

ESAA SOUTH-WEST REGIONAL COMBINED EVENTS AND RACE WALKING CHAMPIONSHIPS

**The Bill Whistlecroft Athletics Arena, Yeovil
Saturday and Sunday 26 and 27 June 2021**

The organising county (Somerset) and the venue (The Bill Whistlecroft Athletics Arena, Yeovil) for the 2021 South-West Regional Combined Events and Race Walking Championships were decided at the 2019 South-West Schools' AA Annual General Meeting. The provisional timetable was agreed (largely a replica of the 2017 and 2018 editions), and an information email was sent to County Secretaries (and other county contacts) on Thursday 6 May with a reply requested by Friday 28 May. This email implored all counties to support the meeting and to provide officials.

The electronic entry system operated smoothly, with far more PBs than usual included by the counties. That was particularly helpful as the closing date for entries had been extended by 6 days so we had far less time in which to check Power of 10. I met Brian Baker on Tuesday 15 June to organise the start-lists of competitors and their seeding in order to complete the programme and make adjustments to the timetable, and thanks to Brian's computer wizardry I was able to send out the complete programme to all my South-West contacts on Thursday 17 June.

The large drop in number of competitors this year (the lack of county competition meant that there were no entries from Cornwall, Dorset or the Channel Islands) and the need to save money prompted us to be far less ambitious in the production of the programme. All the usual details were included but a simple, paper A5 edition was produced thanks to Katie Cobb (SSAA Treasurer) at Hazlegrove School. Track slips and pins were supplied by ESAA and arrived in good time; numbers were from the extensive SSAA stock and Brian Baker produced the field cards.

With the Covid-19 regulations still in place after 21 June, everyone attending (athletes, parents, Team Managers, officials and spectators) was required to complete a Track and Trace form via the Somerset Schools' AA website. Hard copies of the form were available on both days but we were anxious to avoid queuing at the gate and form-filling on arrival.

Counties had been unable to stage their usual County Championships so an analysis of the Participation Pattern at South-West level over the past few years showed that with 71 entries (and 66 actual participants) we were about 20 down on 2018 and 2019, and about 30 fewer took part than in 2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017. It is certainly hoped that the figures will rise in 2022 (when we meet again in Yeovil) with all 8 counties taking part.

Unsurprisingly, the other 5 Regions found themselves in a similar situation. The South-East attracted 98 entries (with 92 participants), the North-West (87 and 76), the Midlands (69 and 55), East Anglia (68 and 61) and the North-East (55 and 55). The South-West entries were as follows:

	Junior Boys	Inter Boys	Senior Boys	Junior Girls	Inter Girls	Senior Girls
Avon	4	0	1	4	4	4
Channel Islands	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cornwall	0	0	0	0	0	0
Devon	4	1	2	3	3	3
Dorset	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gloucestershire	3	2	0	2	3	2
Somerset	4	4	3	2	4	1
Wiltshire	0	2	0	4	2	0
TOTALS	15	9	6	15	16	10

There were no Race Walk entries this year, due to injury.

Obviously, considerable numbers of volunteers are vital to ensure the efficient running of the meeting. Thus, I should pay tribute to the work carried out by Irene Brown (Devon County AA) – the South-West Schools' AA Officials' Secretary and the inputs from Brian Baker (Somerset Schools' AA Officials' Secretary) and Sally Higman (Somerset County AA Officials' Secretary) in the recruitment of officials so that events were well staffed (though some Team Managers were required to assist). With Paul D'Arcy as Referee and Nick Higman as Technical Manager the weekend ran smoothly, with only minor tweaking of the timetable necessary.

Photo-finish was in operation on both days, thanks to Jayne and Keith Reed (Devon County AA) with Track Referee Irene Brown ensuring the running events started punctually and were contested according to all the relevant rules. Brian Baker wore several hats – those of announcer, scorer, results co-ordinator and certificate printer.

The quality of performances at the head of most of the fields continued to be extremely encouraging (with the girls again to the fore both in numbers taking part and in performances). 5 individuals (4 girls and 1 boy) and 3 girls' teams achieved places in the South-West "All-Time Top-10" rankings. The highlight was a Championship Best Team Score of

13441 points by Devon in the Senior Girls' Heptathlon – emphasised by the fact that the CBP score at the ESAA Championships is that set by Dorset in 2017, a total of 13235.

The depth of talent throughout our Region was emphasised when the 'next best 9' rule concerning individual qualification for the ESAA Championships came into operation as the following South-West athletes deservedly earned a September trip to Bedford: Ben Callard (SB Devon), Alice Wilson (IG Avon), Lily Bailey (IG Avon), Mayalee Osola (IG Avon). Also invited, due to there being spaces to make up the 45 in each age group, were Phoebe Googh (SG Avon), Thema Osborne-Hendricks (SG Avon), Charlotte Gravelsons (SG Gloucestershire) and Jodie Burnett-Hockey (SG Gloucestershire), meaning that Avon would now have a team of 3 girls in each Heptathlon competition.

All 5 South-West counties are due to feature in the ESAA Championships, with up to 44 qualifiers in the following numbers: Somerset 14, Avon 12, Devon 11, Gloucestershire 5 and Wiltshire 2. The leading results and the list of automatic qualifiers* for the ESAA Championships were as follows:

Junior Boys' Pentathlon (Record - 3169)

1. Nicolas Maczugowski	(Devon)	2764
2. Stefan Chirita*	(Somerset)	2551
3. Conor Hewitt*	(Avon)	2183

Team Result (Record - 8003)

1. Devon	6820
2. Somerset	6333
3. Avon	5654

Intermediate Boys' Octathlon (Record - 5786)

1. Doug Rogan Rea*	(Wiltshire)	3774
2. Joshua Robinson*	(Gloucestershire)	3713
3. Henry Hawkins	(Somerset)	3680

Team Result (Record - 14149)

1. Somerset	10441
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Senior Boys' Decathlon (Record - 7128)

1. Craig Moncur*	(Devon)	6303
2. Oliver D'Rozario	(Somerset)	6022
3. Liam Hillier*	(Avon)	4507

Team Result (Record - 18124)

1. Somerset	14355
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Junior Girls' Pentathlon (Record - 3221)

1. Eden Robinson*	(Devon)	3106
2. Florence Hampton*	(Gloucestershire)	2683
3. Rosa Ford	(Avon)	2520

Team Result (Record - 9176)

1. Avon	6995
2. Devon	6184
3. Wiltshire	6040

Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon (Record - 5064)

1. Seren Rodgers	(Somerset)	4900
2. Lucy Fellows	(Somerset)	4816
3. Jessica Duncton*	(Gloucestershire)	4396
4. Amelia Watling*	(Wiltshire)	4259

Team Result (Record - 13818)

1. Somerset	13536
2. Avon	12442
3. Devon	11038
4. Gloucestershire	9885

Senior Girls' Heptathlon (Record - 5223)

1. Katie Chapman	(Devon)	4828
2. Megan Hamilton-Strong	(Devon)	4627
3. Olivia Bagg*	(Somerset)	4151
4. Georgina Scoot	(Devon)	3986
5. Stephanie Brooks*	(Avon)	3861

Team Result (Record - 13129)

1. Devon	13441 CBP
2. Avon	9008

The unique atmosphere of Combined Events was maintained throughout the weekend thanks to some outstanding performances, rousing team spirit and the commitment of so many individuals and groups mentioned earlier. Add to those the sheer joy on the part of athletes, parents and Team Managers at being back in competition and renewing our 'friendly rivalry'.

The venue for the 2022 Championships (due to be held on Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 June) will be the Bill Whistlecroft Athletics Arena, Yeovil, and the meeting will be organised by the Somerset Schools' AA. With regard to the organising county and venue for the 2023 South-West Regional Championships, an email to County Secretaries (and other interested parties within the counties) inviting 'bids' to stage the meeting was sent out on 13 September. The hosting county and venue will be decided at the South-West Schools' AA Annual General Meeting on Saturday 2 October.

RICHARD BOWDEN

ESAA COMBINED EVENTS AND RACE WALKING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Bedford International Athletic Stadium
Saturday and Sunday 18 and 19 September 2021

The ESAA Combined Events and Race Walking Championships returned to Bedford International Athletic Stadium after another 2-year absence and once again this proved to be an excellent venue. With Dennis Johnson (a Combined Events coach with immense enthusiasm and experience) as Organising Secretary, and a stadium with staff used to holding national championships, we could be sure we were in good hands.

With 3 teams and 2 individual athletes in the Combined Events Championships, and a Race Walker having been selected, our group would once again be one of the largest on show with a total of 15 athletes and 5 Team Managers.

For many years we have arranged coach transport and a 'team hotel' for the Somerset and Devon group at the ESAA Championships, with a subsidy for each Somerset athlete thanks to any surplus made at the Somerset Combined Events and Race Walking Championships. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 situation forced the cancellation of our 2020 and 2021 Championships so we were not in a position to offer financial assistance towards the Bedford weekend.

Therefore, the decision was made to ask our athletes to arrange their own transport and to book their own hotel accommodation. The uncertainty of the Covid-19 regulations weeks ahead also prompted that decision but we were confident our arrangements would work as we have found over a great many years that almost every Somerset athlete has been supported by parents and/or other family members, so by travelling together and booking a family room it would certainly be possible to cut down costs enormously.

All 5 Team Managers (and 4 athletes) stayed in our usual 'team hotel' - the Bedford Priory Marina Premier Inn, within easy walking distance of the stadium. Other members of the team stayed with parents at other hotels nearby.

The weather was pleasantly warm throughout both days (though a little cooler and overcast on the Sunday) with an hour's rain from midday on the Sunday affecting only the Junior Girls' High Jump (which had no Somerset competitors). The organisation was most efficient and our athletes were given every chance to perform well.

Our full results were:

Junior Boys' Pentathlon

Stefan Chirita	(Millfield School)	10	2573 (PB)
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Intermediate Boys' Octathlon

Toks Akanbi-Mortimer	(Millfield School)	24	3687 (PB)
Henry Hawkins	(King's College)	25	3650
Charlie Glaisher	(King's College)	31	3188 (PB)
Ed Shirley	(King's College)	32	2513
Team Score		5	10525

Senior Boys' Decathlon

Harry Barton	(Millfield School)	5	6028 (PB)
Oliver D'Rosario	(Richard Huish College)	7	5965
Oscar Lee	(Richard Huish College)	25	4586 (PB)
James Connelly	(Millfield School)	28	4045
Team Score		2	16579

Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon

Lucy Fellows	(Millfield School)	2	4753
Seren Rodgers	(The Castle School – Richard Huish College)	3	4621
Grace Fielder	(King's College)	28	3685
Ruby Ibbotson	(The Castle School)	36	3361 (PB)
Team Score		1	13059

Senior Girls' Heptathlon

Olivia Bagg	(Richard Huish College)	25	3366
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Intermediate Girls' 3000m Race Walk

Abby Hughes	(King's College)	1	15:37.66 (PB)
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The team highlight was the Intermediate Girls' victory. Having won 11 team trophies in the previous 32 years of the competition (Junior Boys in 1989, 2005 and 2006, Intermediate Boys in 1991 and 1992, Senior Boys in 2018, Junior Girls in 2015 and Senior Girls in 1999, 2000, 2018 and 2019) we won the Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon team title this year for the first time – making Somerset only the second county in the history of the Championships to have its name engraved on all 6 age group trophies (after Essex achieved the feat 20 years ago).

The individual Combined Events highlights were silver and bronze medals within that Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon team – from Lucy Fellows and Seren Rodgers respectively – meaning there would be 2 Somerset athletes in the England team for the Home International Indoor Pentathlons in Glasgow on Saturday 4 December.

Somerset gained a full set of individual medals as Abby Hughes had won the Intermediate Girls' 3000m Race Walk on the Saturday, meaning that she would make it 3 Somerset representatives in ESAA colours in 2021 with her selection for the SIAB International in Derby on Saturday 25 September (joined by Seren Rodgers in the Long Jump).

Almost every Somerset athlete had family support in Bedford, with another loyal group of parents engendering a most encouraging team spirit. Jane Yandell, Richard Llewellyn-Eaton and Steve Shaw were joined as Team Managers by debutant Zach Harrop, with each playing his or her part in helping to make this meeting a thoroughly enjoyable end to a season in which so many individuals in the Somerset Schools' AA organisation have made enormous contributions at each stage of what must be viewed as a thoroughly well-planned and well-executed 'Return to Competition' pathway.

RICHARD BOWDEN