



Start of the 2018 Blaydon Race

Meet the athlete Ian and Mark Hudspith reflect on winning the Blaydon Race

- 1. Can you remember what it was like competing in your 1st Blaydon? What did you know about the race in advance, how old were you and what do you remember of the experience?***

Mark - My first Blaydon was in 1996 – the year before I won the race – so I would have been 27. The race was on a Sunday afternoon and I finished second to Brian Rushworth. I loved the atmosphere and was determined to come back and try to win the race in future years. I had known about the Blaydon from an early age through my dad running the race on many occasions. Watching my dad and Jim Alder gave me the inspiration to run the big local races in the North East such as the Morpeth to Newcastle and the Blaydon.

Ian – My first Blaydon was in about 2000 I think so I would've been 29. I remember it was won by the Kenyan Julius Kimtai. Mark was 3rd and I was maybe 5th or 6th? I remember the pace being relentless down Scotswood Road and it being a really tough race.

We both knew about the race from watching our dad running it several times and in fact winning the first Gadgie (over 40) award in 1982. I remember watching Mike McLeod winning it several times.

2. Did you specifically prepare for the race itself beforehand, and what sessions did you find most useful for it?

Mark - In 1997 I had decided not to focus on a championship marathon and as such had not run the London marathon that year. I was mixing accountancy exams with track racing and hadn't specifically targeted the Blaydon. I ran a British League match 5,000 metres for the club on the Saturday at Watford and ran particularly badly to finish 3rd. On the journey home Jim and myself had a chat about running the Blaydon on the Monday night to try and get some confidence back. The race itself was a keenly fought 'local' battle and a group of 6 athletes formed at the front of the race. As we approached Scotswood Bridge I decided to try to apply some pressure in order to reduce the group – gradually the group reduced in size but I could not shake off Stew Bell from Chester le Street. We had a close fought battle – Stew was a tough competitor - and I only just managed to get a winning margin in the closing stages. There was great elation and pride at winning such a famous and prestigious race.

Ian – I only did one Blaydon until 2006 because I always concentrated solely on the track in the summer. I then did every Blaydon from 2006 to 2018. As the Blaydon is a fast course (predominantly downhill) and I've always had a good endurance base, I used to focus my training on being sharp and would make sure that I did something like 12x400m in 62/63s on the track every week.

3. **What in your opinion are the most important sections of the route?**

Mark - In my opinion it is important to get a good start to establish your position. The run along Scotswood Road is a downhill section and I always tried to use this part of the race to consolidate my position. The Scotswood Bridge is the point in the race where I would start to think about what moves I could make to affect the race. The rise on the flyover within the last mile of the race also provided an opportunity to make a decisive break.

Ian – The long downhill section on Scotswood Road is obviously key but the flyover into the finish has resulted in lots of changing of positions over the years.

4. **Who were your most memorable opponents over the years, and, apart from the years you won, what were some of the other highlights?**

Mark - In the early years of running the race my main opponents were local athletes such as Brian Rushworth, and Stewart Bell. As the race grew bigger and the prize money increased the opposition started to include top athletes from out the area and also from abroad. The race definitely became harder to win from that point – which makes Ian's achievement in 2009 that much greater.

Ian – In all bar the last few Blaydons that I did, the African athletes were always the toughest opponents. As well as being very good runners they tended to race in surges which made it even more challenging. I'm proud of the fact that I managed to finish in the top 6 from 2006 to 2017. 2018 was a lowlight. I deluded myself that I still had a chance of being up at the front but was well out of contention before we even got on to Scotswood Road.

5. **Did you ever try and work together as a partnership to help each other?**

Mark - Ian and I only ran the race together once I think, in 2000. We spent most of the race along with some other British athletes chasing down the Kenyan Julius Kimtai – to no avail as he won by 20 seconds. We did work together

in other races – whether that was to try and break down a field / or to try and run a fast time.

Ian – I think we only ever did one Blaydon together (2000) and we just ran together in the main group. We did work together in other races but not this one.

- 6. For both of you, how did it feel when you added your name to the illustrious list of past winners?**

Mark – I felt extremely proud to add my name to the list of winners – Kevin Forster, Mike McLeod, etc. I had watched the race for many years when my dad was running it and never thought at that point that I would actually win it.

Ian – Winning the Blaydon in 2009 was one of my top 3 proudest moments in athletics. This was especially because it was a strong field (a couple of Africans, Serod Batochir, Pete Riley, Ryan McLeod etc) and also I'd strained my hamstring in the Middlesbrough 5k about 10 weeks earlier and hadn't raced since.

A few years later a teacher at my school at the time (St Cuthbert's) told me that she had bought a house in Blaydon. She said that the houses (David Wilson homes) were named after previous Blaydon winners and one of them was called 'The Hudspith'. Obviously I boasted about this to anyone who would listen (much more so than Mark). A few weeks later, I drove down to the estate to look at these houses and sure enough there was a house called 'The Hudspith'. Then I looked at the other houses and saw names like 'The Embleton', 'The Matthews', 'The Highnam' etc none of whom had ever won the Blaydon. Then it dawned on me that the houses had been named after winners of the 'First Gadgie Award' and 'The Hudspith' was actually named after our Dad who was the 'First Gadgie' in 1982!

- 7. Recent difficulties with keeping the race going have increased. How important do you think the race is for the running community of the NE as a whole?**

Mark – I think it is extremely disappointing that events like the Blaydon are put under more pressure every year in what they have to do to get the race go ahead. We have lost the Morpeth to Newcastle and seen more recently other events cancelled and you kind of think, where it will all end? The Blaydon is a fantastic local event which is really important to the North East running community and hopefully it will continue to exist for many years to come.

Ian – It's hugely important and a sad indictment of the country that we now live in that there's even a question mark over whether or not this event should take place.

8. And finally, what advice would you have for runners taking part hopefully next year?

Mark – my advice would be not to go too fast in the early stages as it is predominantly downhill in the early stages and there is a sting in the tail. More importantly savour the atmosphere and enjoy the experience of running this historic race.

Ian – Just enjoy it. The atmosphere is fantastic. I've noticed over the years that there's even more spectators on Scotswood Road and at the finish.



Mark Hudspith finishing 3rd in the 2000 Blaydon Race



Ian Hudspith finishing 5th in the 2000 Blaydon Race



Ian Hudspith winning the 2009 Blaydon Race