

Centurion - Ian Richards (M71), GBR – Men's #1 Race Walks and #2 Overall

What does winning the award mean to you?

My first race walking career came to an end in 1982 having achieved most things I believed I was capable of as an amateur while working full time, bringing up a young family and building a career in the finance and investment industry.

I finished 11th in the Moscow Olympics 50k walk, competed in two Lugano walking championships (the fore runner to the world championships), European championships and represented GB on many occasions. I took a 25 year break and started again at age 60 purely to keep fit and have fun.

However, the Olympian within me soon came to the fore and I saw the potential of masters and all that it offers. I was hooked and wanted to see how far I could get. Little by little I have got better and winning this award is beyond what I expected and a major highlight of my career, on a par of becoming an Olympian. It will also help give me extra credibility in my goals to help others become more active and live fuller lives.

What were your goals in Masters Athletes for 2019?

My main goals were to win the World Indoor Championships in Torun and the European Track and Field championships in Venice. Like many walkers, I race all distances from 3000m to 30km and beyond. I knew to be certain of winning, however, that I would have to be in world record breaking form for all distance over a season lasting from March to September.

What are your goals in Masters Athletics for 2020?

Very much the same as 2019, European Indoor Championships, European Non-Stadia Championships and World Championships. It is going to be a much bigger challenge being 1 year on in my age group with some very good youngsters coming up. My mindset is that once again I will need to be in world record breaking form and am training accordingly.

What else happened for/to you in 2019 that you would like to share?

A particularly proud moment was being selected for the England marathon team in a Celtic nations international marathon. I had qualified in an open marathon running race despite the fact that I had race walked the distance. I race walked the international and just broke 4 hours.

Race walking is a very tough event because of the technical requirements, particularly the need to straighten the leg from the point of contact to the upright position. Not only do we slow as we age but it gets more and more difficult to comply with the rules. When you are trying to push yourself to the limit it is easy to transgress and get disqualified.

I am pleased that I have learnt how to manage that pressure and overcome major disappointments. At the British Indoor Championships over 3000m, I won the race and set a new world record only to be disqualified after I had finished for a bent knee. To go on a few weeks later and win the World Championships in Torun and set a new world record was very satisfying.

Unfortunately disappoint soon followed as in the 5000m a few days later, I set out to win and break the record. Again it was not to be. I won easily but was disqualified after the finish, again for a bent knee!

I was determined to get it right in the European Championships. In the 10km which I had targeted for a supreme effort I won easily and it looked as though I had smashed the world record. When I saw my time I said to myself that was impossible and quickly realised the course had to be short and pointed it out to the organisers. I had to argue the point but there was no way I could claim a world record which they eventually agreed. I was so far in front of the record that had it been the right distance I would have still beaten it by a large margin.

Set backs are part of racewalking and you just have to accept it when you get it wrong, its your fault not that of judges who are doing their best.

Sometimes organisers will get it wrong, not intentionally but no one is perfect. It doesn't impact on the enjoyment I am getting from being one of the best masters in the world – I am having the time of my life!

I understand that I have been awarded the Torsten Carlius Fair Play Award by European Masters (this needs to be checked) for the way that I have accepted these disappointments.

How has your health in recent years?

One of the reasons that I restarted race walking was for the good of my health with the hope that it would help me both live longer and continue to be active. So far so good!

All my training is outdoors in all weathers taking no more than a couple of weeks break at the end of the summer.

I am convinced that getting regularly soaked and half frozen is good for the immune system.

What I have found, however, is that injury prevention has become more and more critical and get niggles sorted as soon as I spot them. I train 6 days a week putting in as much time as when I was training for the Olympics. However, I now have to use some of that time conditioning my whole body with extensive stretching. I foam roller regularly, have deep tissue massage once a week and see a very good sports Chiropractor every couple of months to check me over and sort out any realignments that might be needed. Its working although I do get the occasional injury but I am very good at managing those and getting back quite quickly.

Some injuries need to be tackled by rest but I always whenever possible do other things that will help maintain my fitness and have found ways that work for me to get me back to full fitness very quickly once I am able to get back into training.

Other than Masters Athletes, what else do you do for fun?

Any time that I have outside of training and competing I try to use to give something back to others. I have been enormously blessed in my life and as an Olympian feel duty bound to use my time living and promoting the Olympic values.

It is enormous fun and rewarding serving others. I am the current Vice Chairman and also Race Walking Secretary of the British Masters Athletic Federation and I regularly take on the role as one of the Team Managers of the British Masters Team at championships.

I also serve on a number of other committees in various positions within the sport. I am a member of the Salvation Army and am committed to helping those less fortunate than myself.

I have spent many years working with children and youth but find myself increasingly working with the elderly community where I have found that my involvement in masters sport can be used both to motivate and show them how they can become more active and live their lives more fully.

I regularly give talks for those coming up to or recently retired and to other groups of elderly people.

I am currently enrolling to do a Sports Science Degree starting in September as I feel the knowledge this will give me will be of benefit both to myself and help me give better guidance to others. Oh I also have a wife and 5 grandchildren!