Somerset Schools Athletic Association

Chairman's Report 2024

"As I reflect on this remarkable year with Somerset Schools Athletics Association (SSAA), I am filled with gratitude for the privilege of serving as Chairman. Supporting our young athletes, witnessing their dedication, and playing a small role in inspiring, guiding, and managing them has been an honour. Somerset's achievements this year are a testament to the unwavering commitment of our schools, volunteers, and the resilience of our athletes who have brought pride and inspiration to our county.

Highlights and Achievements

1.Cross Country Championships

- Our County Cross Country Championships at RNAS Merryfield were a testament to the spirit of Somerset athletics, with a great turnout of athletes despite lingering post-pandemic challenges. It was inspiring to see familiar faces and new talents step forward, with entries gradually recovering to 331 participants—a promising increase over last year.
- Among the individual champions were Edward Salter and Annabelle Souter, while the Minor and Senior Boys teams captured the top spots, setting a high standard for cross-country talent in the county.
- Hosting three championship events at RNAS Merryfield required exceptional teamwork from officials, volunteers, and SSAA personnel, whose dedication ensured a successful event. A huge thank you to all involved for making this possible.

2.Track & Field County Championships

- On June 8, we gathered at Yeovil Olympiads AC for a packed day of Track & Field events, where the grit and talent of Somerset athletes were on full display. Due to the hard work of officials and the excellent organization by team managers and volunteers, the day ran smoothly.
- Three Championship Best Performances (CBPs) were set, with Tom Webb's impressive 3000m, Annabelle Honey's blazing 200m, and Ella Patterson's outstanding Hammer Throw each raising the bar. These young athletes represent Somerset's potential and remind us why it is so rewarding to provide these opportunities to the next generation.

3.Combined Events and Race Walking Championships

- April's Combined Events Championships at Bill Whistlecroft Athletics Arena attracted 168 athletes, including some of the UK's brightest young talent aiming for international rankings. Somerset athletes performed admirably, and it was especially thrilling to see Toby Wright, Tom Bennett, and Eden Robinson ranked within Europe's and the world's top standings. These performances reflect the high standards we uphold and Somerset's role as a springboard to greater achievements.
- For the first time, para-athletics events were introduced, marking a pivotal step toward inclusive participation. Seeing all athletes perform side-by-side on a global stage was a proud moment for SSAA.

4.South-West and English Schools Championships

- At the South-West Championships, our team displayed exceptional spirit and secured three trophies. Our athletes proved resilient under a challenging new scoring system, which only strengthened their determination. In particular, our Senior Boys team won their category, showcasing Somerset's depth of talent at the regional level.
- A particular point of pride was seeing Somerset athletes selected for Great Britain, including Toby Wright (110m Hurdles), Dillon Millard (2000m Steeplechase), and Lewie Jones (Javelin). Their absence at the English Schools Championships, while felt deeply, highlighted Somerset's growing national and international standing in athletics.
- Despite competing without these standout athletes, our team in Birmingham showcased true Somerset resilience. Tom Webb's silver medal in the Intermediate Boys 3000m and bronze wins by Eden Robinson, Lily Martin, and Jacob Foord were moments of joy and pride for our county. Somerset's determination and strength shone through every event, from personal bests to the heartfelt support shared by teammates and families.

Gratitude to Officials, Volunteers, and Team Managers

Our success this year was possible only because of the dedicated SSAA community. From our 96 officials who collectively contributed 272 "official days" to the team managers and volunteers who supported every event, we owe a huge debt of gratitude. Special thanks go to those in Chief Official roles, who ensured our events met UKA standards and inspired confidence in athletes competing at every level.
The commitment of these individuals was evident across the Cross Country, Track & Field, and Combined Events Championships. I am grateful to work with such an extraordinary team, whose efforts directly impact and uplift Somerset's next generation of athletes.

Reflections and Future Directions

As Chairman, it has been my privilege to play even a small role in supporting and inspiring Somerset's young athletes. Watching them grow and compete has been deeply fulfilling, and I am proud of what we have accomplished as a community. Moving forward, we aim to broaden participation, especially among younger athletes, to ensure that our county championships continue to flourish. This will be achieved by continuing to strengthen ties with Somerset schools and making Somerset's athletics programs accessible to all.

Closing Remarks

In 2024, Somerset Schools Athletics Association has not only maintained but enhanced its tradition of excellence. I thank each athlete, parent, coach, volunteer, and official who contributed to making this year unforgettable. Together, we are creating a legacy of opportunity, competition, and growth for the young athletes of Somerset. I look forward to continuing this journey and building upon this year's successes.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the executive team, including President Mrs. Pat. Gillett, Senior Team Manager Richard Bowden, Secretary and Officials Secretary Brian Baker, Treasurer Katie Cobb, Vice Chairman Mr. Jason Allen, Track & Field Cup Secretary G. Jennings, and Safeguarding Officer Jo Pike. Their dedication, alongside our area secretaries, officials, and volunteers, made this year possible.
As Chairman, I am honoured to support these young athletes and help build a nurturing environment for their growth and success. Thank you to everyone who contributed to another outstanding year for Somerset Schools Athletics Association."