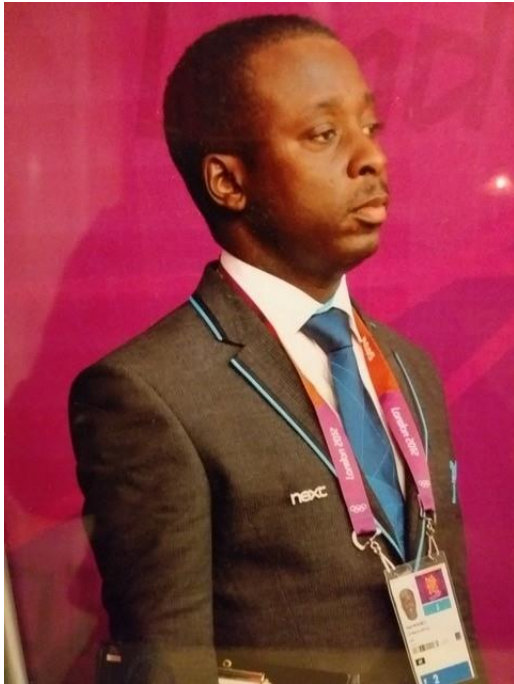


OFFICIALS PROFILE: NOEL MCKAKLY



England Athletics

Track Judge – level 4

Do you have an athletics background?

I enjoyed watching athletics on TV when I was growing up and my heroes were Steve Ovett and Brendan Foster. They were my inspiration to become an athlete which I did, competing for my club Wolverhampton and Bilston AC where I have been a member since I was 14. My dream was to go to the Olympics.

I took part in 800m and 1500m and the club had some very impressive athletes when I joined. I remember some of the club athletes showing me their Olympic medals and I thought I'd like some of that! I didn't make the Olympics [as an athlete] but I carried on competing until about 2000 when former Wolverhampton and Bilston athlete, Denise Lewis won her gold medal in Sydney. At that point I went into coaching and saw another side of the sport. In 2001 we were asked to host a meeting so I also saw what was involved in that side of things. I thought in a few years I'd like to have a go at being an official.

I became a team manager for my club and I would get to meetings and be asked if I had the required number of officials with me. As an athlete you do not always realise the officials are even there so that was an eye-opener.

I also found out the club could get extra points if we provided more officials so that seemed like a no-brainer.

Where are you in your officiating journey?

After a couple of years thinking about it, I went on a course, took the exam, passed and then did my first meeting. I really enjoyed it and I have been officiating ever since; some 18 years.

In 2008 I became officials' secretary of Wolverhampton and Bilston AC so I have been involved in recruiting and retaining officials. I have encouraged officials to take courses and get involved and helped them with their progression.

I have also recently taken on the role of County Official Secretary for Staffordshire.

I chose track judging as I had been a track athlete, so it seemed appropriate given what I knew. I took the exam in April 2004 and haven't looked back. I officiate at grassroots, school, county, area: midlands and national level. I have been lucky enough to officiate at British Championships in 2013 and then again last year. I was track referee last year at the British Championships which was a challenge due to the pandemic. I also refereed at the English Schools from 2015 to 2019 – it had always been my dream to run at this event and I didn't quite make it so to be part of it as an official was a big highlight.

At London 2012 I was a track judge at both the Olympics and Paralympics. I look back with great pride that I played my part in this. The following year I was at the very wet European Team Championships in Gateshead and then in 2014 I was lucky enough to get selected for the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. The World Athletics and World Para-Athletics followed in 2017 in London and then the World Indoors in Birmingham in 2018 and European Indoors in Glasgow in 2019 so I have really made the most of the UK hosting so many major championships. I have been very grateful for the opportunities this has given me as an official.

What is your favourite moment as an official?

For me it would have to be the 45 minutes at the Olympic Games when Jess Ennis-Hill, Mo Farah and Greg Rutherford all won gold on "Super Saturday". I was officiating on the 800m race on the break line where Jess Ennis had to 'break' on the first lap. I had an ITO (international track official) standing next to me making sure I was watching the athletes break and ensuring it was all right and fair, so the pressure was on! While the race was on, I could hear the crowd going crazy behind me as Greg was jumping.

Then for Mo's race I was lap-scoring and trying to concentrate on writing down the laps, but the crowd were so loud. I have never heard anything like it. When I went back to the hotel all the officials were celebrating as it was such a momentous occasion and we had played our part in a moment of history.

What do you love most about officiating?

I love meeting other people and enjoy the camaraderie with the other officials. I call them my second family. We always have such fun, but we are also serious. When you don't enjoy it, it is time to stop.

I enjoy helping new officials who are starting out and help them develop, mentoring them formally or informally

I also love watching the athletes develop especially when you see them develop from junior to senior and achieve their goals and their personal bests. As an ex-athlete, I like watching the performances close up from the best seat in the house.

What are your ambitions in officiating?

I have had such amazing opportunities already and I am happy at level 4. I enjoy being a track official and occasional in the field. I don't have time to go abroad to officiate, so I am very happy at my level.

I have done all the major champs in this country, so I have been very lucky. I hope to be selected for the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.

I want to help recruit more officials and be a good role model for them and promote athletics as we need more.

What would you tell others about becoming an official?

Have – a – go.

Athletics can't take place without officials. We need officials and we are all very supportive, welcoming, warm and helpful. You would be playing your part in making sure the competition is taking place in a safe, fair, enjoyable, in an athlete-centred way.

There are so many disciplines to choose from – there'll be one for everyone. Have a look at England Athletics website and see what appeals to you.

Using just three words describe what officiating means to you.

- Enjoyment
- Dedication
- Pride