

BMAF AGM 2025 – Vice Chairman’s report

Peter Kennedy, the BMAF Chairman, resigned from his position on the 1st August. The Constitution makes no provision for the Vice Chairman to take over the position. I declined to take on the responsibility and there has, therefore been no Chairman since that time. In the absence of a Chairman, this report covers a few points that would have been in his report and gives some personal views on the challenges masters is facing.

The last year has been a good year from the athletics and event management perspective. The key championships have all been successfully held and well attended with high standards being achieved by many athletes. The World Indoor Championships held in Gainesville, Florida in March was attended by over 200 BMAF athletes with many outstanding performances. . The European Outdoor Championships were held in Madeira at the beginning of October with around 500 BMAF athletes. Organisation of the latter left much to be desired and fell significantly short of championship standards. Athletes had to overcome many challenges. Despite this Great Britain finished top of the medal table, an excellent performance. Just as important, what these problems did do, was create an excellent spirit within the team, team managers, the medical team and the British qualified officials who were helping out with events. It demonstrated just how special masters athletics is. It didn't matter how old, whether you were breaking records, winning medals or just wanted to take part and get a personal best. Everyone was in it together. Amongst the athletes many had overcome injuries, operations, significant medical conditions and personal tragedies but they were there enjoying this wonderful sport regardless.

Despite this success, the structure of the BMAF, has probably reached its ceiling of capability because of its growth with the organisation becoming extremely stretched. At the same time there has been a culture change in respect of volunteering. Not so many people have the time or inclination to take on volunteer roles. This is happening not just in the BMAF but across all sports and activities that have traditionally depended on volunteers. Increasing use of technology is helping but it is not the total solution. More and more people have to be paid to carry out essential roles putting a strain on limited financial resources. The main Track and Field Championships is reaching maximum capacity with around 800 athletes in Derby this year and now stretches over 3 days.

We are seeing substantial growth in running with more and more local events but not seeing that in athletics. Many athletic clubs are losing members to new running clubs undermining their financial stability. The Area Clubs are in the midst of this change and are having varying experience. Some are doing well whilst others struggle. The Home Country Athletic Federations are waking up to the potential of masters seeing it as a potential revenue source. In some cases they are becoming an increasing threat to our Area Clubs and care is needed going forward. What is clear is that the BMAF needs to work just as hard with the Area Clubs to help them face their challenges as it does its own.

Change is vital. Many organisations and companies fail because of their inability to manage growth. This must not happen to the BMAF as it is the only body in the UK that is solely focussed on masters athletics.

The incorporation of the BMAF so that it becomes a company sitting alongside BMAF Services Ltd is the first step in creating a new infrastructure to enable masters athletics to continue to thrive and grow while starting to tackle the volunteering problem. Much time has been spent on getting this right while ensuring the best of the past is retained. Some would say too long but it is complicated and following the correct decision making democratic process with consultation takes time. A new company can be created in weeks but the

BMAF is a Federation of 11 independent autonomous clubs with around 4000 members covering the whole of the UK. A corporate structure that ensures the clubs, each with their own considerations, are still in ultimate control, and their members still having voting rights is far from straight forward, but it has been achieved. Becoming a company with limited liability entails introducing controls required by company law making running an athletics company very different from running an unincorporated athletics club or a simple for profit director owned company. Consulting and getting agreement for an overriding document with 14 sections with 161 clauses where everybody seems to have an opinion on almost everything has not been easy.

Going forward we will have an event management company to take care of championships and, a membership system. That will initially be a beefed up BMAF Services with good governance. However, there will be real opportunities for this company to grow, if it is desired, into a major cash generator for the Federation offering its services not just for the BMAF but the whole of athletics. Although it is a not for profit company, which means it cannot distribute profits to shareholders or directors, it can make profits for use in helping the company achieve its objects and also to help finance the company. This could be a way to obtain funds to pay for staff, officials and even start giving support to athletes as is happening in some other countries. We should have the basic company infrastructure in place for this to happen if desired.

Alongside this company, there will be a new overriding company that will deal with all the non event and membership matters. It will deal with strategy, company administration, finance etc. This will free up those who volunteer to help manage the athletics programme and events from all the things they don't want to deal with and nor do they necessarily have the right experience or aptitude to manage. We have within the BMAF family many with high level business experience, a number of whom may be happy to step forward to help in running the Holding Company but would never want to get involved in the event management side.

We have reached the ceiling of what our current structure can achieve. We have to reduce our expectations on the breadth of the roles of the top people running the BMAF. More people with the right experience doing smaller roles has to be the way forward. We are now putting in place a new floor capable of supporting a very different approach to the way that masters is currently managed without taking away what we currently do. The discussions on that way forward and what it might look like can start once incorporation has happened.

Ian Richards

Vice Chairman