

RUNNING THE GOOD RACE



Photography: LRobertPhoto.co.uk

At 40 years old, Helen Clitheroe, who lives in Hutton, has just competed at her fifth Commonwealth Games. As a middle and long distance runner, she has also represented Great Britain at two Olympic Games and five World Championships, as well as winning Gold in the 3,000 metre race at the 2011 European Indoor Championships.

How was your Commonwealth Games 2014 experience?

The Commonwealth Games were a bag of mixed emotions for me this year. It was my fifth time as a Commonwealth competitor – an achievement which not many can lay claim to – and after two years out with injury, it was a big deal for me to be able to prove I could get back to the required fitness to compete at that level, especially at my age. I was disappointed with the result, but it was amazing to be a part of the event. Walking out into the stadium and soaking up the atmosphere was incredible. It was also fantastic to see my great friend, Jo Pavey, win her medal. She's been around as long as I have, so it was good to watch her doing it for the older girls.

What has been your career highlight?

I've been lucky to have a long career that has taken in two Olympics – the first of which was very exciting. But my main highlight has to be winning the 3,000 metres at the European Indoor Championships in 2011. I surprised a lot of people as I was 37 at the time, so it was very special to get on the podium at that stage in my career. Winning a medal at the Commonwealth Games in Manchester was also a special moment, as I was so close to home, so all the people I care about were able to come to support me.

And what about the lowlight of your career?

After such an incredible year at the European Championships in 2011, getting injured just before

Mary Lee-Slade talks to athlete Helen Clitheroe about her experience at this year's Commonwealth Games, her role at Preston Harriers and the secret behind her long career

the trials for London 2012 was a massive low point for me. I had all sorts of medical interventions, but I still went into the trials pretty much running on one leg, so I knew it wasn't going to happen. Looking at it from a positive stance, it meant I was

up to him as a kid when I first got involved in running. As a competitor and friend, I also admire Paula Radcliffe and always strived to be as good as her. And from a personal point of view, my husband is truly inspirational. He's a massive support, both

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able to watch a lot of the Games and enjoy the atmosphere without feeling any pressure.

Who has been your greatest inspiration?

I've worked with some really great coaches, including John Nuttall, who coached me for eight years. He was a great inspiration and I really looked

emotionally and financially.

Do you still find time to train at Preston Harriers?

Although I've spent time training in Loughborough and Kenya, I've always used Preston as my main base and have been a member at Preston Harriers since I was 11! I am now the Honorary Club President and I often train with

them and use the facilities. I've stayed loyal to my roots and hope that I can inspire others to do the same, as local athletics clubs offer fantastic support to young athletes.

What has been the secret to the longevity of your career and how does it feel to be a more mature athlete?

I must admit, I didn't think of myself as an older athlete until the media started mentioning it, but I've started to appreciate it a lot more in the last few years. When I line up alongside my much younger competitors, I see it as a bonus that I can still compete at that level.

The secret to my long career lies in enjoying what I do and looking after myself. It's about being smart about training and not rushing things. I have regular physiotherapy and massage therapy and I look after my body consistently.

How do you like to unwind?

My family all live in the local area and I love to spend time with them. I live in Hutton with my husband, Neil, who's the Assistant Head at Lostock Hall Academy, and we've just got a cockapoo puppy called Betsy, so we're busy training her at the moment.

What are your plans for the future?

I'm still training and hoping to compete in a few road running events in the near future, but I'm also thinking about 'real life' too. As a pro-athlete, I've never earned a great deal, so with that in mind, I'm now focusing on building my own business, creating online coaching plans for runners of all abilities, offering one-to-one coaching in the Preston area and providing sports massage services. It's still early days, but I'm getting a lot of interest and it's exciting to see where it goes. ■