



Ted Norrish: King Henry VIII Relay Race Founder

Ted Norrish was a man passionate about sport and deeply involved in supporting others to participate.

Having established the Henry's cross-country team in the 1960s, Ted created the Relay Race as an opportunity to offer schools an event with national reach.

The first Relay, held in January 1972, was attended by 32 teams, and since then has grown to regularly receive over 80 teams and hundreds of competitors from all across the UK every year. 14,400 laps of the course have been run in the past 50 years!

Ted clearly had an instinctive understanding of the importance of data, and a hallmark of the Relay Race is the careful tracking of times and athletes. The Race trophies celebrate not just winning teams, but reward achievements such as fastest lap, most improved performance and more.

All attendees at the Race are provided with a detailed programme (which began as a six-page result sheet!) presenting much of this information, as well as photos from previous years.

This programme is one of the many attributes that distinguishes the Relay from other similar events, allowing the current cohort to compare their times against now internationally renowned athletes, such as Lord Sebastian Coe or the Brownlee brothers.

As well as data, Ted knew what would make for a great course.

The Relay route is run around the Coventry Memorial Park, beginning on grass, and incorporating both hard surface and trail through the woods, adding interest and excitement to the race, and variation depending on the recent weather!

It's worth noting that there is more pavement now than when the Race was first run; and faster, more sophisticated trainers are available—all factors that affect course times—and yet, when I looked at the data between 2000 and 2020, I note that the top team times are definitely getting slower!

Coventry's central location within the UK is perfect for a national event—but who to invite?

Naturally, Ted had the highest expectations, and invited the best schools for running in the UK, and later, Northern Ireland and even the USA.

His expectations were not disappointed. The boards in King Henry VIII hall show the teams and the talent attending, year on year, and doubtless you will have heard of many famous athletes who have competed here—although the golden years of the 1970s and 80s were truly outstanding, some records then have never been matched.

Ted's Relay Race legacy is in a sense, the stuff of legend, and yet the founding values of the Race, imbued with his character, are to be found strongly embedded in the Race every year.

The nature of relay is that it is a team event.

Whilst there are exceptional individual runners who stand out from the pack, the best results come from the selection of a team who will work well together, encouraging and motivating one another to achieve a strong overall performance.

It is this quality of the Relay that perhaps provides us with an eloquent metaphor for Ted's Race legacy. Always a man who strove for perfection himself, not only did he inspire dedication and the pursuit of excellence in others, he also created a Race that gave the opportunity for so many to be involved:

- as runners, coaches, marshals,

and at every level:

- those younger students just beginning to find their feet;
- more experienced athletes, who pursued running to an elite level;
- and hundreds of students over the years, who supported the event in timing, and cheering on their teams, enjoying the great sport of the day, and the delight of being part of something greater than oneself.

King Henry VIII School owes debt of gratitude to Ted Norrish—not just for this outstanding Relay Race, but for all he contributed to us over the years, and his continued influence in sporting endeavour, and the pursuit of excellence.