

## ADRIAN JAMES – GBR INTERNATIONAL WALKER



The Enfield League racewalk at Donkey Lane, London, on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2023 was named in honour of GBR international walker **Adrian James**, who had been a serious contender for GB Olympic selection in his heyday. Adrian was a top-class walker for both *Borough of Enfield Harriers* (as then called) and *Stock Exchange AC*.

In a relatively short career Adrian was a force to be reckoned with, particularly over the longer distances. He was placed in the national 20km and 35km and won the national 50km and his performances gained him GB selection on four occasions.

**2023 ERWL Fixture 2**

### **The "Adrian James" 5miles**

**Reminder**

*(Permit RWA23007-1)*

**11th February - 11.00am QEII, Donkey Lane, EN1 3PL**

**Entries on the Day** - under 17 Free, under 20 £3 and over 20 £8

**Walkers wishing to do shorter distances are welcome**

There will be a cut-off time of 70 minutes and walkers not taking the Bell by 11.56 will be retired.  
Presentations will commence at 12.50pm.

*Race Officials at Press-time:*

*Starter: Adrian James*

*Timekeeper/Recorders: Phil Welch, Pam Ficken ©, Carl Lawton ©, Tracey Wilkinson*

*Judges: Peter Cassidy (CJ), Elizabeth & Simon Benson, Mark Culshaw, Mick Graham, Shaun Lightman. Runner: Francisco Reis*

*Race Organiser: Ron Wallwork ©*

Now Adrian and I go back a long way and I thought that I should mark this occasion with a piece about his walking career. We had trained together when I was in England (London) in 1980 and we have maintained our friendship ever since.

Adrian was born in Hampstead (in a road called Millionaires Row!), West London, on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1946, making him 76 years old as I write.

At the age of 15, Adrian became an amateur "Modern & Latin American" dancer. He loved it from the very beginning as a novice to a standard where he competed at the highest level, winning some prestigious competitions along the way.

Adrian's dancing career came to an end 1973 and he spent several months doing nothing in particular, but was uncomfortable being inactive. Fate intervened by way of a leaflet inviting Stock Exchange staff to try racing the London-Brighton walk, which fired his imagination and triggered a new passion.

*I had about 5 months doing nothing!!...and my brain was saying...I am a COMPETITOR...do your best! Then at work (with investment bankers Cazenove & Company) I saw this leaflet stating...Try racing the London to Brighton Walk! It was music to my ears...IT ALL STARTED FROM THERE*

Completion of the SE 25 miles championship in March 1974 was deemed essential to gain entry to the Brighton, scheduled to take place two months later. He turned up at Hayes in Middlesex without any training, knowing that he had to finish, which he did, taking 30<sup>th</sup> place with 5.04.59.

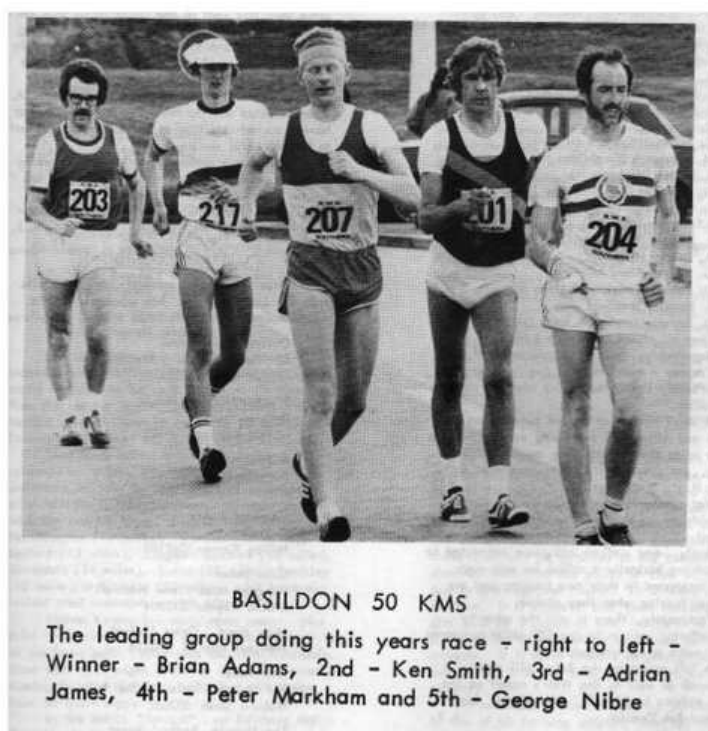
*This race was my FIRST EVER...and on a tough course...but I finished!....(complete novice)! I did no training whatsoever...I thought, right get this race done and start "the ball rolling"!*

He says that he will never forget how his legs felt after the race.

Two months later in May 1974, he duly completed the Brighton race with a time of 11.52.20 and his race walking career was underway.

In ensuing years he won both titles and in the latter event he was one of the few, whether in the SE or the SWC Open races, to cover the 53 miles plus from London to Brighton in under 8 hours.

Adrian's first major mention on the national scene was in the National 10 Miles Championship in York in March 1976, when the *Borough of Enfield* walkers won the Teams Event (Amos Seddon 5<sup>th</sup> 72:18, H. Stewart 12<sup>th</sup> 74:46, G. Scott 18<sup>th</sup> 76:00 and Adrian 20<sup>th</sup> 76:14). He followed this up a week later with 9<sup>th</sup> place (47:30) in the AAA 10,000m track championship. Then in May, he finished 6<sup>th</sup> in an International 50km trail at Basildon with 4:37:23.



*Adrian in action in the 1976 Basildon 50km*

Adrian was quickly showing that he was a talented walker at all distances.

As the 1977 Lugano Cup final to be held in Milton Keynes in September of that year, British races were even more keenly contested than usual. Adrian started the year off well with 8<sup>th</sup> in the National 10 Miles in Coventry in March (74:37), followed by a good 4<sup>th</sup> place in the Basildon 50km (4:32:45), but badly miscalculated in the National 50km, held in Milton Keynes in July. He headed out much too fast, blew up and struggled home well back in the field. Any chances of international selection in 1977 came and went.

1978 went much the same way, with Adrian still unable to make inroads against the top walkers. National Event Coach Julian Hopkins, doing his *Training Talk* column in the March 1979 *Race Walking Record*, commented as follows

*Adrian James one of our least sound tacticians who prefers to go out hard and hang regardless of the opposition. Doubtlessly he has not done himself justice on many occasions following this strategy but one of these days it might just pay off with a very fast time and victory.*

Whether it was this criticism of whether it was the years of training starting to finally pay dividends, 1979 would be the year when it all came together for Adrian.

He took his first national medal in June, a bronze in the National 35km at Leicester. His time of 2:54:07 was less than 2 minutes behind winner Roger Mills. Then a month later, in a truly exciting national 50km at Coventry, he took silver with a time of 4:14:30, only 4 seconds behind winner Mike Parker. But the story line is a big one. He had led the lead group through 20km, only to then slow and drop some 300 yards back. He had done it again, or so people thought. But he rallied magnificently and, by the 37km mark, was shoulder to shoulder with the leader Parker. Parker would draw away on the hills only for Adrian to catch him on the flat. It was left to the final kilometre and the superior sprint finish of Parker to decide the race. Adrian commented recently: *"I felt my body blowing up somewhat!!..And Reg Wells (the Chief Judge) was running beside us (extra care required)....you could feel he was ready to disqualify if necessary...and quite right too."*

This cemented his Lugano Cup 50km team spot, but not necessarily a place in the final in Eschborn, West Germany. First the British team would have to negotiate their way through a European Semi Final at Hove Park, in early September. Once again, Adrian walked a blinder, finishing the 50km in 3<sup>rd</sup> overall behind GDR walkers Weidner and binder, his time a PB 4:09:33. Overall, the teams results showed GDR first with 68 points, Sweden second with 66 points and GB&NI third with 65 points.

Four weeks later, Adrian fronted in the Lugano Cup 50km final in Eschborn and produced the goods once again, finishing 31<sup>st</sup> (the first of the British walkers) in 4:09:52. As an aside, RWR reporter Julian Hopkins did comment on Adrian's very fast first 10km (46:06), wondering if a more restrained start might have led to an even faster time.

Adrian finished 1979 with third place in the national 50km rankings, just behind Bob Dobson (4:07:23) and Mike Parker (4:08:51). A 1980 Olympic berth was now a possibility.

He started 1980 in fine style, with a series of strong races

- A win in the Basildon Open 50km in a PB 4:08:41 on April 12<sup>th</sup>
- 3<sup>rd</sup> in the 50km Olympic trial in London with 4:15:47 on May 3<sup>rd</sup>
- Bronze in the National 20km at Southport in a PB 1:31:40 on May 10<sup>th</sup>

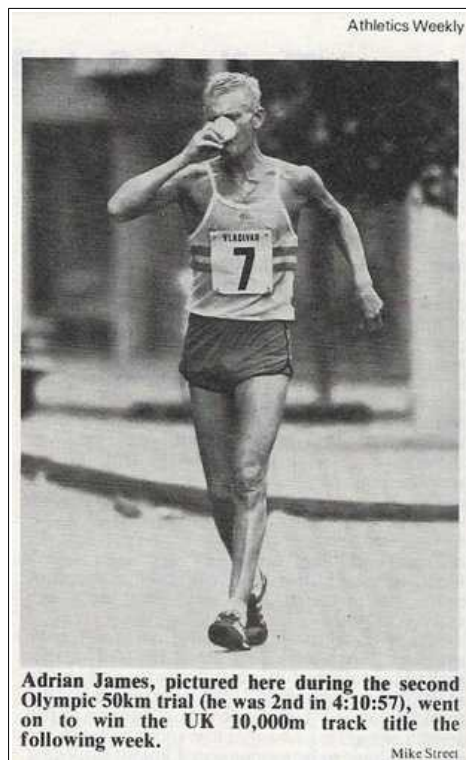
As selections for the Moscow Olympic walks were not clearcut after the first trials, a second set of trials were held in early June in London. On this occasion, Adrian improved to second place in the 50km trial with 4:10:57, not far behind Ian Richards whose winning time was 4:08:28.

A week later, he won the 10,000m walk at the UK Track Championships at Crystal Palace in a PB 43:26.8. a race covered by the BBC TV. He followed this up with bronze in the National 35km championship at Victoria Park with a PB 2:43:02.

Alas, Ian Richards was the only British 50km walker selected for Moscow. Although Adrian would eventually lead the year's 50km rankings with his time of 4:08:41, he had to stay at home and watch the event unfold on TV. His omission from the Olympic team was a travesty of justice.

His PBs, as recorded in the GBR All Time Lists at <http://www.gbrathletics.com/uk/mh99.htm>, were all done during the 1979-1980 period. It was indeed his peak time as a walker.

- |           |          |       |               |             |
|-----------|----------|-------|---------------|-------------|
| • 10,000m | 43:26.21 | 1     | London (CP)   | 14 Jun 1980 |
| • 20klm   | 1:31:40  | 3     | Southport     | 10 May 1980 |
| • 30km    | 2:24:20  | split | Eschborn, GER | 30 Sep 1979 |
| • 35km    | 2:43:02  | 3     | London (VP)   | 21 Jun 1980 |
| • 50km    | 4:08:41  | 1     | Basildon      | 12 Apr 1980 |



1981 was a disappointing year for Adrian. Perhaps some of the fire was gone after missing out on the Olympics. He came 4<sup>th</sup> in the National 50km at Sleaford in what was for him a slow 4:16:30 and he was only named as emergency for the 1981 Lugano Cup Semi Final in Helsinki and did not get to compete.

Over the next few years, Adrian continued to produce good results but younger walkers were now making their presence felt and raising the ante. Some results of note were

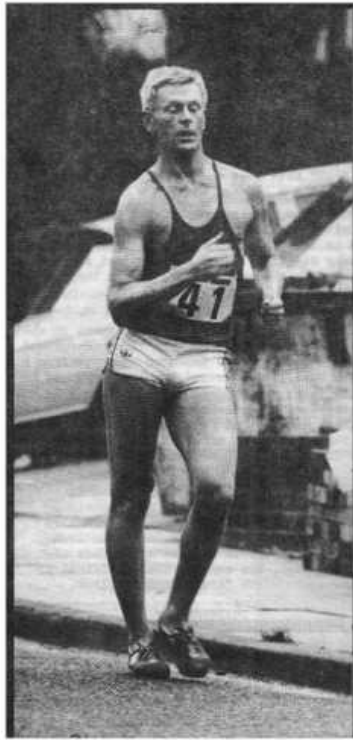
- Winning the 1982 RWA 50km Championship in Leicester with a time of 4:14:11. On that occasion, second place was some 15 minutes behind.
- Winning the 1984 Hastings to Brighton (38 miles) with a time of 5:28:30. Bob Dobson was second with 5:36:06, with the rest of the finishing field over 30 minutes in arrears.
- Winning the 1985 Stock Exchange London to Brighton (53 miles) in the superb time of 7:55:27 (making him one of the few walkers to break 8 hours for that race), nearly 2 hours ahead of second placed Ken Rodrigues. Adrian repeated the win in 1987 with 8:21:18.

Adrian cites as his most satisfying performances as

- Winning the 1980 UK track championships at Crystal Palace in a PB 43.26.8, a race covered by the BBC TV
- His victory in the 1982 national 50km at Leicester (by over quarter of an hour) in 4.14.11.
- Topping the 1980 50km rankings with 4.08.41, a time he set when winning the Basildon Open in the April of that year,
- Walking for GB in the 1979 Lugano Cup and being the first British 50km walker to finish in both the qualifying round at Hove and the final in Eschborn, West Germany

Overall, he medaled 6 times at National level, with his best effort being gold in the 1982 50km

- |                              |             |                 |         |
|------------------------------|-------------|-----------------|---------|
| • 1979 RWA 35km Championship | Leicester   | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 2:54:07 |
| • 1979 RWA 50km Championship | Coventry    | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | 4:14:30 |
| • 1980 RWA 20km Championship | Southport   | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 1:31:40 |
| • 1980 RWA 35km Championship | London (VP) | 3 <sup>rd</sup> | 2:43:02 |
| • 1982 RWA 50km Championship | Leicester   | 1 <sup>st</sup> | 4:14:11 |
| • 1987 RWA 35kmC hampionship | York        | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | 2:57:94 |



The current Club record holder, Adrian James, receives assistance from the Club's short walk exponent, Dave Stevens, in the 1987 race. Adrian set his record of 7.55.27 in 1985.  
*Photograph by Iain Lindsay*

*Left: Adrian in action in the 1984 Leicester 10 Miles Championship  
Right: Adrian on his way to winning the 1987 Stock Exchange London to Brighton Classic*

It is wonderful to see him being acknowledged in February with The “Adrian James” 5 Miles. It is a well deserved honour for an old mate.

Tim Erickson  
Monday 10<sup>th</sup> April 2023  
Melbourne, Australia