

THE SAUCONY ENGLISH CROSS COUNTRY RELAYS

The country's best middle distance athletes were again in Mansfield's Berry Hill Park last weekend for the Saucony English Cross Country Relay Championships. The event returned to Mansfield for the 19th consecutive year and thanks to the sterling efforts of Course Director Pat Carlan and his team along with the support of Mansfield District Council, the Trustees of the Berry Hill Social Welfare Centre and the volunteers from Mansfield Harriers the English Cross Country Union announced their intention to come back to Mansfield for at least the next three years. Pat had yet again prepared a fantastic course and the great weather conditions on the day ensured that the best of the Berry Hill Park course was shown off to the hundreds of teams that had travelled the length and breadth of the country to be there. This great event has been part of the career of many Olympians, World Championship representatives and Internationals including winner of last weekends New York Marathon – Paula Radcliffe.

On what is now one of the best cross country courses in the country the Senior Men's race was always set to be a battle and with athletes such as Phil Wicks, the reigning AAA Half marathon champion, and Andy Baddeley who competed in the recent world athletics championships in Osaka, both turning out for their clubs there was plenty of action for the crowds to watch. It was Baddeley who set the early pace – running first leg for Harrow AC and coming home in the lead with a time of 14:49. Harrow retained the lead through the second leg and then it was Mansfield athlete Billy Farquharson, competing for Notts AC, who provided one of the best runs of the day. Billy took over the 3rd leg with Notts AC in 5th place and proceeded to pick off those in front bringing Notts home in first place with just the last leg to go. However the athletes from Belgrave Harriers, with Phil Wicks on the last leg, proved too much for Notts on a leg that also saw Leeds City come through strongly to take second place. The fight for bronze saw the best battle of the day with less than 3 seconds separating 3 teams - Bedford and County just edging out Notts who only just managed to hold on to 4th with Frank Tickner from Wells City Harriers, who recorded the fastest leg of the day, pushing them all the way to the finish line. Former GB cross country Farquharson will be hoping that his strong and determined run has caught the eyes of the selectors as he fights to secure another GB vest this season. His next outing sees him travel to Gateshead next weekend and then on to Sefton Park in Liverpool for the European X-Country trials.

The Senior Ladies race was won by a strong team from Havering Mayesbrook AC, anchored home by GB international Faye Fullerton, finishing 40 seconds clear of Charnwood AC with Aldershot Farnham and District in third. It was a good day elsewhere for the contingent from Aldershot as they dominated the junior events taking gold in the Under 13 boys and girls, Under 15 boys and girls, U17 girls and junior women and silver in the Under 17 boys. Running for Aldershot in the Junior Women's race was reigning European Junior Cross country champion Steph Twell.

With teams in every age group host club Mansfield Harriers had a strong turnout. The Senior Men's 'A' team produced the 4th fastest ever time by a Harriers team in this event to finish 43rd in a time of 1:06.17. Luke Cragg led the team off in a very strong field and, in posting a time of 15:26 over the 5k course, moved up to 3rd in the Mansfield all time list. Stephen Lisgo, in his first season as a Senior Man, took over from Luke with the team in 20th place and, with a time of 16:18, took himself to 6th on the all time rankings for the club. Chris Brown, better renowned as a track runner and also making his debut as a senior, was next up running a highly respectable 17:16 before handing on to Lee Garrett, who continued his comeback equalling Chris's time of 17:16.

There were also some encouraging runs for other Mansfield athletes – Doug Ross recording 17:09, Pete Stafford 17:48, Andy Plumb 17:59, Steve Grainger 18:05, John Farquharson 18:19, Steve Davies 18:35, Mark Jenkins 18:50 and Julian Wood 22:50.

Mansfield's Senior Ladies were led home by another Farquharson – Billy's wife Lisa running 11:37 for the 3K lap to hand over to new Mansfield member Miriam Tedder who ran 12:46 before handing on to Jane Stafford who anchored the "A" team home in a time of 13:53. Mansfield's other ladies were led in by Maddy Collinge in 13:57, Maz Lee-Cerrino 14:02, Julie Grainger 14:09, Denise Winfield 14:19, Chris Fell 15:41 and Elaine Greaves 15:47.

Best junior performances of the day on came from the Under 15 girls finishing 5th and the junior men finishing 13th. The girls were led out on their 2k laps by Hannah Wragg who came home in 15th place with a time of 7:19 against some of the country's best athletes in this age group. Rachel Brandham went out next and showed her growing potential by steadily picking off athletes to come home in 5th place recording 7:18 leaving new recruit Dee-Ann Davey to anchor the team home with a time of 7:21. Stuart King went off first for the Junior men over 3K and ran a strong leg coming home in 9:08 to hand over to James Mee, recording 9:18 just having had the plaster cast removed from a broken arm. Danny Heathcote was anchor man with a time of 9:49.

The Under 13 girls weren't able to repeat the performance of the 2005 team who took first place in this event but the "A" team of Chevelle Baxter (7:57), Demi-Jade Jakymelen (8:16) and Hannah Hardy (8:22) ran well to take 19th position. Tom Wragg led out the U13 boys with a good run coming home in 7:30, team mates Jonny Brown (8:12) and Sam Raynor (8:12) following him in to take 35th place. The Under 15 boys finished in 33rd place through the efforts of Ryan Childs (6:51), Ryan Saxton (6:57) and Richie Talbot (7:14), Under 17 men 74th over 3K with Adam Sansom (11:05), Luke Mason (12:35) and Daniel Ward (13:03) and the Under 17 women, running laps of 2.5k, finished 28th through the efforts of Georgia Milton (9:41), Nikita Pembleton (10:24) and Kate Raynor (10:07).

Other Mansfield athletes were:

U13 girls – "B" team 38th Hayley Silver (8:20), Amelia Mitchell (8:43), Kiera Abbott (8:27), "C" team 64th Charlotte Bellingham (8:17), Robyn Foster (10:22), Alice Mortiboys (9:20).

U15 Girls – "B" team 14th Claire Talbot (7:37), Christie Childs (7:40), Siobhan Harrison (7:26), "C" team 40th Sophie Ward (7:59), Laura Brown (7:43), Hannah Harrison (8:18)

U17 Women – "B" team 47th Holly Blount (10:43), Emily Reeve (11:55), Gina Radford (10:39), "C" team Daisy Bough 11:16, Emma Wilkinson (10:09)

U13 Boys – "B" team 49th James Mackintosh (8:00), David Wilkinson (8:23), Jordan Boam (8:39)

U15 Boys – "B" team 50th Henry Partridge (7:19), Nick Phillips (7:16), Tom O'Mara (7:22)