SSAA Chair's Report 2021

I was tempted to copy and paste parts of my report from last year having overseen another year of disruption. Maybe I have. Having been chair for, what I believe is an unprecedented (over used word these days), two consecutive years, we have only realistically enjoyed three quarters of a year of athletics. Managing to squeeze in a full cross country season before the lockdown of March 2020 preceded no school athletics or cross country for over a year! The summer of 2021 brought a glimmer of hope but only to the few.

Covid-19 has dealt the world a tragic hand causing the death of thousands, with many people facing emotional, financial and social difficulties. Sport has also been a casualty of this pandemic, especially at grass roots level. Throughout the various lockdowns and restrictions, I continued to be amazed at the determination of the SSAA to offer some form of opportunity for our elite athletes to compete, working tirelessly to achieve what at times seemed impossible. Sometimes it was, but the determination to try was always there. Huge thanks must also go to Yeovil Olympiads, for their incredible support throughout this process. Our elite athletes benefitted hugely from the efforts to provide the opportunity for them to compete at national level, and they certainly grasped this with both hands and excelled – well done to every single one of them.

Unfortunately, many potential athletes have missed out. Our current year 8 have never competed in a Somerset Schools event. Our current year 9 have not competed at the top of their age group in track and field, and only as a minor in cross country. Our current year 10 have not had the opportunity to compete in an athletics team event, with mass participation, since the summer of 2019, when they were in year 7. What I desperately hope is that we can encourage these young people to try this wonderfully inclusive sport of ours. Some might become internationals, most will not. What is more important is that they all have the opportunity to enjoy the challenges and camaraderie of athletics and cross country.

I cannot complete my report without recognising the tireless work of a core group of individuals with the SSAA. Without the efforts of Brian, Dick, Katie, Nick and Sally there would be no SSAA, and no athletics or cross country competition for the young people of Somerset. Thank you.

We do not know what the future holds regarding Covid. As I write this, the advice from Somerset Public Health is for all schools to open under amber conditions for the first two weeks of November. Part of this guidance means schools should aim to not mix across bubbles, hence most fixtures have been postponed or cancelled. Hopefully, this is a short term measure and we can begin to resume our school fixtures, including athletics and cross country. Either way, the SSAA will play a decisive role in promoting and supporting our great sport.

Thank you.

Steve Ladd

SSAA Chair 2019-2021