



# On your MARKS

Gordon Staines is one Derbyshire man who will be playing a part at London 2012...

**I**t's probably safe to say that for the last 35 years the most important job in Gordon Staines's life has been his role as a director of the Chesterfield based company Stainless Steel Fasteners Ltd, but this summer the hobby that's previously filled his free time will take centre stage when he steps up to the line as an official starter for London 2012:...

#### **How did you become involved in the world of athletics?**

In 1985 my children joined Chesterfield Athletic Club and, as parents do, we took them to venues around the country to compete. I've always been a keen sportsman and I grew more and more interested in athletics. I began coaching and enjoyed seeing the athletes I coached improve – and win.

One day I was at Moorways Stadium in Derby when the starter didn't show up and a guy asked me to do it. 'Why me?' I asked and he replied that he'd been told I knew how to handle a gun. This was true (shooting is one of my many hobbies) but starting an athletics meeting wasn't something I'd ever done before. However, I did it and thoroughly enjoyed it. I took a two part exam and still remember sitting in a room at Matlock County offices with a guy named Chris Cohen who checked I wasn't cheating. Chris, a key member of LOCOG (Local Organising Committee of the Olympic Games), is also involved with the Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Progressing through the ranks as a starter is like football refereeing, you start at the bottom with school events, local club and league then progress to



county level. You're reported on throughout and eventually get the opportunity to officiate at higher level UK meetings. Good reports are then essential to progress to national and international status, and after a lot of hard work I have achieved this. People often assume that we get paid but we don't, it's all voluntary with the exception of our out of pocket expenses.

Starting athletic events may look like pointing a gun in the air and firing it but there's a lot more to it than that. You have to make quick accurate decisions with confidence and good judgement. You can't afford to be wrong when deciding whether or not to disqualify a competitor.

Am I nervous before a meeting? Of course, especially when there are eight of the world's best athletes on the 100m start line. All you want to do is to get them away first time without any problems. Over the years I have learnt to deal with the nerves, and minutes before the race I stand by the rostrum watching the athletes warm up and gathering my confidence. I never look who is in which lane, in my mind there are eight athletes all with equal status. When given the go ahead that the athletes are ready I give the command 'On your marks' and the crowd goes so quiet that you can hear a pin drop, that's when the adrenalin kicks in. There's no better feeling than getting them away first time.

#### **What are your career highlights?**

In my 22 year career I have officiated at numerous major meetings, including the World Championships in Birmingham. Being selected to start at the Olympics and Paralympics is an honour of which I am so proud, for me it's the 'icing on the cake'. You can't get any better. Individual high points have been (1) Starting my first

televised major international and getting the men's 100m away first time. (2) Sitting at the finish line in Berlin and seeing Usain Bolt cross the line breaking both the 100m and 200m World records. The atmosphere was unbelievable.

#### **How many make up the team of official starters?**

An international starter from Portugal and three starters from the UK. Another four technical officials from Derbyshire are taking part in London 2012: Chris Cohen (Locog), Barry Parker (Track), Paul and Aiden Smith (Field).

#### **With the eyes of the world upon you, how do you prepare for such a big event?**

We have already held a test event at the new stadium and checked equipment so have an insight into the stadium and where we'll be working, but when the Games begin it will be sheer concentration and very demanding. I try to think that this is just another athletic meeting but we all know that it's more than that, it's the Olympic Games in London! Wow!

#### **What sort of back-up is there in the event of equipment failure?**

At local league meetings we don't have high tech equipment and start all races visually. These are the grass roots meetings which I continue to support. At major meetings, we wear headsets that beep when a false start is detected and the computer provides evidence of which lane is responsible. This equipment is very technical and can pick up false starts which the human eye can't. There are two systems running side by side and in the unlikely event of a failure we can switch immediately to the backup.

#### **Which event would you most like to start?**

The 100m men's is 'the race' but we won't know who will be starting what until we get down there. All starters will be at the start of every race covering each others back and should any of us see an infringement then we will call it back.

#### **Who are you hoping to meet?**

The Queen! Ha ha. When it comes to the athletes I have already met most of them. We have to remember that it's their day and we avoid any unnecessary communication to allow them to concentrate on their task in hand.

#### **Which British athletes should we look out for in particular?**

Jessica Ennis and Mo Farrow are good contenders for a medal but I wish all the British contenders luck.

#### **Who are your sporting hero(es)?**

Multi-event athletes Daley Thompson, Denise Lewis and Jessica Ennis. I have a lot of respect for their ability.

#### **Which part of the Olympics are you most looking forward to?**

The 100m Final and hopefully seeing a new World Record

#### **What advice have you for anyone who wants a career in sports organisation?**

Whichever sport anyone chooses will be very demanding and to reach the top you need to dedicate a lot of time and give full commitment. There will be occasions when you consider giving in but persevere and you will reach your goal. ■