

SSAA Chairman's Report 2020

There are some days, weeks, months or even years that we do not remember for any special reason – there are some that we do. I am sure that we will all reflect on the last year with a sombre mixture of emotions, memories and perspective.

That was my opening paragraph when I was last chairman, in 2013. A year with a postponed County Cross Country Championships, due to weather, and where we mourned the passing of the great Bill Whistlecroft. Little did I think that my next term would be even more memorable, again for the wrong reasons.



Covid-19 has dealt the world a tragic hand causing the death of thousands, with many people facing emotional, financial and social difficulties. One of these is sport, especially at grass roots level. Throughout the whole of lockdown, I was amazed at the determination of the athletics community to offer some form of opportunity for young athletes to compete. As expected, members of the SSAA were among those working tirelessly to achieve what at times seemed impossible. Sometimes it was, but the determination to try was always there.

Despite missing a summer of athletics, we were able to enjoy a cross country season. Area events were successfully completed and, thanks to the continued hard work of Brian Baker, we were once again able to hold our County Championships at the excellent venue, Aldon Hill. The teams that were selected for the South West Championships performed very well, demonstrating the strength of Somerset. Before our world went into lockdown, we were able to provide our athletes with the chance to represent their county in a National Championships – something each and every one of them will remember and appreciate. This is mainly thanks to the continued efforts of Richard Bowden and his team of loyal team managers who dedicate hours to the welfare and success of the athletes. Little did we realise that this would be the final schools' athletics event of the year.

2020 will sadly see the retirement of our brilliant treasurer, Les Neville. Les has presided over this role for 26 years bringing a calm, professional and considered perspective to the many meetings he has attended, not forgetting the many hours he has dedicated to the role behind the scenes. I hadn't even qualified when he began as treasurer and yet he has steadfastly served the young athletes of Somerset by ensuring the SSAA is a financially sustainable association. This is a remarkable achievement that requires tremendous hard work and diligence, the ability to adapt to change and innovation, and the willingness to make difficult decisions. Les has always impressed me by the manner in which he has conducted this role. Thank you for your service, Les. It has been an honour working with you, although I am not sure I have forgiven you for nominating me for my first term as chairman in 2002.

Finally, grass roots sport faces many challenges over the coming years but I feel confident that the young people of Somerset who want to be involved in the sport of athletics will be looked after by my tremendous colleagues, and friends, within the SSAA, and wider sporting and educational communities.

Thank you.

Steve Ladd

SSAA Chairman 2020