

National Cross Country Relays, Berry Hill Park October 31st 2009

Bedford & County and Charnwood AC retained their national titles as the Saucony English Cross Country Relay Championships returned to Mansfield's Berry Hill Park for the 20th time.

Conditions in the park were perfect for cross country, Pat Carlan and his team having worked all week to prepare a pristine course, and the heavy rain through Friday night ensured an ample supply of mud for the 2636 finishers.

With ten different races the medals were shared by no fewer than 21 different clubs from all over the country.

Early leaders in the Men's race, in which athletes each completed two 2.5km laps of the park, were City of Norwich, GB Junior international Mitch Goose leading them out with the third fastest lap of the day and Ashley Harrell retaining first place at the halfway point.

Blackheath and Bromley's Mike Skinner produced the fastest leg of the day on leg two, his time of 14:47 lifting the South London club up from 44th position to ninth, a performance which was to prove critical later in the four leg race.

Darren Deed lifted Bedford & County into the top spot on leg three and handed over to anchor man Neilson Hall with a 14 second gap on second placed Derby who in turn were eight seconds clear of third placed Morpeth AC.

Hall managed to hang on to bring Bedford & County home for their second successive title however it was all change behind him. Scott Overall, with the second fastest leg of the day, lifted Blackheath & Bromley into the silver medal spot with Bristol & West moving up from fifth to take the Bronze medals.

Mansfield's men were led out by Stuart King who was disappointed with his first leg run, just failing to break 17 minutes and bringing the team in back in 70th place. James Mee took over from King and produced a strong run of 15:54, overtaking 31 athletes to handover to Danny Barks with the team in 39th. Mee's time is the third fastest Mansfield leg since 2003.

Barks produced more evidence of his rapidly improving form, his time of 16:34 nearly a minute quicker than last year and gaining six places to hand on to Chris Brown in 33rd. Brown produced another consistent run, recording 17:08 to anchor the quartet home to 34th position, their fourth best ever position in this event in their sixth fastest time.

Team manager Steve Davies composed his B and C teams carefully to encourage some intra club competition and his selections worked, just two places and six seconds separating the two teams at the end. Russ Betts led off for the B team and showed his recent training is beginning to pay off, running 17:24 to open up a 21 second gap on C team lead off runner Doug Ross who also ran strongly.

Betts handed on to new recruit Callum Cullen who produced a useful run of 17:21 to take the B team into 75th spot opening up a gap of 22 places on the C team, for whom Pete Stafford ran 18:57. Graeme Wilkinson took over from Cullen and Tim Raynor from Stafford and it was here Davies' tactics began to kick in – Raynor running 18:34 to close the gap on Wilkinson (19:49) to just eight places.

Davies himself was anchor man for the C team against Mark Jenkins for the B and, despite running 18:38, had just got too much to do to catch Jenkins (19:13), final positions being 88th and 90th.

The Women's race comprised three runners, each tackling one 3km lap, and at the end of the first lap Havering Mayesbrook held the lead through the efforts of Lauren Deadman, one of only five runners to break the ten minute barrier.

It was all change on the second lap when Tara Kryzwicki, looking for her fifth Gold medal in this event, lifted the Leicestershire club into top spot.

With just four seconds separating the top three teams it was all to play for on the final leg however the run of the day came from the athlete who left the pen in seventh position. Beijing Olympian over 1500m, Aldershot, Farnham and District's Steph Twell set off 48 seconds behind the bronze medal position.

Hannah Whitmore ran a brave leg for Charnwood, and with a time of 10:05, opened up a gap on the chasing teams, bringing the trio home for their fifth victory in the last six years, in a time that was 24 seconds quicker than their 2008 performance. Behind Whitmore Bristol & West moved up into the silver medal position, beating the efforts of their men by one place.

Then there was the battle for third - despite running the fastest leg of the day by 20 seconds and equalling a course record of 9:35 that goes back to 2003, Twell was just unable to catch Woodford Green AC & Essex Ladies and Aldershot, Farnham and District missed out on medals in every female event by less than two seconds.

Natalie Yates led out Mansfield's women and clocked 11:29 for 40th position before handing on to Miriam Tedder (12:20) with Kahli Johnson (12:45) anchoring them home to a final position of 46th. Clare Coombes (13:31), Eva Williams (13:06) and Amanda Hardy (14:20) made up a B team that finished 70th with the C team of Wanda Curley (13:47), Jane Stafford (14:16) and Carol Hartin (14:03) three positions behind in 73rd.

Aldershot, Farnham & District (AFD) continued their domination of junior female cross country with victories in all the age groups whilst the male gold medals were spread between Shaftesbury Barnet (2), Leeds City and Tonbridge.

World junior cross-country representative Charlotte Purdue made sure of Gold for AFD in the U20 race, anchoring them home with the fastest junior leg of the day, City of Norwich taking silver and Birmingham University the Bronze.

Purdue's team mate at the World Cross Country Championships in Jordan earlier this year James Wilkinson of Leeds City replicated her efforts in the U20 Men's race. Wilkinson's time of 8:45 lifted the Yorkshire club from third to first, Luton taking silver and AFD the bronze.

For Mansfield Chris Dale (9:51), Luke Marshall (9:50) and James Bellingham (12:15) finished in 43rd spot in the men's event whilst just two runners, Emma Wilkinson and Georgia Milton, made it round for the women.

At U17 level it was more glory for AFD in the women's race – the trio of Georgia Peel, Ruth Haynes and Emilia Gorecka leading from the start. Behind them Marshall Milton Keynes took silver and Rugby & Northampton worked their way steadily through the field to take bronze. Mansfield's Hannah Wragg (9:40), Rachel Brandham (9:49) and Christie Childs (10:48) were 23rd.

Ipswich Harriers were the leaders after the first lap in the U17 race, replaced on the second lap by Shaftesbury Barnet Harriers who went on to take gold, AFD coming through for silver and Ipswich hanging on to take bronze. Mansfield finished in 68th through the efforts of Will Stone (11:33), Tom O'Mara (11:00) and Alex Heath (11:36).

It was gold again for AFD in the U15 Girls race although they had to knock down a 13 second gap to Cannock & Staffs, leaders after the second lap. Leicester Coritanian hung on to second spot with Kingston upon Hull displacing Cannock & Staffs from the medal positions to take bronze. Mansfield's A string trio of Chevelle Baxter (7:42), Demi-Jade Jakymelen (8:11) and Ellie Saxton (8:20) finished in 28th.

Shaftesbury Barnet's U15 Boys weren't to be overshadowed by the gold medal winning performance of their U17 team, going on to do likewise through the efforts of Ames-Blackaby, Callegario and McLaughlin. Windsor, Slough, Eton & Hounslow took silver with Tonbridge the bronze. Jake Lancaster (7:30), Tom Wragg (7:29) and David Wilkinson (7:54) gave Mansfield 63rd position.

There was constant change at the top in the U13 Girls race, early leaders Vale Royal coming home first after the initial leg, replaced by Chelmsford after the second and then AFD coming good on the third to take gold again. Bracknell moved up from 30th after leg one to take silver with Chiltern Harriers taking bronze.

Mansfield's A and B teams had a battle for supremacy with B team lead leg runner Nicole Goulding, making her Mansfield debut in this event, having a storming run to clock 7:45 and bring the team back in sixth spot. Caelidh Ross was just three seconds and two places behind for the A team. Claire Norris managed to hang on to sixth spot for the B team running 8:08 whilst Molly Johnson was pushed back a few places to 10th running 8:11 for the A team. Going into the final leg six seconds separated the two teams, Emma Heath (8:18) managing to out run Rachel Norris (8:44) to secure seventh position for the A team, the B squad finishing in a very respectable 13th spot.

Harriers U13 Boys recorded the highest local finish of the day in a race won by Tonbridge, silver medals going to Tamworth and bronze to Chiltern.

Sam Johnson led off for Mansfield, finishing with a time of 7:25 and handing over to Lewis Ashmore with the team in 19th place. Ashmore produced one of the best Mansfield performances of the day, recording 7:18 and moving the team up to fifth place. George King didn't let the pressure get to him on third leg running a controlled race and recording 7:34 to give the youngsters sixth place overall.

OTHER MANSFIELD FINISHERS: U13 Boys B team – 48th – Finny Quilty (7:58), James O'Mara (7:55), Joseph Ashmore (8:39), C team – 63rd – Ben Hardy (8:24), Harrison Smith (8:18), Jack Foster (8:47). U15 Boys B team – 77th – Sam Dobb (7:49), Jordan Boam (8:31), Sam Raynor (7:54). U15 Girls B team – 46th – Jess Smith (8:24), Alice Mortiboy (8:36), Hannah Hardy (8:21), U15 Girls C team – 70th – Tamsin Smith (8:35), Hazel Blount (8:56), Holly Smith (9:52).