

## **Richard O'Grady**



### **Discipline Lead and Starter with Scottish Athletics Central AC**

#### **Do you have an athletics background?**

I have been involved in athletics, mainly on the endurance side since I was 19. Since I am now 68 that's a good few years! I had to keep fit for my job as a Metropolitan Police officer with four-monthly physical tests so running was the most natural way to supplement my gym work. We all did it – running around Epping Forest near to where we were based and I took part in mostly 10k and half marathon events for many years.

When I retired from the Police, my wife and I moved to Scotland where I started endurance coaching with my local club, The Wee County Harriers in Clackmannanshire. I then became the Club Together Officer with Central Athletics Club in Stirling. But then around eight years ago I started having knee problems and eventually I had to have a knee replacement so that was the end of my running.

I was approached by the then Scottish Athletics Start Discipline Lead to become an official and, because of my career as an instructor and operational police officer in the firearms division, asked if I'd like to start some of the local races around Forth Valley.

#### **Where are you in your officiating journey?**

I have been officiating as a starter now for nearly seven years. I am now the Start Discipline Lead for Scotland coordinating all the starters and trying to recruit new starters and starter assistants.

I am currently a level three starter and level three starter's assistant. But I have also taken timekeeping and photo-finish courses. I have undertaken these roles at events although not as much as I would like as we are short of starters in Scotland so there is limited opportunity for me to do the other jobs.

But I try to encourage others to diversify and try each of the disciplines so that they have a better understanding of what is going on around them at the track and appreciate what needs to happen when things go wrong.

I am currently in the process of going for my level four with everything done except my six observation reports which have been delayed due to the lack of events during the pandemic. I hope I will get these through the next indoor and outdoor seasons.

### **What interested you about officiating?**

It was really the perfect way to stay involved in athletics once I wasn't competing. I really enjoy encouraging others and love seeing people develop as officials or as athletes.

Endurance coaching was becoming difficult due to my knee replacement. With officiating, I am still able to work in the sport encouraging both young athletes and young or new officials.

### **What is your favourite moment as an official?**

My favourite event as an official is the "Super Teams" event for 9, 10 and 11 year olds. It is fantastic to see all the enthusiasm from the young athletes and I love to encourage them as best I can. There is an indoor event at the Emirates in Glasgow and an outdoor event at different venues across Scotland. Both are always oversubscribed and it can be very chaotic but so fabulous to be part of.

Not actually an officiating moment but my best personal moment this year was to receive the Raymond Hutchison Trophy for services to officiating awarded by Scottish Athletics and Jog Scotland. It was a lovely surprise and quite an honour.

### **What do you love most about officiating?**

As a Discipline Lead, I love encouraging, supporting and mentoring the young and new officials as they develop in their various roles.

I also encourage other senior officials to guide them and support them. I have always enjoyed helping others as part of my job and now it is great to be able to do it in my volunteering role.

We recently held a virtual Level 1 starting course with people joining from across Scotland. At the forthcoming indoor season in Glasgow we will try and get as many of the new officials to come, so they can gain experience shadowing and working with experienced officials. They are a mix of ex-athletes; parents who have children competing or who have just left home for college; others are club officials who now want to move on into a national level.

### **What are your ambitions in officiating?**

My target is to get my level four qualification as both a Starter and Starter's Assistant. Although I would love to go to a Commonwealths, Europeans, Worlds or even Olympics, I feel my age is against me as I will be 70 in 2023 so it may not be achievable. But I will certainly strive towards getting to one of them.

I have applied to the Commonwealths in Birmingham next year but I may not have got my level four in time for that one. But I will go to the national championships.

### **What would you tell others thinking about becoming an official?**

I would say go for it! If you want to be part of athletics and enjoy watching the sport, it is a fantastic way to be involved.

It is a very worthwhile and enjoyable volunteering role. You can get as involved as you want to, progressing along the official's pathway from club level, to district, then region and national levels or just stay working at club or local level. It's up to you.

It's also great to see the athletes you once saw doing club runs now representing Scotland or becoming Olympians – for example, Andy Butchart who now competes for GB.

### **Using only three words describe what officiating means to you.**

- Enjoyable
- Worthwhile
- Fun