

## **The case for a single athletic club in the Isle of Man**

### **Murray Lambden (early 1988?) to an open meeting in Boundary Harriers clubhouse**

Many of you will know that I am one of the strongest supporters of the one club policy. I love my club, Boundary Harriers, but all the reasons for remaining independent are sentimental ones. All the reasons for joining together will help athletics in the future. We must have vision.

My arguments concentrate on the benefits of one club. At this stage I have not tried to explain in detail how we will do it, although I do have lots of ideas. Before you build a house you decide you need it. Only when you decide you need it do you draw up the plans.

The points that I am about to make concern everyone in the room tonight. If you already believe in the need for amalgamation I hope to reassure you; if you are against it, I hope that you will listen as I think the arguments in favour are compulsive; if you are unsure at the moment, I hope that you will leave the room full of confidence in the need for a single athletic club in the Isle of Man.

Let me start with the objective of athletics – competition:

#### **Competition**

It is surely an agreed policy that the best Manx athletes should compete against the highest level of competition possible. If this is not the case we should not be sending teams to the Commonwealth Games?

At the moment two clubs on the island enter teams in the Northern Men's league. Whilst there is no doubt that Western AC have some good field athletes and Manx AC have some capable track competitors, how much better it would be if the resources were combined. The combined club would be able to compete at a higher level allowing our star athletes a chance to improve and be better prepared for the traumas of major games. It may still be possible to enter a "B" team to groom youngsters and to allow a decent number of competitors a chance to compete.

In road races too our athletes could benefit. At the moment, if Maureen Oddie, Steph Quirk, Ann Gomer and Irene Corlett entered a marathon they would all be representing different clubs when they could be winning team prizes and even greater recognition for our island. Graham Clarke, Allan Gage, Steve Brennan and Robbie Callister could not compete in a team and yet the latter three frequently train together. How ridiculous.

#### **Fixtures**

Does anyone here disagree that the Anna Marie Cutillo road race is one of the best organised races on the Island? Can you think of any reasons why? I suggest that it is a) it is only held once a year, b) because Graham Davies, who organises the race on behalf of Manx AC is only involved in a handful of events each year. He therefore ensures that the things that too many organisers take for granted are not neglected. He pays attention to marshalling and road safety, he organises a prize presentation and he does not take the officials for granted. Quality before quantity.

The result – all the top athletes compete unless it interferes with their track preparations. There has been an almost cancerous growth of fixtures over the past five years, particularly on the road. But the athletes support them I hear you say. Well I remember when cross country meetings attracted big entries and the number of events mushroomed. What happened then? The runners tired of racing the same old faces until they stopped competing and the Manx cross country scene was ruined. It is taking years to repair the damage.

We need to combine to produce a sensible fixture list because at the moment some of the clubs seem to compete to host the largest number of events. We should start by agreeing the big events – lets say half a dozen. They could be a major fell race, the Manx Track and Field Championships, the Easter Festival, the Parish Walk, an international cross country and the Manx Marathon. We could then channel our resources into these events. Our expertise could be shared. The major sponsors would benefit as the publicity would increase – they would not be competing for newspaper space with four events on the same day. More sponsorship would lead to better organisation for the big sponsors who would demand it or they would go to other sports.

The athlete benefits. More athletes come to the island; the local athlete learns the joy of peaking for the big event; all the Manx athletes would clash and everyone would benefit from safer courses, improved results service, better changing and showering facilities. Does this sound appealing?

A lesser series of events and local championships can still be arranged and any sponsor could still be accommodated either through these events or as a subsidiary sponsor to the major ones.

Let's now consider the attractiveness of new entrants to the sport.

### **New entrants**

Many people come into the sport and join a club before they even realise how many clubs there are. Often they join the club least suited to them and then they want to move. This causes unpleasantness between the clubs and the athlete is left wondering what its all about. If we were one club the new recruit could try out different events and easily change events without the traumas of changing clubs.

Staying on the island let's now consider the track.

### **The track**

We have waited a long time for the athletics track. Some of you were not even born when the first plan surfaced. If we lose the chance by squabbling over its venue it will be a chance lost forever. Some people on the island that we should pay for the track ourselves – what an own goal we will score if we get it and then don't use it properly because of club jealousies. We need to organise as one club to make the most of this facility and to have the resources to coach the new recruits who will undoubtedly be attracted to our sport by the new track.

Let us consider the other facilities:

We are surely grateful for the use of Boundary Harriers clubhouse tonight. I regret that Manx AC disposed of theirs. It is great to have a home but they are expensive. How much better if all the clubs were sharing the facility. Building a clubhouse puts great strains on any club, but it is only fair to share the costs, and then we can all share the benefits.

My next point concerns the need to specialise.

## **Specialisation**

Because our resources are so diluted around the island clubs, none of us get to specialise in the things we do best. We have coaches spending hours at meetings, architects running whist drives, judges lapscoreing, timekeepers marshalling and treasurers writing speeches! If we were all to join together there would be much more time to specialise. How often do we hear of brilliant designers whose businesses go to the wall because they do not have the time to spend designing. I have spoken with marketing men and accountants who would contribute to our sport – it is or has been their sport, but they are deterred because of the amateurish methods of our committees. We need these people to organise our affairs and leave the race organisers free to organise our events and coaches free to coach our athletes.

It is no good expecting money to drop off the trees – there are too many people after the same pot of gold and the others are getting better organised. We need the experts to raise the money – people who run businesses themselves and know the right approach. There are too many sports competing for the same group of youngsters. We need to retain them in our sport. We need to concentrate on organising races free from coaching commitments. We need experts, we need specialists, we need one club.

Oh, I know there are lots of obstacles in the way, but that is all they are, obstacles. They are not reasons against merging. There will be a place for everyone in a united club – just because a person is not on the main committee it does not mean they cannot perform their role. Indeed they will have more time to perform that role – the role of helping our athletes improve and enjoy the sport.

Most people I have spoken to want one club. Many believe it is not possible. What nonsense. You own the clubs – make it happen. The athletes need it, the English clubs want it, the general public want it, the big sponsors want it. Let us act now for the sake of tomorrow.

I will gladly listen to any counter view, but do think carefully. Are they reasons against or are they barriers that can easily be removed. Think of your own position if you are an official. You are there to help the athletes – today's and TOMORROW'S.