

## NEW BALANCE ESAA TRACK AND FIELD CHAMPIONSHIPS

**Manchester Regional Arena**

**Friday, Saturday and Sunday 9, 10 and 11 July 2021**

Once it became clear that the 4 Area Championships would not take place, and the South-West Schools' AA Championships were cancelled, a different SSAA Competition format had to be devised. Therefore, we made use of the South-West Schools' AA Championships date (Saturday 19 June) for Juniors in addition to 12 June (for Intermediates and Seniors) in order to cut down on numbers at the Bill Whistlecroft Athletics Arena, Yeovil, on any single date.

All schools, colleges and clubs were informed of the details, information was displayed on the website and entries were invited from schools, clubs, coaches and even parents, with regular updates and current start-lists sent out.

Online entries and payments (£3.00 per event) were via the SSAA website thanks to massive assistance from Geoff Cole and Paul D'Arcy of Yeovil Olympiads AC, with entries closing at midnight on the Monday before each meeting. We had learned a great deal about the Covid-19 protocols from the 3 Yeovil Olympiads AC Open Meetings held in April and May so all the necessary procedures were in place, including a published arrival time for each event, a *Track and Trace* system for everyone attending, an officials' briefing, a call room for track events, Portaloos and even dustpans for Discus retrieval.

Unfortunately, a number of state schools had been forbidden to take part in competition during the summer term but most of the independent schools seized the opportunity to participate and formed the vast majority of the entries: IG = 60; IB = 62; SG = 50; SB = 64; JG = 44; JB = 54. 31 of our 58 schools and colleges were represented over the 2 days.

Once we realised numbers of entries would be relatively low we offered 'spare' lanes in track events to those South-West counties who would not be staging their own competition on 12 June and entry to all events for Juniors on 19 June, with counties given Tuesday and Wednesday to enter. Our offer was accepted by only 1 Avon Senior Girl on 12 June and 7 Devon Juniors on 19 (4 JG and 3 JB). We even allowed any Juniors entered for the South-West Regional Combined Events Championships the chance to do 2 events on 19 June, but there were no takers.

Results were displayed on the website immediately after each meeting and SSAA Champion badges were sent to the schools within a few days.

Championships Best Performances are sometimes few and far between (2 in 2012, 10 in 2013, 5 in 2014, 10 in 2015, 3 in 2016, 7 in 2017, 13 in 2018 and 6 in 2019) so among relatively few entries and after so much disruption it was uplifting to see 3 in 2021. These were by Lucy Fellows (Millfield School) with 6m06 in the IG Long Jump (breaking a 1997 record), Seb Clatworthy (Millfield School) with 2m05 in the SB High Jump (breaking a 1992 record) and Lucy Chalmers (Millfield School) with 61.08 in the SG 400m Hurdles (breaking Jacqui Parker's 1985 record). This performance earned Lucy the Bill Whistlecroft Hurdles Trophy, with a modest presentation made in Manchester.

The SSAA 'Return to Competition' document had been displayed on the website since April and this outlined clearly the ESAA qualification system in place this year. Each county would be able to nominate the usual number of athletes (40 in the case of Somerset) by the due date (Tuesday 22 June) and the ESAA would then refer to England Power of 10.

Invitations to compete in Manchester would be issued to the top-16 athletes in each event on Friday 25 June, with Seniors competing on the Friday, Intermediates on the Saturday and Juniors on the Sunday. Teachers, coaches and parents were made aware from the outset that there would be no SSAA coach transport provided, nor would there be a Somerset team hotel.

In mid-April an initial pool of possible Somerset nominations was formed and this grew to around 70 following recommendations from schools and clubs. Weekly updates were sent out (11 in all) showing latest performances and rankings and up to 12 selectors were involved in the discussions concerning the final 40 Somerset nominations (plus another 6 athletes on the supplementary list).

Athletes could be nominated in 2 events but would be permitted to compete in only 1 event in Manchester.

We obviously needed to see all our potential nominees at the SSAA competitions but all were encouraged to take part in various Open Meetings. The 3 Yeovil Olympiads AC Open Meetings proved invaluable, with several of our most talented athletes producing National Standard performances right away. It should also be noted that some of our most dedicated athletes travelled as far afield as Braunton, Exeter, Plymouth, Swindon, Cheltenham, Birmingham, Nuneaton, Bedford, Loughborough and Manchester in order to secure marks on Power of 10 in their quest for an ESAA invitation.

We were delighted to have our full quota of 40 athletes invited to compete in Manchester and they were sent the full details on Monday 28 June. There was a subsequent withdrawal though, due to family travel arrangements being impossible to change.

The single age group competitions were on Friday (12 x SG; 9 x SB), Saturday (8 x IG; 5 x IB) and Sunday (5 x JB). ESAA offered a £15.00 hotel subsidy for the night before competition but only 14 of our athletes submitted a claim.

All our athletes found their way to the stadium successfully and in good time. Unfortunately, Jamie Holland (Millfield School) received a Covid-19 alert on the Thursday so was unable to compete on Friday, making our final number of competitors 38. Numbers and items of kit were distributed from our designated team base in the stand and we found that Covid-19 protocols were not as stringent as we had been led to believe. Richard Llewellyn-Eaton and Katie Cobb joined me on the Saturday (the IG/IB day of competition) and I was most grateful for their help.

The warm-up area was spacious and less crowded than usual due to a single age group competing on each day and call room nerves were avoided as athletes were to meet at the appropriate event site.

The Analysis of Somerset Performances (below) enables a broad comparison with previous years and shows we would probably have won 1 or 2 trophies had any been on offer. Group B winning totals in the past 3 years have been: 142 points (Lancashire 2017), 117.5 (Derbyshire 2018) and 146 (Merseyside 2019) so a full team of 40 would surely have taken us closer to the 140-point mark – a useful target for 2022.

Our medal count was 1 gold, 4 silver and 4 bronze, with an SIAB international place for Seren Rodgers (The Castle School) in the IG Long Jump in Derby on Saturday 25 September.

**Our overall performance is analysed below (17\* 18\* 19\* = 32 athletes - up from 25; 21^ = 40 athletes possible, 38 competed):**

|                       | 05 | 06 | 07 | 08 | 09   | 10    | 11 | 12  | 13   | 14  | 15 | 16 | 17* | 18*   | 19*   | 21^ |
|-----------------------|----|----|----|----|------|-------|----|-----|------|-----|----|----|-----|-------|-------|-----|
| <b>Personal Bests</b> | 6  | 9  | 7  | 3  | 4    | 10    | 7  | 14  | 8    | 8   | 4  | 8  | 9   | 9     | 7     | 15  |
| <b>Entry Standard</b> | 6  | 7  | 7  | 7  | 6    | 7     | 9  | 9   | 6    | 5   | 13 | 11 | 11  | 7     | 7     | 8   |
| <b>Nat Standard</b>   | 4  | 7  | 8  | 9  | 8    | 12    | 4  | 14  | 9    | 14  | 8  | 8  | 10  | 13    | 14    | 12  |
| <b>Top-8 Places</b>   | 11 | 12 | 13 | 15 | 16   | 15    | 9  | 18  | 11   | 17  | 15 | 17 | 18  | 17    | 19    | 20  |
| <b>Scorers</b>        | 12 | 14 | 16 | 18 | 17   | 19    | 14 | 23  | 15   | 19  | 21 | 21 | 21  | 21    | 22    | 23  |
| <b>Total Score</b>    | 57 | 83 | 98 | 98 | 85.5 | 106.5 | 55 | 125 | 80.5 | 118 | 90 | 89 | 116 | 121.5 | 129.5 | 124 |
| <b>Trophies</b>       | -  | JB | IG | IB | -    | IB    | -  | JB  | SB   | IB  | SB | -  | IG  | IG    | SG    |     |
|                       |    | SG | Ov | SG |      | SG    |    | IB  |      | Ov  |    |    | Ov  | SG    | Ov    |     |
|                       |    |    |    |    |      | Ov    |    | Ov  |      |     |    |    |     | Ov    |       |     |

39% of the athletes recorded a PB, 53% recorded a National Standard or a National Entry Standard, 53% finished in the top-8 and 60% would have scored points towards team trophies. A particularly encouraging aspect is that all this would have been achieved in the B Group (counties allowed teams of 40) rather than the C Group (teams of 32) following our recent 'promotion'. That move was clearly justified by the number of Somerset athletes who received ESAA invitations – our full quota of 40.

Another indicator of Somerset's strength within the B Group might come from an examination of the numbers of ESAA invitations issued to each of those 14 counties (Somerset shows 39 as we had a withdrawal so some other counties may have been in that situation but the numbers remain interesting): West Yorkshire (15); Nottinghamshire (21); West Midlands (23); Leicestershire & Rutland (23); Derbyshire (23); South Yorkshire (25); North Yorkshire (26); Merseyside (29); Lancashire (31); Avon (34); Buckinghamshire (38); Cheshire (38); Devon (38); Somerset (39).

ESAA could have awarded a trophy for that, at least!

**RICHARD BOWDEN**