**Chairman’s Report 2015**

I would like to talk first about the successes athletics has enjoyed during the last year, starting with the achievements of the team representing the island in the Island Games in Jersey. It was a team of experienced athletes and youngsters, and they are all to be congratulated on the way they performed, the times and distances they achieved, the medals they won and the team spirit they showed. It was very noticeable, looking around the track, where the Isle of Man team were congregated - there they were on the top bend, all in their red T shirts and fleeces supplied by Full-Factory, very much a team supporting each other.

Perhaps the individual stand-out performance was from Catherine Reid, and watching her cruise round the 400m in record time was clear indication of a very promising future ahead.

Catherine went on to finish third in the World Youth Games in Colombia, and by doing so, she announced to the athletics world that she had arrived. Watch this space.

Success too for our team of young athletes in the YDL. For the third consecutive season they gained promotion to a higher league, and by a huge margin. There seems no stopping them. Again, I could pick out outstanding individuals, but what has really impressed me and the other officials who travel with the team, is their support for each other, their willingness to stand at trackside and shout and cheer each other on.

Success too for some of our senior athletes, like Gail Griffiths, selected to represent England in the Masters series in Lyon, France, and recently in the Masters Cross Country event in Ireland.

Success too in terms of increased numbers taking up the sport. The local Cross country season kicked off in October with a record number of entries, up by nearly 20% on last year’s record.

But…

This kind of success comes at a cost to us all. The more we achieve, the more we want to achieve. The more we do, the more we want to do. The more we stretch our resources, the more likely we are to over-commit.

I wrote recently that we face “Boom and Bust”. I really do fear that we are facing a situation where athletics may well go bust. Our resources are being stretched to breaking point - our coaching resources, our officials resources and the time we have at our disposal to do everything.

The sport is growing. Fell-Running is attracting ever increasing numbers to their events at both Junior and Senior level. The island hosted a round of the UK Fell-Running Championships in July which attracted a large entry; the Fireman’s Runs and the Park Runs are going from strength to strength; Race Walking is as popular as ever; we have more and more track and field athletes travelling across and competing indoors - wherever you look on the fixtures list, all through the year, Manx athletes and Manx teams are competing in athletics events and with each success we attract more athletes to our sport.

But….we are struggling to cope. We are desperate for more volunteers to come forward. We need more officials, more coaches, more sponsorship, more help from the politicians on the island, more help from those who work in sport.

Without more volunteers - and, I might add, more younger volunteers - athletics will have to contract, not grow. We will have to stop doing as much. Stop sending that team away, stop holding that event, stop doing what we want to do - develop the sport.

But there is a further problem. As I see it, there is a serious mismatch that threatens the whole sport, and that is a mismatch between the managers and administrators of the sport and those who deliver it to the athletes.

On the one hand, we have paid civil servants and career politicians making policy decisions that impact directly on our sport, not just here, on this island, but internationally.….On the other hand, we have the unpaid volunteers, the coaches and officials, struggling to deliver the sport, standing out on the track in all weathers, giving up their evenings, giving up their weekends to travel with teams, doing everything they can to support the athletes….

Beyond that, but a huge part of the problem, is the “target-setting” culture that the administrators and managers have brought to the sport. It is the same culture you can find in business, in manufacturing, in the health services, in education…the administrators set the targets and the coaches and the athletes are expected to deliver, and held to account if the results are poor.

But this is sport. By definition, it is unpredictable. On the day, during the event, anything can happen.

I want the administrators and managers to wake up to that fact, before the sport is ruined.

Where are they this evening? Not one is here to support the sport. Everyone here represents the unpaid volunteer side of this mismatch. Everyone here gives hours and hours to athletics, everyone here is working at breaking point.

If my words tonight serve as a wake-up call, I hope it is not too late. I hope the politicians on the island wake up. I hope the civil servants wake up. Athletics does not need another Government initiative, or another level of management, or administration, we need the powers that be to listen to the people who deliver the sport day in, day out; we need the powers that be to offer help and support, to make things easier for us, not more difficult.

David Pryke

Chairman IOMAA