

Update from the Chief Handicapper

Nov 02, 2011

On behalf of the Handicapping and Stewarding Panel, welcome to the 2011/12 Victorian Athletic League season. With some promising new meetings adding to our wonderful, historic calendar it promises to be an exciting season. Also well done to all those that took part in the first meeting of the year last week at Epping. Ultimately the handicap system rewards those that compete regularly & consistently.

There have been a few minor **adjustments to our handicapping guidelines** which I wish to outline:

- Our 120 Open start time has been adjusted to 12.40 sec. This means that unless your best performance is under that time, or if you have won over the distance last season, or made the final of the Stawell Gift, you will most likely hold your finishing 120 handicap from last season. Start times for all other distances remain the same.
- The starting novice handicap mark for the 70 Open has been adjusted to 4.0 metres and for the 120 Open to 6.0 metres.
- An additional discretionary lift of up to 2 increments will be available to the handicappers for established athletes for Stawell marks only. We will utilize this for those athletes we believe have raced honestly and consistently throughout the season. An example would be someone who has taken an early season win at a lesser meeting then competed consistently for the remainder of the season. This lift will be for Stawell only and will require the approval of the Handicap Review Panel.

The updated Guidelines and tables are on the website, so I encourage athletes and coaches to familiarize themselves with these. If you have any questions you can email me through the VAL office or speak to me at one of the meetings.

It is worth noting no athlete can have a starting mark this season in excess of their finish mark from last season. In many distances finishing marks at Stawell 2011 were inflated due to fields being lifted to incorporate international level athletes. Normal finishing marks before these Stawell lifts apply.

We also have the discretion to reduce the start mark of "OGA" athletes if we believe it is warranted. So again it pays to race regularly and become established over your race distances. To be classified as established you require 5 starts over a distance last season and 20 starts in total within the last 5 seasons.

The Handicapping Panel for this season will again be myself (Chief), Graeme Goldsworthy (Sprints) and Graeme Watkins (Distance). Our aim will be to reward participation and consistency of effort and performance.

This season the Handicappers and Stewards will work together as one Panel. The Handicappers will combine with Steward John Holloway and another yet to be appointed, to manage the stewarding duties throughout the season. We will look to speak to athletes throughout the day that we have concerns with or questions of. If we believe Stewarding action is required, such as Unsatisfactory Performances, our aim will be to address this with the athlete on the day. If this is not possible it will be done at the next meeting. We will not be publishing NAPs and UPs on the website as our preference is to communicate directly with the athlete.

We again welcome **Interstate athletes** and advise that they will be treated the same as other OGA athletes in the VAL. They will be given a start mark in accordance with the guidelines and the starting times for each event. When they compete in the VAL they will have their mark reviewed. As with all athletes their performances outside the VAL, which they must provide and declare, will be taken into account. The more information we receive the easier it is to give new and interstate athletes an appropriate and competitive mark. The less we have to go on, the more conservative we will be and if we lack sufficient information, marks will be withheld until we receive it. Interstate athletes should be aware that generally VAL marks are tighter than other professional Leagues and winning times slower.

Finally we would like to stress the **importance of declaring all outside performances** regularly and PBs immediately. As a matter of course we check outside results and take a dim view of discovering non declared PBs. Those that run amateur can be assured that we will only adjust handicaps if PBs take ratings under the ceiling after allowing for rubber tracks and conditions. This rarely happens and we welcome and encourage dual registered athletes to compete in the VAL.

The season is upon us and there are some big carnivals only weeks away. Also Stawell is early April this season so it is time to start racing. Athletes that compete regularly have the best chance of success.

The entries for the first few events have been extended so if you still want to get a run at the Dandenong Gift onwards log onto the entry page via the VAL website.

Please contact me through the office if you have any questions.

Best wishes and see you out on the track.

Mark O'Brien

Chief Handicapper