



Administrator's Annual Report to the AGM November 2021

I think it's safe to say that 2021 has been like no other, with problems and pitfalls at every turn. Whilst we started the season with a certain amount of trepidation and concern as to whether we would be able to offer a full programme of events, indeed the first rounds of matches offered a reduced 50% timetable, which some clubs were able to take advantage of and run an open type meeting alongside; the second half of the season reverted to a full timetable but suffice to say even that wasn't without its issues.

Due to the uncertainty at the time, we made a decision to restructure along more local lines so that travelling was kept to a minimum. This sometimes meant we ended up with smaller divisions than we would have liked and also resulted in a season of no promotions and relegations, this was met with enthusiasm from some quarters and frustration from others. Possibly the decision not to award points for officials backfired as some teams saw this as an excuse not to provide sufficient cover and depended heavily on host clubs to cover the shortfall. Fair play to those hosts who moved heaven and earth to make sure the competition ran efficiently but it must be stressed that part of a club's commitment to the league is to provide officials as specified in the rules. We appreciate that there is a problem with the number of officials decreasing but we are grateful to England Athletics for their supporting initiative to try to encourage clubs to recruit and retain their officials. The take up has been quite slow, not helped by the shortage of courses but we do hope that other clubs take advantage of this and persuade their parents and others to take up the challenge – without officials and other necessary volunteers, there can be no matches.

In all, 169 YDL matches took place across both age groups; this accounts for one third of all league and similar competitions across the country which is a significant number of fixtures – I can personally vouch for that since I have carried out the bulk of the match scrutiny which has to take place in order to verify the results. The double weekend in September was absolutely the most stressful time I've had since taking on the role of Administrator. Apart from issues with the results software, there were also a worrying number of occasions where it was plain that the guidelines we produce had played no part in the recording of results, nor it seems, in a few cases, were the league rules understood or adhered to.

We're looking forward to holding a full league programme in 2022 but will be carrying out a consultation exercise to explore our options for 2023 and beyond that best serves our athletes. We are committed to providing a league competition as it is our belief that our athletes enjoy the team aspect to competing in a league that cannot be achieved at open meetings and other such competitions, they too have their place, but they cannot be the sole option. Looking ahead, we've lost some clubs, many due to the shrinking number of athletes at their disposal, I think it's fair to say that the sport has lost a large number of athletes during the 2 years of Covid, and it will take some time to get back to 'normal'. On the positive side we have gained some new teams into the fold. We are still far and away the biggest league in the country and the number of athletes on our portal has increased this year, up to 24 000, although not all will have competed in every round of the competition. The software did cause some problems for us all, and we are aiming to have a more stable version for the beginning of next season to make it a more pleasurable experience for all involved in the results. The portal remains very popular amongst team managers (when it's working, I think everyone feels it's an excellent resource).

Of course, one of the crucial elements of running a league is the willingness of clubs to host fixtures, our rules stipulate that each team should host when asked and at least once every two years. In 2021 we all relied heavily on clubs to step up to the plate, and some did this in spades. One of our clubs in the



Northern region hosted 5 out of a possible 6 across both age groups, which in a difficult year is an exceptional effort, and deserves the gratitude of the clubs in their respective divisions. Well done to Leigh Harriers. With the cost of tracks rising, it's crucial that everyone plays their part in sharing the load.

Agreeing fixture dates for 2022 has taken up a lot of time during the summer, needless to say we've had to compromise a lot and, with reluctance, have accepted the dates we were given (after some renegotiations of course). UKA's Competition Working Group were intending holding a webinar to explain all the complexities of sorting out the fixture calendar, whilst also taking on board what our clubs had to say. At the time of writing, we are still waiting for a date from the CWG so we can send out an invitation to all our clubs. It's a little unfortunate that the opportunity to discuss and debate the fixture calendar has been removed and it has led to some frustration for both us and our member clubs.

We're also waiting to hear if we are to receive any governing body financial support for 2022 and beyond and our Finance Officer is still working very hard on this, as his financial report will demonstrate.

Although our amended structure made it impossible to offer promotions, and relegations, for the season I still produced league tables for all divisions, and it was good to see some new faces topping their respective divisions. In 2022 we'll revert back to our more linear structure but trying to take into account travelling distances for the majority. As stated above, we will be running some roadshows early on in the year to look at ways of improving the league and inviting your thoughts as part of that process. Whilst it's sometimes easier to maintain the status quo, we do also need to adapt to a changing environment when athletes' and clubs' needs alter.

I am extremely grateful to the committee for their support and assistance during the year, in particular the Area Co-ordinators who sorted out the structures and were the first line of enquiry for many clubs. In addition, Joyce volunteered to scrutinise the results from a number of matches, including 7 sets from the horrendous September weekend for which I am extremely grateful. I am concerned that the number of volunteers is diminishing and shudder to think what will happen if we fail to attract anyone to take up the role of Area Co-ordinator in the Midlands and Southern regions. I would like to extend my personal thanks to both Joyce Tomala and Lorraine Vidler for their support and commitment over a number of years, I'll be sad to see them go, but totally understand their need to move on.

Finally, on behalf of our committee, I would like to thank you and all the volunteers in your clubs who continue to work hard week in, week out to support your athletes; without your enthusiasm and commitment there would be no matches, so, thank you all. I look forward to another year of working together to ensure the future success of our sport.

Marian Williams
YDL Administrator