



Loughborough, 20.5.12. Race starter MARGARET WERRETT. photo by Mark Shearman.

Margaret Werrett

Level 5 Starter

England Athletics

Do you have an athletics background?

I was an athlete – running for the Central Region club and, then, Falkirk Victoria Harriers both based at Grangemouth Stadium in Scotland. I did most track events from 100m right up to 1500m, mainly 400m.

My dad took me everywhere. He was an athletics official. My PE teacher was the Chief Starter for Scotland and I hankered after being the first female Scottish Chief Starter. Sadly, he was killed in a road accident before I fulfilled this ambition. But the idea of being a starter also came from when I false started in a swimming gala. From that moment on I wanted to get his job!

In my late teens, early 20s I realised I wouldn't make the quantum leap to any more than a club runner so I decided to focus on the officiating side and my ambition to be a starter so I could stay in the sport.

Where are you in your officiating journey?

I did my first officiating exam in 1982 when I relocated to England. At this time there were very few women in the starting fraternity. I went back to Scotland to officiate and I did become the first Scottish woman to be appointed as Chief Starter.

At that time I faced quite a few challenges of being a woman starter. Vivienne Webster became the first woman to get to the top level in the late 1980s. Thankfully it has changed for the better now and women are more readily accepted as starters and starters assistants and getting through the levels is much easier.

By 1998 I achieved the old Grade 1 (now level 4) and in 2004 I achieved Chief Starter.. Then level 5 came as a result of being appointed as International Starter to many European and Global World Para Athletics (WPA) meetings since 2013 and becoming a WPA International Technical Official in 2014. I was appointed as International Starter for the World Para Athletics two years ago and carried out the same role at the Paralympic Games this year. I have also been appointed to the International Starters panel with European Athletics.

Working in a school in Bromsgrove – where I was a teacher until my recent retirement - I have officiated at many schools, county schools and regional meetings supporting my tri-region. Alongside these meetings I officiate at disability meetings in this country as well as my role as WPA International Starter. In 2019 I officiated at the three global para-athletics championships for the WPA.

I was start coordinator at London 2012 for the Paralympics and in Tokyo I was international starter.

Next year I hope to be appointed to officiate at the Commonwealth Games. This would complement my first European Athletics appointment as International Starter. I am Start Coordinator for the Indoor British Championships in February.

What is your favourite moment as an official?

Jonny Peacock's final in 2012 was so completely surreal. After I said "on your marks" the crowd was so loud chanting his name. It was so loud I had looked at the athletes and thought "we are in trouble here" so I had to stand the athletes up then I calmed them down and an athlete looked to over-balance so I stood them up again and thought "this race is

never going to start'. One of my colleagues said they wished I could have seen my face as the utter relief when I walked off the track after the race had finally started was unbelievable!

I brought the track and field programme in London to a close in what was Oscar Pistorius' last track race. And I was then given the honour to do the same in Tokyo starting the final Women's T63 race where the Italians came first, second and third breaking the World record for the third time that day and in torrential rain. I had decided that I didn't want to go into that final race in the plastic raincoat, so I went inside to take it off and all of the Japanese start team, 20 in all, had all done exactly the same so we were all stood there in our formal uniforms in the pouring rain which was a lovely moment and the correct way to end the Games.

What do you love most about officiating?

There are always challenges; with new challenges in every race and every team you work in.

But the biggest thing is the camaraderie in the discipline which has improved leaps and bounds since I started all those years ago. That and knowing that your starting is consistent, and you are giving the athletes in front of you the best possible start whether it be a schools race, the women's 60m indoors final or the final race in the Paralympics you treat them all the same. This is what gets me out of bed at unearthly hours to do my "unpaid job". But if you stop loving the sport and stop learning then there is no point in doing it.

What are your ambitions in officiating?

My target was to be an International Starter and I have reached that which I am very proud of. So, I guess it is to keep doing what I am doing to the best of my ability and to continue to improve.

I would like to be given the opportunity to officiate at more European and World Athletics championships; to do that I need to keep doing what I am doing successfully. That along with continuing to be an International Starter for World Para Athletics will make me a very happy woman!

I would also like to help encourage more officials to come through especially younger people and to support more female starters. Some women are reluctant to use firearms. But with the development of more electronic start systems which are used more widely this may be less of an issue in the future.

What would you tell others about becoming an official?

It is enjoyable and the camaraderie means it is a pleasure to do it.

We do need more young people to come into and enjoy the sport.

You get out of it what you put into it. Over the last twenty years I have been lucky to have been given so many opportunities within the sport which have enriched my life immeasurably.

. I would say keep at it when the going gets tough and if you think that you can do it you will. You have to believe in you. No-one else will. If you can do this then you will have a rewarding career in your chosen athletic discipline. Hopefully some will be as a Starter/Starters Assistant.

Using just three words describe what officiating means to you.

- I don't know what I'd do without it (more than 3 but sums it up for me!)