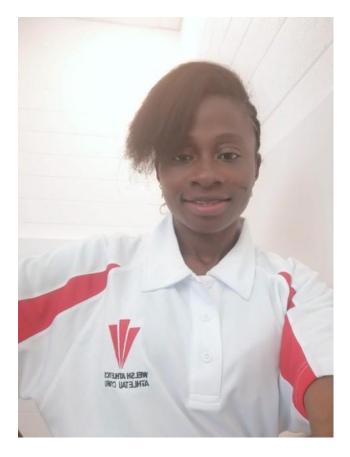
OFFICIALS PROFILE: AYO AFOLABI



Welsh Athletics

Track Judge

Do you have an athletics background?

I have two children who take part in athletics at our local club, Cardiff Archers. I used to do some athletics in high school myself so when I was looking for something to keep my son active I thought of the athletics club. He was a bit tall and very quiet at school so I felt he needed a challenge and I was sure he would enjoy athletics and benefit from it.

Both children still compete – my daughter as an under 13 sprinter and my son as an under 17 multi-eventer. About three or four years ago the club asked the parents if they could help out as volunteers.

Where are you in your officiating journey?

After I'd helped out a few times the club suggested I went on a course being put on by Welsh Athletics to gain my level one track judge training. I then did some official duties to finish the qualification.

I have started working towards my level two and I am ready for that once competition resumes next year to get my experience at events.

I have always been interested in athletics and we watch it on TV. I had thought I might like coaching but when Welsh Athletics suggested officiating, I thought I'd give that a go.

The knowledge is useful and I would still like to help with coaching at some point as I do feel there are a lot of children with talent that may not have access to coaches or clubs, especially those in primary school.

I have covered most areas of the track including checking lanes, registering finishers and, even, monitoring the hurdles.

What is your favourite moment as an official?

Just being at the events is great. I was scared and nervous when I started and, after lockdown, I did worry about if I would remember everything, but it was fine. I enjoy seeing the children develop and monitoring their progress.

What do you love most about officiating?

Actually when I am volunteering as an official I feel I am having a break from looking after the children! I know a lot of the young athletes and I enjoy watching their progress.

I love the inclusive nature of it – as a black woman I wasn't sure if I would feel like I belonged, but I have always been made welcome. Everyone interacts with you, even those with higher qualifications.

What are your ambitions in officiating?

I hope to be successful in getting my level two next year. I have registered for all local events in the Welsh junior league for next year. I would like to try to get a role outside Wales in the future.

What would you tell others about becoming an official?

Go for it. If you have the passion for it and are interested in athletics, then it is something you will enjoy. It is a long day, so you do need to be interested in it. I have encouraged some young people to think about volunteering as we definitely need more younger officials.

Using just three words describe what officiating means to you.

- Enjoyable
- Welcoming/sociable
- Rewarding