

# TWIF MONTHLY FOCUS



## Bill Meston

*Scotland has a network of sports councils that cover the country helping clubs with training, travel grants and general backup with Aberdeenshire covering our area.*

*Every year the sports council recognises the efforts of their clubs and athletes and holds a presentation evening to make these awards. There are eight categories for nominations and I was lucky enough to win the **Service to Sport** award.*

*The winners from each group are then all considered for the top award of **Sports Personality of the Year** which I was also fortunate to win. This historically has always gone to an athlete successfully competing at the highest level but on this occasion I was the lucky recipient.*

**O**n the rope, take the strain, pull as you would start any tug of war. My 'on the rope' was in 1964 when Kinneff Young Farmers started training for their summer sports teams. The running, tug of war and football all trained together so all the young lads went along for the football but I was immediately hooked on the tug of war but as everyone seemed to be 100+ kg I thought coach could be an achievable goal.

The next five years was spent attending once or twice a week training sessions - often the butter in the sandwich - playing football with the pullers and making up numbers for the live pulling. At that time we were all pulling in a traditional style of tug of war and foolishly thinking that this was the strong-

est way of pulling, I tried to apply my tug of war training to my fencing work and very quickly realised that when bent over you couldn't move the old post which meant the fencing technique had to be applied to tug of war.

In 1976 I became too old to compete in the Young Farmers pulling so I moved over to full time coaching, training a coach as well as pullers and in 1979 at Echt Kinneff comprehensively won the Young Farmers Rally tug of war for the first time. This started a period of great suc-

cess for Kinneff - winning the rally on many occasions, local shows and highland games with the next adventure coming in 1981. When travelling round Scotland to set up the first National Young Farmers championships I met up with Dennis Reid the first chairman of the Scottish Tug of War





*Pulling left handed too - first National Title 640 kg in 1982.*

Association and he invited Kinneff to the Cupar Highland games to take part in a multi weight event all run in leagues.

We turned up on the day with all our soutar equipment to modify our boots as required by the judges, big squad, lots of excitement - we were to show this south lads how tug of war was done.

Well it didn't start well, a straight two end loss to Bonny Bridge, so stern words and a new team slogan "Ride the Big Yarks" we never lost again that day but couldn't understand all these men dropping out with injuries and the opposing team dropping men to keep the pull fair, then another shout started "They're a Saft".

The Scottish Championships was held two weeks later at Doune Motor Museum and the team entered the 600, 640 and 680 kg and battled without success in the 600 and 680 but won silver in the 640 kg which enabled us to



*Receiving an individual trophy 1982.*

represent Scotland at the upcoming UK Championships to be held at Dumfries show.

After four weeks of fund raising a bus load of pullers and supporters set off on a 250 mile trip to Dumfries with no idea what we were getting into. But knew we were going to beat the Scotland A team who in years to come were to be our great friends and rivals Callender. We met a lot of great teams from across the UK like Isle of Oxney and Prince Albert from England.

We won very few ends but managed to beat Callender, had a great experience and a long journey had begun. We had a lively bus journey home on Saturday night with little or no sleep and probably no one could have passed a drugs test. We rounded up a few reserves to fill the blanks and held 80 miles north to win the 640 kg Scottish traditional style by beating a great team from Bonnar Bridge in the final - either a totally unforgettable weekend or a complete blank.



*Anchored Scotland 600 kg at UK's Bearsden, Glasgow.*



*Frontman for Kinneff 600 kg at UK clubs Paignton, Devon.*

Kinneff continued to develop and started indoor in the 80's initially for fitness for the outdoor season but it was proving hard to get the team to pull straight with all the local experts reckoning we had it all wrong in spite of being quite competitive for a young farmers team on the local circuit. All that changed in 1992 when we competed at our first Worlds representing Scotland in the 560 kg in Ireland we saw the Swiss teams pulling in a style very similar to what we had been trying and they were very successful

so coaching became a lot easier on our return. The pullers had seen what we were trying to achieve even if it was an unsuccessful Championships the experience was invaluable for our development.



*Coached Glasgow Vets Ladies at UK 560 kg clubs 2001 in Wales.*



*Above, coached Scotland 600 kg at UK's and below, coached Kinneff at Nationals at Cupar Highland Games.*





*Pulling at 1 for Kinneff at Clonmany, Ireland.*

Kinneff continued to represent Scotland internationally picking up odd medals at the UK club competitions but always inviting good pullers from other clubs like Strathbogie, Balmedie, Comhill, Durris, Turriff, Mount Blair and many others to improve our team and give more athletes the experience of high level pulling and take it back to their own clubs. In 1996 Kinneff was struggling to put teams out and I was invited to coach Kinloch Ladies from Carnoustie at the worlds in Holland having won with them at the national championships. Although this trip did not result in any medals it was very important because I was asked to a meeting of all the ladies coaches to discuss mixed pulling. On my return Scotland started mixed pulling the following summer but at lighter weights than TWIF so that the ladies had a much greater influence on the results and this event has proved to be very popular in Scotland.

Kinneff won their first representative medal at the UK indoors in 2003 with the help of two BRC pullers which in time led to three Kinneff men being chosen for Scotland in the 560 kg Worlds in Italy. This was a very successful championship for Scotland winning gold in the 600 and 640 kg and silver in the 680 kg but the personal high was silver in the 560kg with two Kinneff men behind me that I had coached since they were 15 years old.

My most successful period in tug of war has been the last two years when I have been asked to coach a squad of men based on the Comhill team but with help from teams throughout Scotland who have tug of war as their main focus. In this time we have won Scotland's first outdoor 600 kg gold at the British and Irish Championships, held in Colrainc Northern



*Pulling at 4 for Kinneff at BRC.*



*Pulling for Scotland 600 UK's Bronze 2003 Kelvin Hall, Glasgow.*

Ireland, various club weights over the two years and in 2019 won Scotland's first medal for men at the European Club championships a silver in the 560 kg. Tug of war is a truly great team sport and one of the few where men and woman can compete together, and with contact sports becoming problematic in schools, tug of war can offer a real strength and stamina event to both genders with much less chance of injury.

Over the 50+ years I have experienced some great times, made great friends, seen some amazing athletes at work and play and feel very indebted to every one that has worked on project "Win at TOW". ●



*Coached Cornhill Club Teams in 560 and 600 kg to win Gold in both, Colrainc, Northern Ireland.*