

CHAIR'S REPORT

Annual General Meeting, October 2014

I would like to use this opportunity to encourage our membership to pause for a moment and enjoy the peace of a post Commonwealth Games period and relative calm of the mid Olympic cycle. Too often we are hard on ourselves, trying to be all things to all people and forgetting that 99.9% of this organisation is made up of volunteers giving freely of their time.

Use the moment to remind ourselves that as an organisation we have been moving at a whirlwind pace; staging major events, fighting fires and dealing with the past (sometimes reviewing decisions that are eight years old); whilst change is constantly on the Agenda and being thrust upon us by other stakeholders.

Indeed, if we examine our own personal contributions then we can only conclude there is much to celebrate about British Wrestling. Those that were present at the Olympics or Commonwealth Games in whenever capacity will bear testimony that the sport is alive and well; making best use of social media to bring it to the attention of a new audience who thought our athletes were something entirely different and failed to recognise the dedication required to become proficient at the sport. To the leaders, administrators, officials, support teams, coaches and athletes we owe you a tremendous debt of gratitude; the next generation of wrestlers has already been inspired by your professional delivery.

When I say "British Wrestling" I mean every person that completed an online application form; we are too small to view the organisation in terms of "them" and "us" mentality and I often hear the BWA referred to in the third person. "Who are the BWA?" - We are the collective sum of thousands of ordinary interactions between coaches and teams; parents and athletes; club treasurers and funders; committees and councils or the Executive and Sport England.

I have been involved in wrestling for about 35 years and today I see an organisation which is structurally fit for purpose (audit after audit from Sport England provides confirmation) although we continue to learn valuable lessons particularly around the selection of key positions; only last week at a Sport NI meeting I heard senior representatives from the sports of hockey and badminton debating problems that plague their corporate governance, matters which we resolved years ago.

Nevertheless, with the foundations in place there is more work to be done and it is now time to get on to the front foot e.g. we have a huge capacity for growth, do we actually believe that our numbers consists of just over 1,200 persons in total (equivalent to the capacity of the family stand at Torquay United FC)? If it were true then the ability to identify and prepare 8 Commonwealth medallists in truly a phenomenon.

I believe this is a gross under representation and does British Wrestling a disservice in the eyes of our statutory partners and friends. So therein lays a challenge and the responsibility to address it rests with us all; I feel it should be a priority as we approach 2015 but rapid progress can only be made if everyone else sees things the same way.

British Wrestling is a democratic organisation and each top end committees will be set the task of contributing to an overarching document which sets the strategic direction for years to come. Efforts will be coordinated by the CE but the membership will own the document and if the process is correct then we will believe in it. Performance is no longer the main driver and as the health of the nation declines for the first time in a long time we are hearing about club development, increasing participation and pathways for young people; subjects which sit at the heart of every club.

The door is open for innovation and creativity; ideas can flow throughout the organisation very quickly and we should seize the moment, funding is in place and we will not be shy about asking for more as our statistics improve, others have already done it.

Piece by piece, Skype by Skype (and occasionally face to face), we have built a strong central core; the work will continue and opportunities will arise in the immediate future for others to contribute as interim positions are filled, committee members rotate and new Directors on the current Board roll their sleeves up, we will embrace the grind!

The watch words for 2015 will be transparency and trust e.g. a summary of Board minutes will continue to be published on the web site and Directors will be more visible at tournaments. As we establish and publish a set of values important to British Wrestling, I have no doubt that these words will form the central pillar of the document.

Undoubtedly, this resonates with the entire organisation but these matters require the two way flow of accurate and timely information (top to bottom/bottom to top) and as we move ever closer towards de-centralisation with stronger National and Regional Squads based in additional centres of excellence in Stirling, Cardiff and Londonderry then communication is vital.

There should be no closed doors within British Wrestling and I look forward to the day when the Academy in Salford is once more a welcoming, vibrant and busy location. Undoubtedly, we have another challenge on our hands to retain and modernize the building but it is the focal point of our joint efforts and the shop window to our sport, the Board of British Wrestling will rally around to ensure that this asset is one to be proud of and reflects a unified and determined organisation moving forward.

I would like say a very sincere thank you to Yvonne Ball, Colin Nicholson and Malcolm Morley (OBE); they work above and beyond the call of duty and I have witnessed at first hand just how demanding their jobs are in reality. Finally, to the parents and carers of all our athletes, thank you for every car journey on a wet wintry night, every pound invested in equipment and tournaments; every sacrifice you have made throughout the year, the sport simply could not survive without you.

Yours in Wrestling

Barry Pollin
Interim Chair - British Wrestling