

SOMERSET SCHOOLS ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION



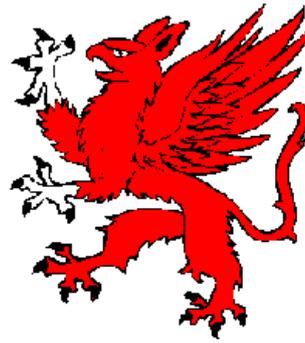
Cross Country Report and Results 2009



SOMERSET SCHOOLS ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

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2009 Cross Country Report

It was with much sadness that we learnt Angela Thomas, one of our team managers in 2008, passed away. Angela was a stalwart member of our team managers with a wealth of knowledge for our athletes, along with an enthusiastic and vivacious personality, which inspired the whole team. Angela will be sorely missed by all who had the good fortune to work alongside her.

The season of 2009 will be remembered for the gap left by Angela and cancellation rather than the superb feats of the athletes, team managers and organisers!

Junior Championships:

As has now become common place these championships were held on the superb King's College playing fields. The venue lends itself very easily to this type of championships and with Richard Llewellyn-Eaton's organisation the young athletes, many of whom are experiencing cross-country at this level for the first time, take part in a very enjoyable afternoon's event.

The races start and finish in a central location beside mature trees which become natural bases for the schools. This was particularly evident this year as more schools and more athletes participated: a very healthy sign for the future.

In the year 7 girls' race there were 64 finishers (22 more than in the previous year) with 12 teams completing the course. It should be noted that the number of finishers in this race was greater than the number of entries for a senior championships race!

The winner was Holly Brown representing Queen's College which also won the team trophy.

The year 7 boys' race saw 55 athletes (5 more) complete the course with Josh Aspey from Danesfield being the champion. The team trophy was won by Whitstone with 8 teams completing.

The year 8 girls' race saw 47 athletes (23 more) finish the course with Emily Smith (Wells Cathedral) becoming champion along with the girls team from Whitstone; there were 8 teams completing.

The year 8 boys' race had 41 athletes (3 more) complete with Curtis Stevens (Whitstone) becoming champion whilst Danesfield secured the team trophy from 4 other teams. Certificates were sent to the first six individuals and top three teams.

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Senior Championships:

The venue for this year's championships was always in doubt. With the Taunton Racecourse used in the previous year and Millfield School previous to that the hope was that either Sedgemoor or Yeovil areas would be able to host the championships. After many phone calls it was thought that a course adjacent to Stanchester School could be used. Unfortunately this turned out not to be possible but thanks to Larry Tulett the Yeovil Recreation Centre playing fields were viewed and a booking secured. Larry and myself made a further visit to meet with the ground staff to chat through what they could offer in terms of equipment and marking out and to decide on the final course and relevant race lengths. I must state that the ground staff at this time were most helpful as was Rachel Holmes (SSDC). The staging of such an event at this venue necessitates a postal circulation to surrounding neighbours explaining the increased traffic and parking and also the rearrangement of soccer fixtures.

A large number of entries were received and all was going to plan until severe winter weather hit the south-west. The Yeovil area was particularly harshly hit resulting in the closure of a number of schools. A long phone call from Rachel on the Thursday before the championships resulted in the decision to cancel the championships due to the ground conditions being not suitable (all other sporting fixtures had already been cancelled) and our usage of the fields would have meant long term damage.

Immediate phone calls and emails from me to area secretaries and their subsequent contact with athletes meant that on the day only one athlete turned up, apparently her school, not in the Yeovil area, had also been closed due to the weather conditions.

Thus on the day of the championships 10 committee members met at the Yeovil Olympiads Clubhouse to select the county team for the SW championships three weeks later. The selection, being a paper exercise, was no easy task but our undertaking was made easier by, ironically, very bright sunshine streaming through the windows! (In the track and field season the groundsmen did mention that perhaps given the actual weather on the day the cross country could have gone ahead!)

Southwest Championships:

The county team had been selected on the countless cross country results prior to the cancelled championships alongside the rank order of the area team lists. Athletes were initially contacted through their school and a letter was sent to all head teachers outlining the selection procedure. Fortunately many of the team had represented the county before and thus I had contact details to chase up athletes and thus my efforts were directed to making sure the minors knew of their selection. Amongst everything only two parents questioned their son's/daughter's non selection; and this I feel is due to the very positive relationships built up over many years with athletes and their parents and the SSAA cross country management.

The southwest championships were held at The Taunton Racecourse and thus alongside organising the county team I was also receiving and organising the entries from the other SW counties. Fortunately Richard was the man-on-the-ground who organised the course itself and the many, many local helpers so my role was very much one of sorting reams of paper! (I attach a separate report submitted to the Southwest AGM.)

The championships were most successful with the county securing three team trophies and one individual champion. Overall, although there is no trophy, we were the most successful county.

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Champion	Somerset best	Champions	Somerset
Minor Girls – C Smith (C)	H Brown – 2 nd	Devon	2 nd
Minor Boys – O Fox (S)	O Fox – 1 st	Cornwall	3 rd
Junior Girls – L Bleaken (W)	A Martin – 12 th	Devon	4 th
Junior Boys – B Westhenry (Do)	S Bedford – 8 th	Somerset	1 st
Inter Girls – A Gummow (C)	I Ness – 7 th	Avon	2 nd
Inter Boys – T Curr (G)	B Brown – 11 th	Dorset	6 th
Senior Girls – H Alderson (A)	O Bryant – 3 rd	Somerset	1 st
Senior Boys – M Withey (G)	N Young – 3 rd	Somerset	1 st

With this championships being a ‘double-header’, necessitating that we have a group of team managers as well as a group of organising officials, I must thank most sincerely the enthusiastic and loyal set of team managers. Again we were evidently the admiration of other teams for we still had a team manager solely responsibly for each age group. The selection for the national championships was thought provoking. It was decided that a couple of athletes who were reserves for the southwest championships would probably do better than those who finished ‘poorly’ at Taunton. The hope was that the team would be stronger and gain national rewards to build upon previous years’ national success.

National Championships:

The championships were held at Stanford Hall, Leicestershire having been moved at a very late stage from Donnington Park. Thankfully the two venues are in close proximity and thus no changes had to be made regarding the accommodation of the team, again in a Premier Inn, a few miles from Stanford Hall.

It would be superfluous to keep stating year on year the benefits of using Premier Inn suffice to say that the reception was smooth, the meal deal and organisation surrounding it efficient and the sociability within the team and many supporters most evident. “This is the highlight of our year, we wouldn’t miss it,” stated one parent.

The short journey to the course was easy and as is usual our arrival meant that we could park just after the entrance and close to the central areas. The grounds of Stanford Hall are vast and undulating. Two distinct areas were used for the course separated by a fairly narrow gap on the brow of a hill. Thus spectators had to choose between the start and finish areas or the long lap of the course itself. The team made base beside the start area and this proved to be sheltered, secure and easy to find for athletes, team managers and the many supporters.

Again, and I cannot express this fact too strongly, we were the envy of other counties for the number of team managers attached to the team. With there being ten team managers it was possible to have one dedicated team manager for each team, an overall boys and girls team manager plus Les and myself completing the administration and in the finish area looking after delighted, fatigued, injured and distraught athletes. I know, from comments I receive, the athletes really do appreciate the individual treatment they receive. A huge thank you to each and every team manager.

Overall our boys teams were not ‘in the mix’ with a poorer showing within southwest teams than at the southwest championships and consequent low positions within the national rank. The team’s strength was depleted by an injury to Nathan Young prior to the championships but of note was Sam Bedford (JB) who finished in a very

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commendable 15th position. This placed him third within the southwest and it is most encouraging for the future to record that Sam was disappointed with his performance.

The girls' teams did better with much camaraderie (particularly senior girls) within the finishing tent when it was realised that all team members were there! Olivia Bryant was certainly disappointed by her performance (23rd) but this was outweighed by Nicola Morgan's delight at coming in sixteenth.

Within the senior girls team we soon realised that with all eight girls finishing 'together' we were in a good position to retain the H Witham trophy. Unfortunately this was not to be the case and the team returned to Somerset trophy less. But we had done better by placing second overall! Narrowly beaten by Kent, an 'A group' county, by a mere 17 points! It is worth recording that our 8th placed runner was 16 places in front of Kent's sixth and last scoring athlete! The difference between first team and second team is simply that Kent's first scoring athletes beat ours whilst our last scoring (easily) beat Kent's.

Having packed up our base we were leaving the championships with national recognition, certificates and smiles. Just as I and a few others were leaving the central area a call went out for the Somerset team to come to presentation. A great surprise where we were presented with the overall trophy for Group C girls. Fantastic, we were returning with a trophy and added national recognition.

Best performer	SW team @ nationals	National
Junior Girls – 40 th - Emily Smith	3 rd	28 th
Junior Boys – 15 th - Sam Bedford	5 th	29 th
Inter Girls – 72 nd - Isla Ness	6 th	32 nd
Inter Boys – 57 th - Blair Brown	6 th	36 th
Senior Girls – 16 th - Nicolas Morgan	1 st	2 nd
Senior Boys – 39 th - Charlie Maclean	3 rd	26 th

The season ended on an unexpected high and perhaps with the passing of time this success will be remembered rather more.

However the cancellation of the county championships did have knock-on effects for it meant a loss of income of about £350. Fortunately this loss will be partly eradicated by the profit from the staging of the Southwest championships but I fear the cross country section may not have balanced the books over the course of this season.

Team managers:

Jane Yandell	Dick Bowden
Tracey Parker	Stuart Richards
Charlotte Fisher	Jason Allen
Laura Parker	John Rix
Julie Harrison	Stuart Richards
	Richard Llewellyn-Eaton
	Les Neville
	Brian Baker

BB
Sept 2009