golds at the 1978 and 1982 Commonwealth Games, famously dead heating with Mike McFarlane over 200m at the latter. In his former years, one-time long jumper Wells raked the pit at the 1970 Commonwealth Games, a few miles from his home, in order to watch his hero Lynn Davies.

Meg Ritchie

Fife-born discus thrower Meg Ritchie was ninth in the 1980 Olympic final and improved on this at the 1984 Games with fifth overall. She also won the 1982 Commonwealth discus title.

On the domestic front, Ritchie won the Scottish discus title seven times and shot put title on three occasions. She also won the UK discus championships four times and the AAA title three times and still holds the British discus record (67.48m from 1981).

Yvonne Murray

Spotted by Edinburgh AC hammer thrower and coach Bill Gentleman while playing hockey, Yvonne Murray went on to win the set of medals at Commonwealth and European outdoor and indoor championships as well as bronze at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, plus the world indoor 3000m title in 1993.

In 1981, the 16-year-old won the British Schools 3000m in 9:30.0 and the following year was selected to represent Scotland at the 1982 Commonwealth Games over 3000m. On her 18th birthday she finished 10th in the final but improved to bronze at the 1986 Commonwealth Games in Edinburg and silver in Auckland in 1990 before graduating with gold over 10,000m in Victoria in Canada in 1994. Murray also won European outdoor gold, silver and bronze medals in 1990, 1994 and 1986.

» *This is a version of a four-page feature published in the May 29 issue of AW, which is* [*available here*](https://subscribeme.to/athletics-weekly/back-issues/2014) *or* [*digitally here*](http://pocketmags.com/viewmagazine.aspx?catid=1038&category=Sport&subcatid=264&subcategory=Athletics+%26+Running&title=Athletics+Weekly&titleid=1126&issueid=82164&issuename=29%2f05%2f2014)*, that includes more on the history of the club as well as further profiles on ‘Edinburgh’s finest’ athletes*

Read more at http://www.athleticsweekly.com/blog/club-focus-edinburgh-ac-3921/#TsxcBBxAuWOewklq.99