

JOHN GILMOUR, OAM — TRIBUTE

Statement by Minister for Sport and Recreation

MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston — Minister for Sport and Recreation) [2.13 pm]: I rise today to mark the passing, at the age of 99 years, of a very special Western Australian athlete, Mr John Gilmour. Mr John Gilmour was a war veteran and one of WA's greatest sportspeople, and I believe, Mr Speaker, one of your heroes from your running time. May I welcome members of the family into the chamber today—Judith Cameron and grandsons Jordan and Marshall Cameron.

Although serving the country in World War II put a pause on John's running endeavours, when he finally returned home he returned to running. Up until 1956 John set several WA state records and gained state selection five times for the Australian National Cross-Country Championships. He retired from open athletics in 1956 but made a comeback in 1962 and continued to compete for the next five years. After retiring again from open competition, he continued to run and during his life set 114 age group world records. As well as competing, John was involved in athletics as a volunteer, coach and founding member of Masters Athletics WA and the WA Marathon Club, and was instrumental in the formation of the Canning Districts Athletic Club. John won the WA Sports Person of the Year award in 1975, and in 1978 received an Order of Australia for service to sport.

At 97—just a few years ago—he ran in the World Masters Athletics Championships here in Perth where he competed in the 800 metres and 1 500 metres races, which many of us would like to be able to do at our age! John embodied what it meant to be a true sport, and as a valued member of the WA sporting community he will be sorely missed. We pass on our condolences to the family.

Members: Hear, hear!

Statement by Minister for Veterans Issues

MR P.C. TINLEY (Willagee — Minister for Veterans Issues) [2.15 pm]: I also rise today to salute the passing of John Gilmour, OAM, a very special Western Australian. Given the remarks by the Minister for Sport and Recreation about his achievements, members will note how good those achievements were when they look at the adversity of his war service.

Mr John Gilmour was 99, a great sportsman and one of our few remaining World War II veterans. Scottish by birth, John moved to Australia with his family in the group settlement scheme as a child in the 1920s. John was a promising Western Australian state athlete when his sporting career was interrupted by World War II. He enlisted in 1940, was captured at the fall of Singapore in February 1942 as part of the 2/4th Machine Gun Battalion and incarcerated in the infamous Changi Prison for 18 months and then for a further two years in Japan. Once released as a prisoner of war, he returned to Perth and was classified as a blind soldier and spent 12 months in a convalescence home during which time his health gradually improved. Due to his own willpower, he resumed running. John suffered terribly, both physically and mentally, as a prisoner of war. Local author Hal Colebatch described John's wartime incarceration like this —

Gilmour, who had begun the war as one of Australia's most promising young athletes, ended it a physical wreck, beaten, tortured, traumatized and permanently almost blind. He was helped off the ship at Fremantle weighing 41 kilograms. He was, he says, glad his eyes were so bad he couldn't see the look on his mother's face when she saw him.

For the rest of his life, up until recently, John ran marathons and set records. Active as a volunteer and coach, he touched the lives of many with his courage, determination and persistence. We mourn the loss of one of our own. Lest we forget.

Statement by Speaker

THE SPEAKER (Mr P.B. Watson): Members, if you would just indulge me for a moment, I knew John Gilmour for too many years, probably, when we think Johnny was aged 99 years. I was a 14-year-old who won an athletics event at Subiaco Oval and to me it was a fluke and all I wanted to do was go back to my dream to play football for Collingwood. But this gentle little man came up and sat next to me and he said, "You know what, you've got a talent that you should use", and he steered me in the right direction. When I spoke about this at his funeral yesterday, so many people came up to me and said that this gentle little man had changed their lives. We talk about legends these days and what legends are, and we use the word pretty freely, but to me John Gilmour was a gentle man. He was dealt a very hard hand in life, but he never stopped smiling. He leaves this world a better place for not only what he did for me, but hundreds and hundreds of others. To Judy, Jordan and Marshall, you should be very, very proud, and I am proud to have known John.