



Centre Manager's Report – Ipswich Little Athletics

Season 2025/2026

It being my first year as Centre Manager it has been an honour and a privilege to take stewardship of this enormously successful Little Athletics Club. Ipswich Little Athletics has been a pillar of our local community for nearly 50 years providing the building blocks and development of athletics skills for our young people regardless of their level of skill and ability. The most rewarding part of athletics for me personally is that there is an event for everyone, regardless of their shape, size or impairment so therefore everyone can participate.

Our Facility

I sincerely hoped that by this time that I would be able to provide some certainty regarding the future of athletics in Ipswich. As we all know there is a big push from all levels of government for a synthetic facility in Ipswich. Unfortunately, there is still outstanding soil testing on Bill Paterson Oval (BPO) which will go a long way in determining the location. Whilst I am reasonably confident that BPO would not be suitable because of the landfill concerns, we must leave it to Council to advise us formally. From my point of view, I would like to see the new facility on the other side of the netball courts whilst maintaining BPO as a warm-up facility after it is remediated back to what it was when it was first created as a track.

The start

I think it is fair to say that the introduction of Sports 80 and the bib system by LAQ as the new registration platform has been an 'evolving challenge'. This may have had something to do with our registration numbers dropping by about 140 athletes from last season. I appreciate that last year was an Olympic year and that numbers do drop off the following season but a near 20% drop is something to ponder. What I can say is that the drop wasn't due to a lack of promotion by our Centre. Our social media presence is strong and the feedback I have received is that there hasn't been a lack of communication and that most people feel informed.

Our athletes

We are so blessed to have talented athletes in our Club, and their hard work and dedication is reflected in the results they achieve at club level, as well as at Met West and State level at LAQ Championships.

Whilst we are always dominant at regional level due to our size I want to focus on our achievements at State Level.

State Relays saw Ipswich with 115 athletes attend with 33 track teams and 49 field teams. From this our athletes received 16 Gold, 5 Silver and 11 Bronze. I also know there were at least three State Records broken from memory as well. A fantastic championship!

LAQ State Championships was also a major source of success for Ipswich. Of the 97 athletes who qualified, they achieved 27 Gold, 26 Silver and 23 Bronze medals. I swear every time there was a medal presented; an Ipswich athlete was being called. I wish there was an easier way to report on the Queensland Best Performances.

We also had a record contingent of Multi-Class athletes from across QLD compete with 47 athletes. We had 7 athletes compete and all athletes medalled in what was the most competitive field of Multi-Class ever assembled.

I am very proud of all our athlete's achievements at all LAQ carnivals and the Combined Events Championship. Congratulations to all.

Australian Little Athletics Championships (ALAC) was held in Brisbane and Ipswich had six QLD representatives which is absolutely outstanding! Whilst this is not something that is widely advertised, for all ALAC representatives from Ipswich we contribute half of the fee that is required to be paid. Being in Brisbane this year it wasn't a large amount. However, last year the club contributed over \$10000 to eligible athletes to travel to South Australia for ALAC.

Why am I highlighting this? It is because of the hard work of Ann Bell and the team raising money in the off-season through the school track and field/cross country canteens. They cannot continue to do it alone though and we need volunteers to assist, even if it is only for one or two canteens. Giving up only a few hours of your time could assist your athlete to attend ALAC and represent QLD either now or in the years to come.

Multi-Class athletes

As I mentioned before I firmly believe athletics is a sport for all regardless of their impairment. This season Ipswich has led the way with introducing a dedicated program for para-athletes. This hasn't been done anywhere else in QLD and it couldn't have been achieved without the dedication of our MC coordinator Chez and the parents and carers of our athletes for placing their trust in us. I wish to thank the committee for allowing this program to be implemented and the success of this program has been immense.

For the first time para-athletes have been awarded an Age Champion and Most Improved trophy for each gender. The inaugural Isabelle Schodde trophy was created to highlight the para athlete with the most PBs over the course of the season. Izzy was also recognised with her 10 year badge and I think we can all agree that she is a shining example of a para athlete who gives 100% every week and always strives to improve every time she competes. She deserves to have that trophy named in honour of her.

I look forward to this program continuing for future seasons and for it to become bigger and better. A goal for the program will be to introduce seated throwing for those

classifications who are eligible to participate. This would involve installing some harness hooks around the circles so a chair could be strapped down.

Competition nights

I believe that the innovation introduced last season by Dan Johnson in splitting the age groups has been successful. This has generally resulted in less wait times at events and earlier finishes. There was rarely a time where Friday nights finished past 8:30pm even with walks. What was also a blessing was the lack of nights cancelled due to rain.

What has been a struggle is the lack of volunteers in assisting with their respective age groups. This is very much an issue from U12 and older and there were many times where there was a delay in these ages competing due to a lack of parents to help. Put simply, we are not a drop and go service. It doesn't matter how old the athlete is, parents are responsible for supervising their children. As stated in our rules there is also an expectation of parental assistance in running events for their age group. The committee are not an infinite number of people. Athletics requires lots of people to make it run. For field events it is generally a minimum of four people. If you want Friday nights to continue to finish early, then pitch in and lend a hand. Help us to help you.

Twilight Carnival

Twilight Carnival was an enormous success this year with 376 athletes. What was surprising was that there were more visiting athletes than Ipswich athletes which shows that visitors love our carnival.

Centre Championships

The format was changed this year to have Centre Champs run over two weekends instead of three. This avoided clashes with QA State Championships which in turn increased participation. I believe this was successful and provided a potential buffer in case of rain.

This year our Centre Championships was marred with extremely poor behaviour from parents. This involved extremely offensive language directed toward the parents themselves as well as to other committee members in full view of children. This is quite frankly disgraceful and a stain on our club. What kind of example do we want to set for our athletes? Please ponder that for a moment and consider whether this applied to you. If that was you then I would be considering whether you should return to Ipswich Little Athletics.

Our championships are an opportunity for athletes to give their all and have a crack at setting records and becoming Age Champion. However, I do not want athletes to be confused between competitiveness and poor sportsmanship. There is a way to win and a way to lose. I encourage athletes to reflect on that.

Another thing I also encourage parents to reflect on is their expectations of Centre Championships. Do you want it run exactly and to the letter of the LAQ Competition Handbook? If so, I suggest you get off your backside and lend a hand. What I will not tolerate is criticism of our application of the rules of athletics when we are stretched so

thin that the Centre Manager must run individual events instead of overseeing and dealing with issues as they arise.

If you want people watching to see if athletes' step on the inside of their lanes when running a bend, then stand up and volunteer to do it. If you want a call room like they have at LAQ then volunteer to set one up and run it. If you want to judge whether there is jostling at the finish line, then stand up and learn the rules and lend a hand. Also note that our lanes are not standard width, so we must give some tolerance for athletes.

We have over 50 years of combined athletics officiating experience at our club who have officiated at all levels of Little Athletics, as well as Australian Athletics Championships and Oceania events. Whilst we are not perfect, we do the best job we can with who volunteers to help.

Looking forward

This year will mark the 50th year for Ipswich Little Athletics and I am sure the club would like to celebrate this in some way. Please be on the look out for more information should the new committee wish to explore this.

One thing I would like to see moving forward is the introduction of a dedicated official at each event on a Friday night so this will take significant pressure off Age Marshalls. This has been done in the past but dropped off due to a lack of volunteers. Please consider this if the committee seeks to adopt this for the next season.

Conclusion

I want to sincerely thank the committee for their tireless work this season. It was definitely challenging when the Secretary quit mid-season, but we have handled everything to the best of our ability and you should all be commended.

To the Age Marshalls. You guys are the unsung heroes of Ipswich Little Athletics. Without you Friday nights would be chaos. Thank you for all that you do!

Our canteen volunteers have been a huge blessing this season. I do not think our canteen was closed for one night this season which was fantastic. Our sincere thanks goes to Carmen McDonald and her family, Michelle Burton, Kat Pattemore, Karen Bellingham plus others I can't think of at the moment for their enormous effort.

Lastly, to our Life Members. **Ann Bell, Michael Smolenski, Barry Wenzel, Steve Warner, Paul Langton, Crystal Goulding and Mel Smith.** Our club is honoured by your commitment and dedication every week to make our club successful. You all exemplify the spirit of community service, and you all deserve the highest praise. Whether it is running the off-season canteen, line marking, creating programs, operating photo finish or maintaining and setting up of our equipment, we thank you for everything.

I wish you all the best for the school athletics season and look forward to seeing you all in 2026/2027.



Joshua Roney

Centre Manager

Ipswich Little Athletics