

Race walking report for BMAF AGM 2023

Ian Richards OLY – Race Walking Secretary

The last year has not seen any reversal in the decline in the event in the UK at both senior and masters levels. The race walking national and regional governing bodies continue to focus on the younger age groups using mainly short track events. The consequence has been that it has not been possible to find races which could/are willing to accommodate a BMAF Championship. The majority of races that do take place do not use championship judging rules and are, therefore, unsuitable. National Championships have entry standards, which is unacceptable for masters events, so they can't be used either. The low numbers of walkers also make Regional championships unviable and, as a result, those championships tend to be put into the same race as a National championship with entry standards. Sadly we simply do not have the resources or volunteers to stage a viable championship ourselves.

None the less, the BMAF has staged 3 championships, two of which have been within BMAF track championships at 3000m in the BMAF indoor and BMAF outdoor. We also did manage a 5000m road walk was organised within the Horwich Festival by Adrian Edwards supported by Eric Horwill. That was a great success and probably the biggest A rules race in the country over the year with 10 ladies and 20 men taking part. The Festival were able to accommodate a walk on a new course because of the small numbers but not a 5km run.

On a brighter note, ladies race walking is in a much better position than the mens with a number of newcomers in the masters age range. The outlook for 2024 looks much the same. Currently there is not one race in the proposed 2024 calendar that is suitable. The BMAF has no option but to start to try to arrange its own races which is challenging as the surviving race walking clubs and larger clubs with a race walking section are run by just one or two people. This means that there are no pools of volunteers around the country that could easily be recruited to help stage an event.

Internationally Great Britain continues to have success in the championships with 7 ladies and 3 men taking part. In the world indoor championships in Torun, Dave Annetts won 2 silver medals in the 3000m and 10km while Ian Richards picked up a Bronze in the 3000m. In the European outdoor track championships it was the turn of the women to shine. Grazia Manzotti won her first medals in an international with a silver at 5000m, gold at both the 10km and 20km. Maureen Noel won a gold at 20km and silver at 10km while Noel Blatchford took silver in the 5000m and Melanie Peddle won a bronze in the 20km. The W50 ladies won silver medals in both the 10km and 20km races. In the mens 5000m, Ian Richards took gold while Peter Bozko took silver in the 20km.

On a sad note Noel Blatchford (W75) took ill after winning her silver in the 5000m. She was hospitalised where a stroke was diagnosed. She remained in hospital for a further 3 weeks after the championship ended during which time she suffered 2 more strokes before passing away on the 20th October. Many tributes have been made from around the world to this fine athlete who won many medals in both World and European Championships. She will be sadly missed. Tributes have appeared on EMA, BMAF and other websites.

I have been the Race Walking Secretary for the last 12 years and, at 75, I feel it is time to let someone else to take over. If no one steps forward, with the help of two volunteers who have offered to assist, I shall continue until someone is found but without the Executive position. I am standing for the post of Vice Chairman to enable me to finish the work that needs to be done on incorporation. If elected I

will remain on the Executive in that position. I have still to decide what role, if any, I might consider in the new company structure.

Race Walking in the UK is fighting for survival while in the rest of the world it is thriving and spreading to more and more countries. This has come about because of a decision made by the Race Walking governing body many years ago when the judging rules changed requiring the leg to be straightened at the knee from the point of contact of the leading foot with the ground until it is in the upright position. Many have found this very difficult as it has made the event very technical. With the best of intentions the UK decided not to introduce this rule for all races but allow the old rule to continue in what are now called B races. Rather than lose walkers it was felt that giving those who could not meet the rule the opportunity to race was a sensible approach. The rest of the world did not follow and now just have races with the new rule but their judges do not interpret the bent knee rule as strictly. In the UK the opposite has happened with the unintended consequence that races with the full rule are judged more strictly resulting in fewer and fewer masters walkers being prepared to race in A races. Using my position as BMAF Race Walking Secretary I have been trying for years to get change in the UK without success. I want to become more active outside the BMAF to try a new approach, possibly by standing for positions in the national race walking governing body and am even considering using the approach that has worked successfully in the road race community by looking at the possibility of becoming a race walking event promoter that uses a select panel of judges who are prepared to act more proportionately as foreign judges do.

Ian Richards

Race Walking Secretary.