

Bill Scally

Athlete, coach and stalwart of Shettleston Harriers;

Born: November 13, 1941;
Died: August 4, 2013.

BILL SCALLY, who has died aged 71, was the doyen of Shettleston Harriers and an outstanding servant of athletics in Scotland. He was part of a remarkable sporting dynasty. Four generations of his family have been synonymous with the Glasgow east end club for more than 80 years.

He was the youngest of the three sons of Allan Scally of Broomhouse, a notably successful professional athlete whose accolades included a world professional title, at Powderhall. His winnings helped fund soup kitchens and alleviate distress during The Depression and the 1926 miners' strike. He was enlisted as a coach by the club, but the prevailing oppressive amateur rules meant he could never become a Shettleston member.

Yet Bill Scally recalled a procession of runners coming to his parent's home for advice, and food. His father helped restore the club's fortunes, even recruiting youngsters whom he spotted running on the verge of the A8. He helped deliver many national championships, and ordinary club runners in whom he would embed traditional values. Quite literally, he helped build the club, by barrowing tons of ashes and other material for the club's former track at Gartocher Road.

Tributes to the father were many, notable among them from 1954 Empire

Games marathon winner Joe McGhee, a clubmate who pointedly ridiculed amateur officialdom in describing Scally as: "the finest amateur I ever knew".

Allan Scally made a huge impression on his sons and generations of athletes, and his name is honoured in an annual relay race which his son Bill helped inaugurate, and which bears his father's name.

Appropriately, he followed in his footsteps as both athlete and coach. As a youngster, Bill was an excellent footballer and took part in many sports. Athletics in the 1950s effectively began at 16. For 40 years, until the 1990s, he competed for Shettleston, winning many national medals. His career changed course many times: butcher, Ascot van-man, and latterly, as an accountant with Wylie & Bisset in Glasgow.

He was part of the Shettleston squad of the 1970s who won everything available in the UK. In 1968 The Glasgow Herald noted his breakthrough in the McAndrew Relays, as "an athlete of some stature, and not the moderate performer we have known".

That year he transformed a 200-yard deficit into a 300-yard lead on the fourth stage of the blue riband of Scottish road racing, the Edinburgh to Glasgow Relay, helping give Shettleston their first victory in seven years. The eight-man team included future Commonwealth champion Lachie Stewart, and Dick Wedlock who also ran the 10,000m at the 1970 Games in Edinburgh.

But perhaps Bill Scally's finest individual achievements came as a veteran. He simply got faster with age. In 1988 and 1992 he won silver over 25k at the World Veteran Championships, and European masters half marathon gold in 1995. His marathon time of 2hr 24min 05sec, in the 1984 London Marathon, was remarkable for a 43-year-old. Only two Scots have run faster this year, and he would be 14th in Britain.

He helped organise national championships, convened open-graded meetings, and officiated at every level. He was a founder of the Glasgow Athletic Association, serving for many years as treasurer. He proved an excellent administrator and coach in a club blessed with people willing to give their time freely, and held every possible position during more than 50 years.

He was a driving force during their centenary year, in 2004, chairing committees and fund-raising efforts. He was proud of honorary life membership of both Shettleston and scottishathletics. Due to failing health, his wife, Jo, collected the latter on his behalf at a star-studded gala in Glasgow's Marriott Hotel last year.

His biggest contribution to his club, however, was coaching. Many have cause to be grateful for his time and advice, and they would echo the remark which marathon champion McGhee made about his father half a century earlier. Yet he was so self-effacing he was probably oblivious to his impact.

His midweek sessions at Glasgow Green attracted international athletes from many clubs over nearly 30 years,



until illness stopped him. Yet even from his sickbed he would phone and email advice. His coaching contribution was recognised by scottishathletics in 1997 by the award of the Betty Clapperton Trophy.

From work at lunchtime he would maintain fitness with a group at Kelvingrove Park, but when his health began to fail on retirement he was denied fulfilment of his plans for enjoyment.

He is survived by his wife, Jo (they met at an athletics club dance in 1961) who has nursed him over the past six

years as well as taking over the role of Shettleston club secretary. Their son Brian, and daughter Elaine, were both international athletes, as was his son-in-law John Mackay. There are four grandchildren: Allan and Nicola (both Scottish shot putt champions), Cameron (a rower), and the youngest Kyle who does several sports.

There will be a Requiem Mass at Our Lady of Good Counsel, 73 Craigpark Glasgow, at 10am tomorrow; thereafter at Daldowie Crematorium.

DOUG GILLON