

Isle of Man Athletics Association – Chairman’s Report – 2009 to 2010

The past year has seen some major developments in athletics on the island: after months of having no running track, which disrupted winter training for many athletes and meant that the Manx Harriers Track League had to be shifted to the grounds of King William’s College, and the Manx Youth Games to St Ninian’s playing field and The Bowl, we finally put those problems behind us and were able to make use of the newly improved facility for the Track & Field Championships in July. This major event, with continuing sponsorship from Dohle, was very well supported over the two days, despite the bad weather, and there was some really memorable competition, boding well for the future of athletics on the island.

During the year, the new weights room at the Institute of Sports facility has been the venue for strength and conditioning sessions, while rooms upstairs have hosted talks on Nutrition and various meetings.

Currently, the track facilities are undergoing further modifications to make it ready for the Commonwealth Youth Games in September 2011. This will be arguably the biggest athletics event the island has ever seen, and planning and preparation is well advanced, with many local officials meeting with UKA specialists to make this event a success.

But athletics is not just about facilities: it is about athletes, officials and coaches. This year has seen the appointment of key personnel into key posts. Anthony Brand took over management of the island Games Team, assisted by Di Shimell, and over the course of the year he has set about strengthening his management team, and building for the future, by appointing Danaa Callow and Richard Sille.

Also appointed was Gianni Epifani, as Head of Performance, with the role of identifying young talented athletes, working with the coaches to make sure programmes are in place for those athletes to reach their potential, and mapping out their possible route to success. Gianni has organised Nutrition workshops delivered by Katherine Sentence, set up meetings about “goal setting”, organised the “Strength & Conditioning” sessions as well as the first Squad Training Day for elite athletes and potential Island Games Team members.

In a similar vein, Trevor Christian was appointed as Sports Development Officer, and he has been working hard to recruit and train new coaches and encourage existing coaches to improve and upgrade their qualifications. He has organised coaching weekends and gained £30,000 worth of funds, spread over the next 3 years, from the McCain’s Athletics Network, to support further coaching initiatives, such as the McCain’s Network Local Coach Development Programme, to fund coach mentoring sessions and bring “Flying Coaches” to the island.

And last but not least, Hannah Riley was made Team Manager for Athletics for the Commonwealth Youth Games Team, and she has made a start on identifying potential athletes for this prestigious event.

The athletics highlight of the year, the Commonwealth Games in Delhi, was both a source of pride for Manx sportsmen and women, but also a source of disappointment for those of us involved in

athletics. A combination of injuries and other factors meant that none of the three athletes short-listed for the Games were able to compete. Reports back from Steve Partington and other officials were very positive, all paying tribute to the way the Manx team represented the island and themselves.

Closer to home, local events have continued to flourish; we are delighted that Manx Gas has continued to sponsor the cross-country fixtures, which have attracted good numbers and strong fields, and have produced some keen races. Similarly, road-running, fell-running and race-walking have proven to be as popular as ever; in fact for a small island population, it was felt there was a danger of fixtures congestion. Accordingly, an IOMAA sub-committee, under the leadership of Andy Fox, was set up to look at this issue and try to rationalise the fixture programme for forthcoming years.

In the immediate future, we look forward to a year which brings us an Island Games in the Isle of Wight, in June, and the hosting of the Commonwealth Youth Games in September. It seems to me a great time to be involved in athletics on the Isle of Man! Of course, these events require the continuing support of officials and increased effort and preparation. Coaching courses are essential to train local coaches to the required level, training practices have to be right to prepare our athletes for competition, and the facilities have to be in place to ensure our athletes reach their potential. I believe we are well placed in all respects: the latest Sportshall Athletics initiative, organised by Trevor Christian and aimed at students in Years 5 and 6, has already proven to be very popular and looks certain to ensure future success for young athletes on the island.

With such challenges on the horizon, and such a varied and diverse athletics community to cater for, the IOMAA website continues to develop as a central source of information for all athletes. My wife and I maintain the site and keep it up to date: for instance, cross-country results are on line within four or five hours of the race being run. Of course, we could not maintain the website, or indeed be effective officers on the committee, were it not for the continued support of so many people who give so freely of their time and energy and expertise. I must say a huge thank you to all those mentioned above, and many others who work hard in the background. Special thanks go to Bernie Shimell for bringing the track and field records up to date; to Dave Griffiths for maintaining the road-running records and collating the cross-country results; Steve Taylor for helping bring the race-walking records up to date.

Finally, I must say a massive thank you to all the members of the IOMAA Committee, and in particular to Lesley Christian (Secretary) and Cheryl Pryke (Treasurer) for the tireless work they do and the support they have given me in my first year of office.

David Pryke