



We are Harriers.

STEPHEN MACKAY

MIDDLE DISTANCE ATHLETE.

As part of a series of interviews with Club Members, we asked Stephen MacKay how he has remained focussed during the COVID-19 Pandemic as he has prepared to compete in the British Championships this coming September weekend.

From an outsider's point of view things have been going well. Following a recent race in England, Stephen set a new 1500m Club Record of 03:47.59.



IH - What was your reaction to the initial Lockdown? How did you maintain training and fitness levels?

SM - I definitely found the lockdown period tough but I think everyone found new challenges during that period. With my own running I really like having my routine set and sticking to it, so the change in routine and structure was difficult at first. We bought a treadmill for the house so I could continue to train twice a day and after a couple weeks in lockdown I just settled into what people called 'the new normal'. I hate that phrase but it probably best describes that period. My coach, Mark Pollard, and I decided lockdown was actually an opportunity to just purely run and recover. I increased my training volume to 75 – 80 miles per week and just trained really hard for around 16 weeks before heading to altitude.

IH - Was the Altitude training always in your training diary or was this an opportunity that came from somewhere else?

SM - I was due to leave for 5 weeks of altitude training in America but unfortunately we went into lockdown the week before I was due to leave. I have a really good relationship with Andy Young who coaches athletes like Laura Muir, Jemma Reekie, Sol Sweeney, Erin Wallace and Eloise Walker. With the introduction of an air bridge to France, Andy had organised a camp in Font Romeu, France. I have been on training camps with the group before and was delighted when Andy offered me the chance to join them for a month. The training is always really hard but the opportunity to work and learn under a world class coach as well as training among some of the world's best athletes is great and has really aided my development in the last 18 months.



Stephen and the Training Group he was part of in France 2020. Quality Athletes and supported by Coach Young.

IH - You've been altitude training before - what are the benefits for you?

SM - I suppose the scientific reason is because the air is "thinner" at high altitudes meaning there are fewer oxygen molecules per volume of air. Every breath taken at a high altitude delivers less of what working muscles require (oxygen). By training at high altitudes, athletes aim to allow their bodies to produce extra red blood cells through a period of exposure to that environment, the body adapts to altitude by producing more red blood cells which is beneficial for transporting oxygen more efficiently at sea level.

Personally, 3-5 weeks of altitude has always resulted in good results upon return to sea level. I always just feel very fit and training with the Andy Young group is so intense that when paired with altitude it seems to leave me in great shape. Andy would argue I go away with his group to toughen up a bit and he is probably right!



Teamwork making the Dreamwork.

IH - Was the BMC Meet always in the competition diary and did it compliment the altitude training - My limited knowledge is there are optimum times to race after coming down from altitude - Did the BMC Meet fit into these times?

SM - I raced the BMC meet around 10 days after my return. They say you should either race straight off the plane or wait 10 – 14 days on return from altitude. The BMC fitted nicely into the second timescale but honestly races were very hard to come by and I had already had two races in Europe cancelled, I would have raced anytime and anywhere at that point. The BMC is brilliant for British middle distance running and we are very lucky in the UK to have their races, especially at a time where it can be more challenging to ensure a safe event can take place.

IH - What was the BMC Meet run like?

SM - The BMC did a great job running a safe event with all the necessary covid measures in place which included reduced field sizes and increased hygiene measures. The race itself was paced perfectly to 800 metres in around 1.59/2.00. I had a very even paced run concluding in a sprint finish over the last 100 metres. I finished 2nd by the thickness of a vest. Running a two second PB in my first race was pleasing and confirmed to me that I was in good shape and with some sharpening would be in a good place for the championships come September.



Stephen sets a new Club Record in Trafford. Picture Copyright David Lowes.

What are you looking forward to in the British champs?

I am looking forward to testing myself again in a championship environment. Having made the final last year and following that up with a 5th place finish Indoors in Glasgow, I really want to try and push towards the medals. Championships bring about a different sort of racing where it can be tactical and I always relish these sort of races.