

COLIN WEAVER (1914 – 2000)

“Always the Scratch Man”



Colin Weaver, born and bred in Llanhilleth, where he lived all his life.

During his professional athletics career, Colin competed in eight Powderhall finals.

The “Powderhalls” were athletics meetings attracting over 200 professional runners from all over the world. At their height in the 1930s and 40s, bookmakers could rake in £15,00 bets on a single race.

Much like some horse races, competitors were “handicapped” but, unlike horseraces where weights were applied, the handicaps that were applied meant that runners could start from different distances from the finish line, as determined by the Handicapper, who judged the form of competitors in previous races.

The fastest sprinter would run the full distance and was known as the “Scratch Man”, usually Colin.

Colin, invariably, was given the daunting task of giving starts of 1 yard to 15½ yards to his opponents. He ran to orders and was never beaten off the same mark.

As a youngster, Colin stood out in his school’s sports. Scouts contacted “Billy the Pond”, a local bookmaker who soon became a big influence on Colin’s development as a professional sprinter. Such men often managed local sprinters and boxers, anything where betting was involved.

He would be collected from Ty’r Graig School in a large, white car, to run for money. He tells of returning home with a “jar of money” for his parents.



A teenage Colin training on the tram road near Trinant with Llanhilleth in the background

MITCHELL OF ASHINGTON TAKES SPRINT £15,000 Weaver Gamble Fails by Half a Yard

The biggest Powderhall events were held on January 1st and 2nd at the Powderhall Stadium in Edinburgh.

(Not ideal sprinting conditions by today's standards.)

From a newspaper of the time:

Stake money has been increased from £100 to £150, and, providing any analysis of the handicap is correct, favourite to secure the main prize will be the brilliant Welsh ped Colin Weaver. One point over which I am confident, the "school" able to produce one to beat the Llanhilleth representative will land the spoils.*

*Professional sprinting, at the time, was known as "Pedestrianism" and the runners as "Peds"



Here we see Colin winning his heat comfortably.

After the heats of this, the 130 yards Handicap, the odds offered were Colin Weaver at 5/2 on and Mitchell 5/2 against.



Here we see him losing in the final by just half a yard to A. Mitchell (Ashington) after conceding one and a half yards to him at the start

As one newspaper put it: "Weaver must be the unluckiest contestant in the history of the race"

Colin's preparations for these races involved months away with a professional team of coaches, masseur, training partners: a monastic like existence.

For decades Colin freely gave his time coaching athletes, soccer and rugby players and his coaching was renowned as being second to none.

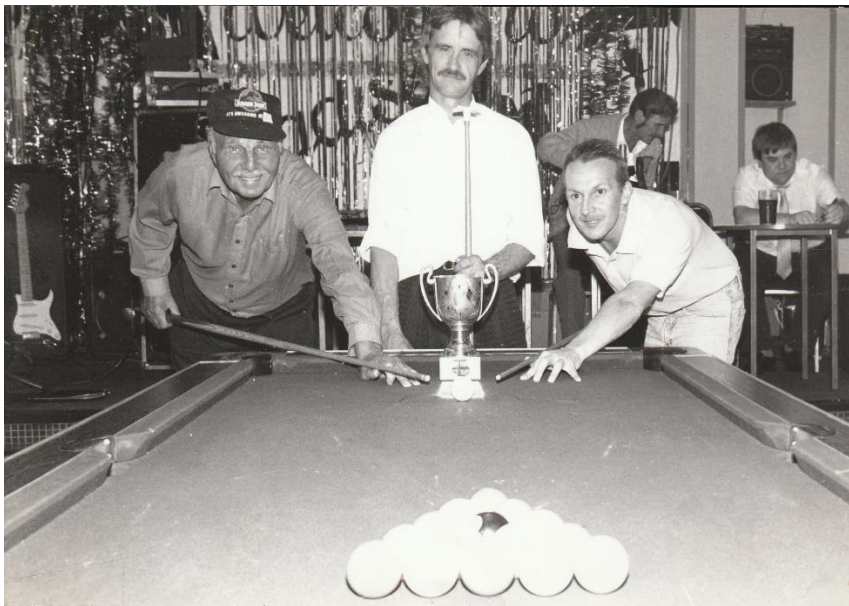
Llanhilleth Athletes Sweep County Medals



From Left:

G. Edwards, B. Jenkins, P. Keeling, C. Weaver,
D. Edwards

Colin remained competitive all his life. He captained the darts and pool teams locally in his eighties.



Amongst Colin's many newspaper clippings, he is favourably compared with the American sprinter and Olympic superstar, Jessie Owens.

Colin was barred from ever competing at any major events such as the Olympics etc., because of his professional status.

Colin's brother, Reg, was also a fine athlete, winning a Welsh Powderhall and playing for top teams, Chelsea and Wolverhampton Wanderers.



In 1943, Reg won this English Powderhall trophy in a race in which Colin came second.

However, towards the end of his life, Reg gave it to Colin, saying that it should really be his, maybe suggesting that Colin could and should have been victorious.

It is now treasured by Colin's family as is his huge scrap book of newspaper cuttings.

Colin was always a modest, family man, loved and dearly missed.

Forced to retire from his professional career at 42, due to injury, this piece gives only glimpse into Colins remarkable career as a professional sprinter. Hopefully, one day, someone will put all his achievements together and he will get the credit he deserves as, surely, one of Wales greatest athletes.

We have noted that he was always billed as Colin Weaver, Llanhilleth. A great ambassador for his home village.

Written by Colin's daughter Lesley and her husband Bryn Jenkins

Notes:

The races were originally held in 1870 at the Powderhall Stadium in Edinburgh, Scotland, hence the name.

The Welsh Powderhall was inaugurated in 1903, and a crowd of 40,00 spectators watched a 130-yard Powderhall sprint in Taff Vale Park. Pontypridd.