

Mansfield Harriers & Athletic Club

Top class cross country action returns to Mansfield this weekend when Berry Hill Park hosts the 2009 Midlands Championships.

Building on his excellent reputation for staging championship races, Course Director Pat Carlan has designed a new course for this premier event. With over 500 runners expected in the Senior Men's race – the biggest field of the day – Carlan has had to design a wider than normal start area.

Berry Hill Park is regarded as one of the top cross country venues in the country and organisers are grateful to the Trustees of the Berry Hill Social Welfare Centre for allowing the event to take place and for their support in staging it.

The Senior Men's race will see several current, former and potential internationals in action including some who competed in last years World Championships. This race enjoys local history with Mansfield athlete Billy Farquharson a previous champion in 2000 and 2007.

Reigning champion James Walsh, who went on to compete in the World Championships for GB will be looking to retain his title over the 4 lap 11.3 km course. Walsh will be running in the blue and yellow vest of Leeds City. Amongst those looking to take Walsh's title will be Jean N'dayisenga who competed for his native Burundi in the World Championships but on Saturday will be wearing the black vest of Birchfield Harriers.

Other contenders for the title – and the medals – will be Scottish international Tom Russell, running for Bristol, and Phil Nichols, GB international in 2007 running for Tipton.

Pick of the local favourites is likely to be Ian Boneham of Notts AC who, along with his team-mates, will be looking to retain the team title that they won in 2008. Amongst those challenging for this will be Coventry Godiva and Bristol AC.

In the Senior ladies race GB international Laura Kenney, who competed in the European Championships in December, will be expected to challenge last years top three of Hannah Whitmore (Charnwood), Tina Brown (Coventry Godiva) and Emily Pidgeon (Gloucester).

Charnwood, who took the County Championships title at Berry Hill Park 2 weeks ago, are hot favourites for the team title with Telford and Bristol & West likely to be amongst the challengers.

Local lad James Mee, who finished 10th in last year's event, will be hoping to be in the running at the top end of the Under 20 Men's race over 7.5km;

where favourites are likely to be the Staffordshire pair of Clowes and Derricott along with Ryan Kenny (Coventry) and Tom Meakin (OWLS).

Mansfield's Under 13 girls will be looking for a team medal after their excellent bronze in November's National Cross Country Relay Championships whilst the Under 15 Girls, who won the title last year, will also be hoping to be up there.

Ryan Saxton, on-form at present, will be looking to improve on his 14th place when he was at the bottom of the Under 15 age group last year. Chevelle Baxter is another athlete in this position – finishing 12th last year at the bottom end of the Under 13 girls age group. Baxter, along with Caelidh Ross and Molly Johnson, if fit after her recent bout of chickenpox, will also be looking to run well.

Other Mansfield youngsters with potential to be at the sharp end of their races will be Sam Johnson and Bailey Wardle in the Under 13 Boys, Claire Talbot and Rachel Brandham in the Under 15 girls and Hannah Wragg in the Under 17 Women.

The action kicks off at 11.30am with the full timetable as follows:

11.30am: Under 13 Boys - 3km
11.45am: Under 20 Men - 7.5km
12.25pm: Under 13 Girls – 3km
12.45pm: Under 15 Boys – 3.8km
1.05pm: Under 17/20 Women – 4.8km
1.35pm: Under 15 Girls – 3.8km
1.55pm: Under 17 Men – 5.8km
2.25pm: Senior Women – 7.5km
3.00pm: Senior Men – 11.3km

Spectators are very welcome with free entry. Car parking will be tight on the park itself so spectators are advised to park away from the park and walk in. Those needing to come by car should follow the marshal's instructions with a one way system in place, entering the park via the Lichfield Lane gates and exiting onto Blackscotch lane.

Mansfield Harriers had a busy weekend in preparation for the Midlands Championships with athletes in action at 3 different cross country league meetings.

The last fixture in the North Midlands Cross Country league took place at Nottingham's Wollaton Park last weekend and Mansfield's youngsters picked up 4 of the 6 available team trophies and 2 individual titles.

Sam Johnson topped the Under 13 Boys table after the 4 races, finishing 3rd on the day at Wollaton. Johnson battled all the way around the course and finished just 2 seconds behind the Burton athlete in second place but his performances in the earlier races were enough to keep him in top spot.

Bailey Wardle in 7th and Jake Lancaster in 8th ensured the Mansfield Under 13 Boys team took the overall team title with Lewis Ashmore running well to achieve an 11th placed spot and Jordan Boam coming home in 21st.

Harriers' other overall individual title went to Ryan Saxton in the Under 15 Boys age group. Saxton had an excellent battle on the day with Selvey of Chesterfield just pipping him by 2 seconds at the finish but with these two nearly a minute ahead of the rest of the field.

Tom Wragg finished 6th, Tom O'Mara 10th and Henry Partridge 14th to be first team home on the day however this wasn't quite enough to take the team title – Mansfield finishing 12 points behind Notts AC.

The Under 13 Girls were without Caelidh Ross and Molly Johnson, who is recovering from chickenpox, however their strength in depth showed through as they took first team place at Wollaton and overall. Chevelle Baxter returned home in 3rd place and this was enough to retain 3rd place overall, with Tamsin Smith and Claire Norris in 6th and 9th respectively.

Claire Talbot finished the series as she started it back at Markeaton Park in October with victory in the Under 15 Girls race and taking second spot overall. Rachel Brandham finished in 4th place in the race giving her third place overall. Demi-Jade Jakymelen was third scorer finishing in 6th taking the girls to victory on the day and keeping them at the top of the table overall.

The Under 17 Women completed a clean sweep for the junior females with the team trophy. Hannah Wragg was first harrier home in 4th place with Georgia Milton in 6th. Christie Childs carried one of her spikes for most of the course having lost it on the first lap but despite this managed 9th place. Kate Raynor in 11th and Gina Radford in 13th were the other finishers.

Daniel Winter and Richie Talbot repeated their battle from a week ago at the County Championships in the Under 17 men's race finishing 9th and 10th respectively. Winter had been clear most of the race however Talbot chased him down on the last lap finishing just 4 seconds behind him. Daniel Ward was 18th and Jack Longstaff 19th.

With little at stake in terms of honours in the Senior Men's race and with a depleted field overall it turned into a series of individual battles for the Mansfield men.

Stuart King ran a sensible and well timed race with a strong last lap to take 10th place in 38:09. Mark Jenkins had his best race of the winter to finish 45th in 41:29 with Doug Ross, chasing Jenkins down in the last lap but not quite managing to catch him, finishing 51st in 41:39. Ross was second VM45 overall in the 4 race series.

Pete Stafford and Faz Fahy battled it out to be the fourth Harrier home. Stafford was in the lead all the way round with Fahy looking strong on the last lap however Stafford's experience showed through coming home in 66th place in 42:54, 3 seconds ahead of Fahy in 67th. Stafford finished the series in second place overall in the VM50 category.

Another battle followed with Terry Ashmore having a strong run and chasing down Steve Davies. A race for the finishing line ensued with Ashmore just pipping Davies to 79th position but with both athletes being given the same time of 44:17.

The third battle involved 3 runners who kept swopping positions throughout the 3 lap race. Trevor Hiscox ended up first back of the trio, taking 87th spot in 45:05 with Dave Peet chasing hard and finishing just one place behind in 45:07. Despite not quite being able to stay with the other two at the finish Graeme Wilkinson took his first ever top 100 – finishing 90th in 45:11.

Eva Williams led the ladies home with a 33rd place finish in a time of 26:27 with Helen Scott just 10 seconds and 2 places behind. Amanda Hardy was third Harrier home in 27:24 with Claire Coombes also in the top 50, finishing 44th in 28:03.

OTHER MANSFIELD FINISHERS: **Under 11 Race:** 8: Isaac Moodie, 14: Ben Moodie. **Under 13 Girls** – 15: Harriet Codd, 16: Robyn Foster, 18: Amelia Mitchell, 19: Hazel Blount, 22: Rachel Norris, 29: H. Smith. **Senior/Vet Women:** 54: Tina Green, 59: Maddy Collinge, 63: Carol Hartin, 67: Sally Smith, 71: Michelle Peet, 74: S. Armitage. **Senior/Vet Men:** 104: Grant Saxton, 107: Clive Russell, 129: Les Chambers, 131: Julian wood, 158: Jason Foster, 164: Dave Rose, 183: Alan Smith

Several of Mansfield's youngsters were back in action again on Sunday when the Nottinghamshire Mini League fixture was held at Rushcliffe Country Park.

Alex Reiley continued his domination of the Under 11 age group with victory in the boys race with Ben Hardy in 5th place. Harrison Smith was the third Mansfield finisher in 7th with newcomer Archie Raynor running well to finish 8th in his first race. Josh Boam, Luke Silver and Simon Warriner completed the line up with 19th, 24th and 26th place finishes respectively.

Emma Cundy was the only blue and green vest in the Under 11 Girls race but ran well to take 5th spot.

Bailey Wardle and Robyn Foster scored useful points in the Under 13 Boys and Girls races respectively by both finishing in second place. Bailey was backed up by Jake Lancaster (4th) and Jordan Boam (14th) whilst Robyn led home Claire Norris (5th), Rachel Norris (10th) and Beth Mortiboy (15th).

At under 15 level it was double victory for Mansfield – Demi-Jade Jakymelen leading home the girls and Ryan Saxton cruising to a comfortable win for the boys. Hannah Hardy took second spot in the girls race with Alice Mortiboy in 5th and Jess Smith in 15th.

In the 4th fixture of the Booth Decorators League at Ilkeston Luke Marshall was the man in form for Mansfield. The junior continued his strong 2008 form over the country with an excellent 3rd place finish clocking 31:08 to also be the first junior home.

Tim Raynor was 18th in 32:46 with Clive Russell doubling up in the weekend's races to finish 40th in 35:48 and also coming home as the first VM55. Mansfield also had the second VM55 back as Pete Collinge clocked 38:01 to finish 55th overall.

Julian Wood, Trevor Hiscox and Les Chambers completed the scorers finishing 70th, 84th and 99th respectively to place the Men's team in 7th position.

Eva Williams was first lady back for Harriers for the second time in the same weekend, this time placing 80th overall in a time of 39:40. With 3 ladies to score Kate Raynor's 100th position and Claire Coombes 102nd counted to keep the ladies in 2nd place overall after the 4 races.

Tina Green was 107th in 42:46 with Maddy Collinge and Sue Bellingham in 116th and 118th clocking 44:07 and 44:41 respectively and Elaine Greaves finished 130th in 51:08.

Fresh from his triumph in the team event at the County Cross Country Championships Steve Lisgo returned to College in the USA and despite a 23 hour journey posted a very useful time of 4:11.4 in an indoor mile race 5 days later. Lisgo finished second in the race which took place in Chicago.

Trevor Hiscox doubled up again in the Derby Midweek races with outings in the mile and 5K races. He finished 11th in the mile clocking 6:08 before returning in a time of 19:18 over 5K for 26th position.