

## Curtis Robb

It was Curtis' infant school friend, Neil Davies, with whom he is still in touch, who suggested giving cross-country running a try. This was to start Curtis on a successful athletic career, which was to lead him to the Olympic Games of 1992 and 1996. He achieved it despite niggling injuries and, over towards the end of his time at the top, the need to do his hard training at odd hours while he completed his medical studies.

Curtis was born on June 7th 1972 and was brought up in the Woolton area of the city. When he was three years old he contacted meningitis, leading to a very worrying time for Mum Sylvia and Dad Alex. Curtis nearly died, and spent five days in a coma at Alder Hey hospital.

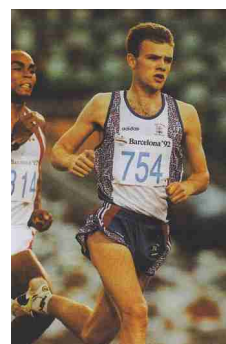
Thankfully, he pulled through and attended Bishop Martin Primary School, progressing to Liverpool College, and joining Liverpool Harriers at the age of 12. He was initially in Mr. Bridge's group, then with Mr. Cubbin's group. The key moment came when, at the age of 17 and already a promising middle distance runner, he became part of the highly successful squad run by Ernie Gallagher. Ernie had been at the club since 1943 and was the ideal person to bring out Curtis' abilities, as he himself had been the Northern 880yds champion in 1953 and 1955. Curtis made good progress through the club teams, emerging as a very useful 800m and 1500m runner, winning the English Schools 1500m title.



Ernie had raced against the legendary Bannister, who was held in awe not just because being the first to dip under the "Four Minute Mile" barriers, but also because he had combined his athletics with qualifying as a Doctor. When Curtis moved on to University, studying medicine, had experienced the same problems of trying to combine his studies and hospital placements with his hard training schedules. This also meant that coach Ernie received phone calls at weird hours of the night, saying "I take it you're in bed, but...!" This was Curtis' way of unwinding and support like this from his coach was all part of a relationship which helped the determined athlete to succeed.

Curtis' introduction to the international scene came when Ernie contacted the promoter, Andy Norman, to get him a place in a 800m race in Sheffield. There were no vacancies, so he ran in the 1,000m instead, finishing third. While waiting for the presentation, a security guard tried to move him on, until another athlete came to his rescue: Curtis was only 18, and looked it! He was then invited to take part in an 800m race at the famous track at Split in Croatia, where he won in 1min 46secs and was instructed to do a lap of honour. He was on his way!

On his 20th birthday in 1992, he won the UK 800m title in 1min 46.95secs, but had to wait three weeks before hearing he had booked his passage to the 1992 Olympic Games at Barcelona. The successes continued that year: he won the AAA 800m in Birmingham in 1min 45.16secs, then the 800m in the 23rd European Cup, at Gateshead, in 1min 49.48secs. At Barcelona, Curtis survived the two qualification rounds to final where, at the age of just 20, he finished an incredible sixth. But Curtis does not see this as his top performance; he feels his best achievement was finishing fourth in the World Games the following year, running 1min 46.88secs in Stuttgart, Germany.



Curtis also made the GB team at 800m at the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta, but he was eliminated at the semi-final stage. The standard was amazing: he would have had to run almost a second inside his PB to reach the final.

For some time before Atlanta, he had been struggling with a long term leg injury, but he was determined to battle on. In 1999, after visiting the renowned physio Gerard Hartman, his injuries finally cleared. He won a British League 800m in 1min 48secs in June, and followed that by winning in Budapest in 1min 45.3secs. If only the problem had been solved a few years before!

Despite the stress of study and the severity of his training, Curtis has always been a rounded and relaxed person. He certainly found time to have a social life and confesses to enjoying a pub crawl with his mates, round Woolton Village ("not hard, thirteen pubs in a small area"). He supports Liverpool FC and, for the record, his favourite TV programmes are "Red Dwarf" and "Match of the Day". Curtis admits to being known as "Soft Lad" at university, because of his mistakes on the wards! But he qualified as a doctor in 1997, having survived shifts of up to thirteen hours a day at Sheffield General, and is now an orthopaedic surgical registrar, at Walsall Manor Hospital.

Curtis has come a long way since the innocent suggestion to "try cross-country": a happy and valued coach/athlete relationship, a loyal Club performer, Olympic athlete, three times AAA champion, many fine memories, and very well respected by all in the sport.