

With success in the British League qualifying match providing a fitting end to the 2009 track season for Mansfield Harriers; all eyes are now on the cross country season. This started in earnest last weekend with two fixtures testing the youngsters on successive days – at Berry Hill Park and at Retford.

Saturday saw the first fixture in the Nottinghamshire Schools Cross-country league and with a distinct lack of rain in the last few weeks the ground at Berry Hill Park was very hard underfoot.

Harriers had victories in 4 out of the 8 races – Alex Rieley and Nicole Goulding taking a clean sweep in the year 7 Boys and Girls races respectively, Archie Rayner taking the year 5/6 Boys and Ellie Saxton the year 8/9 Girls.

Saxton was the first of 7 Mansfield athletes home in the top 10 of the 8/9 Girls race, run over 2.4K, and with Caelidh Ross, Molly Johnson and Chevelle Baxter not running, it illustrates the growing strength in depth at this age group within the club. Emma Heath produced a good run to finish 2nd, Claire Norris and Ella Shirley taking 4th and 6th with 7th, 8th and 10th spots going to Rachel Norris, Amelia Mitchell and Robyn Foster.

David Wilkinson produced a strong and promising run in the 3km year 8/9 boys race to take second place with Sam Dobb, James O'Mara, Finny Quilty and George King occupying the 4 spots immediately behind him.

Claire Talbot and Hannah Hardy finished in 2nd and 3rd respectively in the year 10/11 Girls race and with Charlotte Bellingham in 6th, Alice Mortiboy in 7th and Alice Keogh in 8th strength in depth was again apparent.

Daniel Patrick, running in Garibaldi School colours, finished in 3rd spot in the year 10/11 Boys race with David Lagerberg, better known as a 200m/400m track runner, putting in a fast finish to take 6th spot. Tom O'Mara and Tom Wragg took 8th and 9th place.

Ben Hardy and George Pidding joined victorious Alex Rieley in the year 7 Boys event taking 5th and 6th spot respectively. Emma Cundy followed home Nicole Goulding in the year 7 Girls race, finishing in 3rd place. Harrison Smith (6th), Laura Herrod (4th) and Elisabeth Reiley (8th) completed the Harriers representation in the year 5/6 boys and girls races respectively.

Emma Heath went one better than the day before when she took victory in the first Notts Mini League cross country fixture at Retford. Heath led a Mansfield 123 in the race, twins Claire and Rachel Norris taking 2nd and 3rd respectively. Emma Cundy (9th) and Anya Ramsdale (13th) were the other Mansfield athletes in this race.

Alex Rieley made it a second win for Mansfield, and his second of the weekend, with victory in the Under 13 Boys event. Andrew Frettingham (5th) and Ben Hardy (7th) also made the top 10 with Jack Foster just outside in 12th.

Hayley Silver was the third blue and green vest to cross the finish line in first spot taking the Under 15 Girls race from second placed Ellie Saxton. Alice Mortiboy and Robyn Foster finished in 6th and 7th with Keira Abbott in 20th spot.

Just two Under 15 Boys turned out for Harriers – Jordan Boam first back in 8th with David Wilkinson in 12th.

Archie Raynor, fresh from victory in the schools race the day before, could only manage 4th at Retford but was still first Harrier home – Harrison Smith (5th), Alistair Flynn (7th) and Josh Boam (16th) being the other three.

Three Under 11 Girls turned out with Megan Purchase first back in 12th spot, Elisabeth Rieley was 3 places behind in 15th with Chloe Asher in 21st.

National cross country action comes to Berry Hill Park twice in October. Saturday 31st sees the return of the English Cross Country Relays where many of the country's best senior athletes will be in action. Course Director Pat Carlan has yet again prepared a challenging course on what is now regarded as one of the country's top cross-country locations.

This is preceded this Saturday (October 3rd) by the staging of the British Masters Cross Country Relays where Carlan has again prepared a testing course. With over 70 teams travelling from all corners of the UK the action starts at 12.30pm and spectators are welcome to come along and watch.

This is the last race for athletes looking to impress the selectors ahead of next month's Home Country International and hence some good individual, as well as team, performances are expected.

The VL35 race has strong local interest with both Redhill Road Runners (2nd last year) and Notts AC expecting to challenge pre race favourites Chester-Le-Street AC.

A good contest is expected in the Men's M35 race between Halesowen A.C., Leicester Coritania & Tipton Harriers. The Mansfield quartet of Mark Johnson, Faz Fahy, Steve Taylor and Jason Gardener in this race is probably the host club's best chance of a medal.

The most open and interesting race will be the M40 race, with big entries from established clubs such as Bedford & County, Bingley Harriers, Morpeth, Hallamshire Harriers & Telford A.C., all of whom carry ex senior international athletes amongst their memberships.

Former World half marathon record holder Nick Rose who competed in the 1980 and 1984 Olympics is listed in the Bristol & West AC entry for the VM50 race where the South West club will expect tough competition from Barnet & District, North Belfast Harriers and Tipton Harriers.

On the roads Steve Davies took part in the Cusworth Hall 10k taking the second place spot in the VM50 category in a time of 36:32 – a new personal best in this age group.