

Profile – Rob Mayston – AMA Board Member

You can refer to me as the “accidental masters’ athlete”. My very first foray into athletics was a successful one as a member of a Primary School Grade 5 winning relay team all the way back in 1967. At High school I showed some early promise in sprints before I got overpowered by the “big kids” ending up as the no. 5 runner (“the relay emergency”). But an opportunity unexpectedly opened up in the long jump in year 10 and I made the most of it, holding my place through to year 12 and recording a best jump of 6.73m in 1974.

But it would be a long time after that before I ever set foot again on an athletics track. The next time for that would be in 1993, when I commenced what would be a 16 year stint as a parent of four children who all did little athletics across two states – South Australia and Victoria. I liked the ethos of “Little A’s” with it’s “being the best you can be” motto, and whilst still encouraging the more talented athletes, participation and having fun were the main aims. I would do some training with my children, but my main sport back then was as an Aussie Rules football umpire where I would go on to chalk up over 500 games. My career highlight was an ‘A’ grade grand final in the Adelaide Metropolitan League (no I was never good enough to be up at AFL level) on the hallowed turf of the Adelaide Oval in 1997.

Of my four children, one would progress to open athletics. And it was in that setting in 2007 that the “fuse was lit” for a comeback to athletics after a pause of 33 years. One day whilst watching my son compete at the Frankston athletics track, a crazy idea entered my mind, which was to pay a 2\$ “come and try” fee (required for insurance purposes - in case of the need to call an ambulance I was later told) and to run a 200m. And so with no training, no warm up, no proper athletics gear - out I went. Severe cramping resulting from the run, and the need to excuse myself and sit under a bush to let the lactic acid subside, somehow didn’t deter me and so I registered at my local club Sandringham and competed in open athletics for the ensuing year. I was near on the only athlete in the club over 50 years of age with the “pin up” athlete of the time down there being Tamsyn Lewis. I focussed on the 200m and 400m, with the latter to end up being my main event. I was just running in flats and just generally having a bit of fun, with masters’ athletics still yet to come onto my radar.

With my running improving (my 400m under 60 seconds...something I’d never achieved previously in that event)...I had an idea to enter the 2009 Australian Masters Games at Geelong. I had just bought a pair of Asics ‘Hyperion’ spikes (my first pair since High school) – at sub 60s, I was starting to get serious...so I thought ! Starting from an outside lane I took off expecting to be overrun by the inside runners, but lo and behold I entered the straight in front and despite the lactic hitting big time, I hung on and won the race in a time of 56.75s (wow those spikes are amazing I thought !). After the race the 2nd placed runner (guy left in photo here, now my training partner Andrew Watts) asked me if I was going to the Australian Masters Athletics (AMA) Nationals in Adelaide. I didn’t even know anything about masters’ athletics at all and so soon forgot about that, thinking that likely something like that would be out of my league anyway. National Championships was not something I had ever done in anything.



Next through Athletics Victoria, I “discovered” the Victorian Masters State Championships in March 2009. I entered the 200m and 400m and managed placings in both. But even having competed in this event I still had yet to discover Victorian Masters Athletics (VMA). The only thing I noticed though was that there was a lot of people running around in VMA tops...”why were all of these people running around in state competition tops at a state championship?” I wondered.

In 2010 I took another step into my masters’ athletics’ journey and competed at my first AMA Nationals in Perth winning both the 200m and 400m (I have since competed in all AMA Nationals – missing only Melbourne 2012 when injured). And here I did finally find out who VMA was - and that was I had to register with them to compete in AMA events. But there was no other follow-up or welcome which I thought a bit

odd. But I was at least starting to “get into” masters’ athletics and so next on my radar was the 2011 World Athletics (WMA) Stadia (outdoor championship) in Sacramento, USA.

My first world championship was somewhat of a disaster as I got injured beforehand and ran just one heat of the 200m before I withdrew. Since then, I have competed at all (six) outdoor world championships, experiencing the “highs and lows” with the highlight being a win in the 400m at Porto Alegre, Brazil in 2013

(photo here is a good memory of “crossing the line” in Brazil). My message to those who compete in these – or any other events - is put in the hard work beforehand, then turn up compete hard and you never know what you will experience. Something I tried for the first time in 2023 was a WMA Indoor Championships in Poland. My take on it...“it’s bucket list”...and something for everyone to have a go at.



Once I finally found out what masters athletics’ was all about I got more and more immersed in it and wondered why more people weren’t participating in it. Then from the competing side of things I took it upon myself “to give back to the sport” by getting involved in the VMA Committee in 2018 and where in pretty quick time I found myself as LOC for the AMA Melbourne 2019 Championships. With a (still) record of around 970 registered athletes it presented some big challenges in terms of scheduling logistics with just one main track but somehow we found a way and it all went off well.

Further steps into the admin. side of things occurred in 2021 when I took-over as VMA President in 2021 and then joined the AMA Board in 2022. I see a large runway for growth in masters athletics’ in Australia.



Park Run has shown us how growth can be done and I see a similar opportunity for us. Track & Field with its diversity of events in simple terms looks to have event/s for everyone. I’ve always said “if you are not growing, you are going backwards” – which is especially true as new entities come along offering things aligned with what we are about. Currently I see the main barriers to growth for masters’ athletics in Australia to be availability of (i) our low profile...most people are like I was

and are not aware of masters athletics in Australia (ii) resources – both financial and human. If we want to truly strive to be “bigger and better” then we will need to come up with ways to overcome the current lack of these basic ingredients for growth. I would encourage every masters’ athlete to “give a bit back to their sport that gives them so much” – for if every member of AMA just recruited one new member we could double in size of AMA in one year - and you don’t have to be on a committee or the like to do that.

If we really put our minds to it boosting AMA membership to over 10,000 should not out of the question in my view, because there’s absolutely plenty of room for there to be many more “accidental masters athletes” like me !