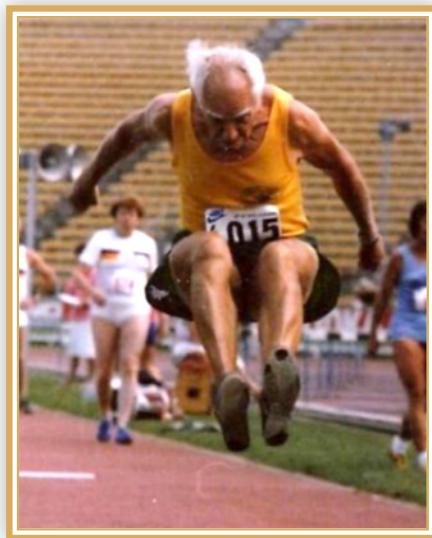




South Australian Masters Athletics
HALL OF FAME



Al Digance

SAMA 'Founding Father'



Inductee No 9: Al Digance



BIOGRAPHY

OPEN ATHLETICS

Alwyn (Al) Digance started his athletic career when he joined Western Districts at age 15 but gave it away during the depression in favour of cycling, hockey and surf lifesaving. He returned to Western Districts in 1961. He became President (1962-71) and was awarded Life Membership in 1971. Al was the Junior and Sub-Junior team Manager/coordinator as well as Manager/coordinator of all the major senior relay events, in fact the comments from those who knew him were that “Al was the Manager of everything” during the 60’s.

There was no citation to go with Al’s nomination for Life Membership. He was the President at that time and extremely active in the club and had such a big presence that they obviously thought he didn’t need any justification for his nomination and he was elected unanimously.

From 1965 to 1979 he was Vice President of SAAAA (South Australian Amateur Athletic Association, now Athletics South Australia) as well as being a member of the Competition Committee, Chairman of the Cross-Country Committee and Member of the Selection Committee. He was awarded Life Membership of SAAAA in 1973.

MASTERS ATHLETICS COMPETITION

An avid competitor, Al competed in all National Championships except 1976 and competed in three World championships in eight different events. His best result was to make the semi-finals of the 100m in Gothenburg. He won once and placed second once in the sprint at the Bay Sheffield carnival. A search of Club records shows Al’s versatility – sprints, middle distance, distance, jump, pentathlon and walks. Al even broke the Australian record in the long jump.

MASTERS ATHLETICS ADMINISTRATION - SAMA

Al is acknowledged to be the Veteran’s Club founding father.

In the late 60’s, early 70’s, Al in his role with SAAAA, was keen to have more competition for the over 40’s both in SA and interstate. He had discussed the concept of Veteran’s races with many older athletes and on January 21st, 1971, Al called a first meeting of those interested in the concept of separate Veteran’s athletics in South Australia. It took place at his home (actually the garage) in Clarence Gardens and two weeks later a group of eleven interested members drew up a constitution which was forwarded to the SAAAA. Al was elected the first secretary/treasurer and he designed the Club uniform – a blue singlet with vertical red and gold stripes with white shorts. In 1977 Al was a strong supporter of the amalgamation of the men’s and women’s Veteran Clubs.

In July 1979 Bob Auld, then Newsletter editor, wrote that Al Digance was probably the most familiar figure on the veteran scene in this state. He was known as “Mr Veteran Athletics”, being a complete all-rounder – administrator, official, runner and race walker.

Throughout the 1970’s Al was the most visible and most energetic of the more senior members. At various times during the 1970’s Al’s offices included President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and Registrar.



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In April 1978 Al retired and was able to put in even more work for SAAAA and continue his assistance to the Vets. In 1979 he was very influential in getting over-40's competition into the programme for the Open State Championships.

He was the first Life Member of the Veterans, being honoured in March 1982, achieving that honour shortly before he died of a heart attack on April 3rd, 1982. Wal Sheppard from AVACC travelled from Melbourne for the presentation of Life Membership to Al. He stated that "Al had not only been the backbone of Veterans Athletics in SA but had also given great support to the Australian Association and he personally appreciated the effort that Al had put into National and International meetings". Al died after running in the Suhard Shield 5k run in the western Parklands. A large group of mourners attended the memorial service and a guard of honour was provided by Western Districts and Veteran Athletic Clubs.

To honour Al's contribution to athletics, the Vets raised about \$800 through donations and fun-run proceeds and combined this with \$700 from ASA to erect the Al Digance memorial clock which became operational in 1984. It was mounted at Olympic Sportsfield on the photo-finish box facing the grandstand to give an instant display of winning race times. The fate of the clock was unknown following the demise of Olympic Sportsfield until 2013 when contact was made with Al's granddaughter Karen McColl who said she had seen the remnants in Blanchetown.

MASTERS ATHLETICS ADMINISTRATION - AMA

In 1974 the Australian Association of Veterans Athletic Clubs (AAVAC) (now Australian Masters Athletics Inc.) was formed and Al was elected as Vice President. He was a Vice president from its establishment to his death in 1982. He played a part in developing the National uniform and how records for Australia would be established and he was distributor for the Veteran Athlete in SA.



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RECORDS SET (Australian, OMA, State)

Record level	Event	Age Group	Performance	Date	Location
Australian	Long Jump	M65	3.68	April 1980	Adelaide
SAMA	100m	M60	14.40	1976	
SAMA	100m	M65	14.80	05/04/1980	Adelaide
SAMA	200m	M60	29.30	1977	
SAMA	200m	M65	31.80	15/03/1980	Adelaide
SAMA	400m	M60	75.20	1976	
SAMA	400m	M65	78.50	01/02/1980	Adelaide
SAMA	800m	M60	2:46.9	1976	
SAMA	800m	M65	3:06.80	07/03/1982	Adelaide
SAMA	1500m	M60	6.12	1976	
		M60	5:58.3	1976	
SAMA	Mile	M60	6:43.0	1977	
SAMA	5000m	M60	23.17	1976	
		M60	22:13	1977	
SAMA	10,000m	M60	51.21	1976	
		M60	48.55	1977	
		M60	47:57	Pre 1979	
SAMA	T&F Pentathlon	M65	1211	1980	Adelaide
SAMA	10km Road	M65	54:35	21/06/1981	Adelaide
SAMA	3000m Walk	M55	17:24	1973	Adelaide
SAMA	Long Jump	M65	3.68	05/04/1980	Adelaide
SAMA	Triple Jump	M60	7.84	1976	
SAMA	Triple Jump	M65	7.43	1976	Adelaide



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MEDAL PLACINGS

World Masters Athletics Champs (WMA), World Masters Games (WMG), Australian Masters Athletics (AMA), Oceania Championships (OMA), Australian Masters Games (AMG)

Competition	Event	Age Group	Placing	Performance	Date	Location
OMA	3000 Walk	M65	Gold	?	1982	Suva, Fiji
AMA	10km CC	M55	Silver	57:58	1974	Adelaide
AMA	100m	M60	Silver	14.50	1975	Adelaide
AMA	200m	M60	Silver	31.20	1975	Adelaide
AMA	1500m	M60	Bronze	6:22.0	1977	Perth
AMA	5000m	M60	Silver	?	1977	Perth
AMA	10000m	M60	Silver	50:21	1977	Perth
AMA	Javelin	M60	Gold	15.44	1977	Perth
AMA	Discus	M60	Bronze	19.80	1977	Perth
AMA	10000m	M60	Silver	47:57	1978	Melbourne
AMA	1500m	M60	Bronze	6:28	1979	Sydney
AMA	100m	M65	Bronze	14.80	1980	Adelaide
AMA	10km CC	M65	Bronze	54:44	1980	Adelaide
AMA	LJ	M65	Gold	3.68	1980	Adelaide
AMA	TJ	M65	Silver	7.43	1980	Adelaide
AMA	Javelin	M65	Gold	16.20	1980	Adelaide
AMA	LJ	M65	Silver	3.45	1981	Brisbane
AMA	TJ	M65	Silver	6.91	1981	Brisbane
AMA	Discus	M65	Bronze	18.34	1981	Brisbane
AMA	Javelin	M65	Silver	15.54	1981	Brisbane

PERSONAL QUALITIES OF THE NOMINEE

An ex-china and glass wholesaler, Al was a snowy haired figure, always determinedly finishing long races or recounting one of his commercial traveller-type yarns. He would engage in heated arguments and be a charmer, chatting up the ladies. He would be a coach giving a tip on athletic technique to a novice, telling a joke on the start line or a manager conferring with fellow executives between events or playing a great guitar at the early Club dances – he was all these things! To the question of “what’s your favourite event?” Al would answer with faint surprise “I don’t know”; to the question “what’s your aim now?” he would reply simply “to keep running”.

Al was the founder of the club and a pillar member of the early years, a true supporter and promoter of everything the club did. Always super friendly, Al Digance’s foresight, determination and leadership gave us our club.



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The sad demise of the Al Digance memorial clock

