

SOMERSET SCHOOLS ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION



Cross Country Report and Results 2008

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2008 Cross Country Report

This year's cross country season will be remembered for countless occasions of camaraderie, surprising success, dogged determination and unfortunately belated payments!



Junior Championships - were again held on the superb playing fields of Kings College utilising a different start and finish area to the previous year. More schools now know of this event and have inserted it into their calendar. As a result more competitors were seen with 50 finishing the year 7 boys' race! In total there were 154 finishers with few if any athletes did not complete their races as conditions were perfect. There were 28 individual teams from 14 schools and team awards were shared between Queens College, Wells Cathedral and Westfield. These certificates were sent to schools after the event whilst individual certificates and champions badge were presented at the conclusion of the races to:

Year 7 Girls – Becky Carver Whitstone
Year 7 Boys – Curtis Stevens Whitstone
Year 8 Girls – Emily Ruffell-Hazell Queens College
Year 8 Boys – Rowan Preece Castle

Thanks must go to Richard Llewellyn-Eaton for organising the event which, as is now usual, contained the 'hares' so that the young athletes would not go off course.

Senior Championships - took place at The Taunton Racecourse with grateful thanks again to Richard Llewellyn-Eaton for his organisation particularly on the morning of the event. A good entry (379 competitors) from all corners of the county competed in sunny conditions. The course, as proved in the past, was demanding and competition particularly at the head of the fields fierce. Champions were:

	Entry	Finish	Winners: Individual	Team
Minor Boys	52	40	George Lavalin (M)	Mendip
Junior Boys	56	46	Blair Brown (T)	Taunton
Inter Boys	56	32	Nathan Young (M)	Taunton
Senior Boys	41	24	Dan Layton (M)	Yeovil
Minor Girls	56	43	Emily Smith (M)	Mendip
Junior Girls	51	42	Isla Ness (T)	Mendip
Inter Girls	39	32	Catherine Blew (T)	Taunton
Senior Girls	28	21	Nicola Morgan (Y)	Mendip

Countless familiar faces from previous years came into the finishing area and hopes began to rise for the forthcoming championships. Selection for the southwest championships was problem free.

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Southwest Championships - were held at The Crypt School, Gloucester having been moved from Cheltenham. As is common two coaches were hired to take the team and pick-ups were planned as late as possible. We were the last team to arrive, took the last parking spaces, walked straight through and past the severely crowded admin area to the course located on the far side of the school. A team manager for each team again proved invaluable.

Unfortunately the set up of the course was slow, particularly around the finish area, and concern was expressed for a very narrow section 'through' a hedge. But once races were underway everything went smoothly. It had to for there was a large senior men's league race immediately after!

The county were well supported again but the team had mixed fortunes:

- A minor boy, who had finished 5th in the county championships, fell and had his hand spiked. A minor injury in itself but quite traumatic for a young athlete just starting his career and in unfamiliar surroundings.
- A junior girl for whom we had high hopes also did not finish.
- Two well known senior athletes also did not finish, one in tears through pain and helped by ALL his team mates after they had finished the other in tears of desperation for just not having it on the day.

But:

- The minor boys and senior girls packed into the top 30 positions
- The minor girls had high placed finishers as did the inter boys and inter girls.
- New faces to the team had ran well and had become 'team members'.

At the finish area Les and myself were very hopeful of winning trophies. Unfortunately we, and everyone else, had to wait some time for confirmation. The results service proved particularly slow and amidst the presentations there was a fire alarm; after ignoring it we had to evacuate the hall! Eventually, having returned home our success was:

	Best performer	Team
Minor Boys	4th - Joe Merriweather	1st
Junior Boys	6th – Blair Brown	3rd
Inter Boys	3rd – Charlie Maclean	2nd
Senior Boys	7th – Dan Layton	3rd
Minor Girls	4th – Vera Assis	5th
Junior Girls	6th - Isla Ness	6th
Inter Girls	3rd – Catherine Blew	1st
Senior Girls	5th – Nicola Morgan	1st (retain trophy)

Selection for the national's team was thorough but given the above performances there were no major problems.

National Championships – were held at Sefton Park, Liverpool in March. More than a year before this counties were informed of the possible lack of accommodation in Liverpool due to its status as European City of Culture. Consequently I had booked a Premiere Inn one motorway junction from the course some 11 months before! This again proved a good location but as is again always the case travel was slow around Birmingham and we arrived a little late. But Premiere Inn staff were well organised albeit tentative. The evening meal was done in three sittings and there was time before the first for a team meeting (minus one!) and presentation of awards from the southwest championships, in particular the inter girls trophy which was incorrectly scored at Gloucester!

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There were no problems in the accommodation other than a set cooked breakfast rather than to order after which there was ample time for kitting out and team photographs before departure to the course.

Again our arrival at the course was at an ideal time for the coach parked adjacent to the administration and finish areas and thus became a natural base for the team. Fortunately the driver understood what was best and fully complied with our requests. Some team members, for various reasons, had arranged to meet the team at the venue and again this was easy given the distinctive colours of the Berrys coach.

The course was flat, predominantly open, and thus fast with a long straight leading into a hairpin bend prior to the long run-in to the finish. There was good spectator space throughout the course and not until the last race did the weather change from breezy and overcast to a gusty wind with heavy rain.

Importantly:

- Whatever was set against the team, every athlete completed their course.
- Our best runners maintained their performances
- All other runners played their part.

My personal highlights are:

- George Harris (JB) overcoming his medical problems to move further up the county ranking!
- Camilla Windus (JG), arriving late from a Friday night stage show, running her heart out and enjoying being part of the team before going directly back to school for the Saturday stage show!
- Charlie Maclean (IB) repeating his performance of the previous year, finishing 10th and again being a reserve for the international. He was extremely pleased, more so than in 2007!
- Catherine Blew (IG) running herself 'into the ground' and being thankful for the team support!
- The complete togetherness of the senior girls team, lead on the course by new girl Nicola Morgan and also lead by old stalwarts Naomi Taschimowitz and Laura Parker, in her sixth nationals!
- Having George Mapletoft (SB) in the team after a five year gap!
- The atmosphere in the finishing tent with the senior boys when the climate in the form of cloud cover came inside!
- And finally the look of joy and amazement on the face of reserve runner Hannah Bridger (SG), and her team mates, when she realised that her finishing position had enabled the senior girls' team to retain the H Witham Trophy!

Some weeks later the team scores were published on the ESAA web site. This showed that we had won the Girls Overall 'C' Group trophy which will be presented at the track and field championships. We also placed second in the 'C' group boys. Totalling all 'C' group team scores we would have been champions had there been a trophy. This should mean an invitation to the London Mini-Marathon, but nothing is guaranteed!

	Best performer	SW Team	'C' Group	National
Junior Boys	21st – Blair Brown	2nd	2nd	9th
Inter Boys	10th – Charlie Maclean	2nd	3rd	11th
Senior Boys	102nd – Dan Layton	4th	6th	33rd
Junior Girls	33rd - Isla Ness	2nd	3rd	20th
Inter Girls	34th – Catherine Blew	2nd	4th	27th
Senior Girls	35th – Nicola Morgan	1st	1st	6th

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Such success simply cannot be attained without back-up behind the scenes and for this I must thank the band of team managers whose number continue to be the envy of all other teams. This year we were graced with nine at the national championships with numerous parents always happy to help out and above all support the team in its entirety.

It would be impossible to organise a season's activities without hic-cups. There were three:

- To support the team and to spread the cost I am always prepared to have parents travel with the team. In the main this is absolutely no problem but occasionally an awkward situation arises which can be directly attributable to one or more parents.
- One of our team managers coaches athletes from other counties. As a Somerset team manager his allegiance is quite clear yet on two separate occasions he was seen and heard to support one of his athletes to the detriment of a Somerset county athlete. As a result he will not be asked to team manage in the future.
- The total cost of entering, travelling to and staying at championships is large. Because of this selection letters are always directed to either Heads of Physical Education or Head Teachers. Athletes know this and many approach their schools asking for financial help. Many schools have policies in place whilst some give a clear indication to their students that the school is paying and then ... nothing!!! Consequently although all cross country fees have been collected the last was received in July!

Finally I can only apologize for listing my memories and thoughts of the season for in reality they are but a speck compared to those of the athletes and team managers who so successfully participated.

Team Managers:

Brian Baker

Richard Llewellyn-Eaton

Charlotte Fisher

Phil Wylie

Les Neville

Clive Thomas

Tracey Parker

Ian Humphreys

Jane Yandell

Angela Thomas

Jason Allen