

DEATH OF COLIN YOUNG (1935-2019)

An appreciation by one of his oldest friends, Mel Watman

With the death on December 17 of Colin Young, I have lost one of my oldest and dearest friends, and our sport has bade farewell to one of its most memorable characters. What a contribution he made to athletics: as a redoubtable long distance race walker, as a founder member of the NUTS and as the inspirational coach of world record breaker Mel Batty.

I first got to know Colin when I was a teenager and we were both founder members of the National Union of Track Statisticians (NUTS) in 1958. Born in Barking (Essex) on 20 January 1935, Colin took up race walking in 1947, aged 12, and by his early twenties was already a well regarded figure, having won the National Junior 5 miles title in 1953 and clocked under 4 hr 50 min for 50km. Competing for Essex Beagles, he would go on to post such times as 1:39:27 for 20km in 1962 and 4:35:20 for 50km in 1963, but it was in the ultra distance events that he proved such a formidable and gutsy competitor. He achieved the coveted Centurion status in 1960 by covering over 131 miles in 24 hours; two years later he walked from London to Brighton in 8 hr 7 min 42 sec and in 1966 he won an international 100km race in Lugano.

As I recounted in my book *My Life In Athletics*, the great Paul Nihill paid tribute to him in AW in April 1970 and wrote that Colin was preparing to attempt a fantastic endurance double: a 24 hour walk in Rouen followed less than a month later by the 512km (318 miles) Strasbourg to Paris classic. Colin didn't win either race, but walked with his customary grit to finish second in Rouen and fifth in the Strasbourg to Paris – becoming the first Briton to complete that gruelling event. The latter was tough going indeed as daytime temperatures hit 90°F in the shade (only there was none), the road surface included long stretches of cobbles, and there were at least four climbs of 8-10km in length. For good measure, the heels on both pairs of his shoes collapsed, resulting in a severely wrenched calf muscle over the last 50 hours, necessitating frequent short stops for massage. The experience didn't deter him, for next year he followed up victory in the Rouen race, covering a record 215.835km, with a close third place in the Strasbourg to Paris in 73 hr 37 min.

It was at another celebrated ultra-distance event, the Prague to Podesbrady 50km, in what was then Czechoslovakia in 1968, that Colin met his future wife Eva, an orienteer, through a mutual friend, Ivo Domansky. She moved to the UK as an *au pair* the following year and, as Eva puts it, "the rest is history".

Colin continued to compete for several more decades, winning numerous international medals as a veteran. As he stated in AW (Athletics Weekly) in 1969, what he liked most about athletics was "the satisfaction of pushing one's body to the limit, the wonderful friendships made, the feeling of bodily fitness and the delight of winning or setting a personal best."

As well as his own exploits, Colin was THE expert on reporting the UK and world walking scene and from 1967 to 1986 was the highly respected and ever enthusiastic walking correspondent of AW. For over 60 years he remained a stalwart member of the NUTS committee, delighting in challenging myself in particular to remember some arcane result or other. He himself had an astonishing memory, not only for athletics trivia but also for his other passions which notably included cycling and traditional jazz.

Colin's greatest hero was Emil Zátopek and how appropriate it was that as a coach his major success was guiding Mel Batty to a world 10 miles record of 47:26.8 in 1964 – a distance at which Zátopek was a former record holder with 48:12.0 in 1951. Batty, whose time was bettered the following year by Ron Clarke no less, in turn learned from Colin's methods to coach Eamonn Martin to his 10,000m and marathon triumphs.

In recent years Colin suffered from poor eyesight and a number of physical problems, but he remained an avid fan to the last, lapping up all the latest results worldwide. No one who knew Colin will ever forget him and I offer Eva heartfelt condolences on her and our loss.