

SOMERSET SCHOOLS' AA / SOMERSET COUNTY AA COMBINED EVENTS AND RACE WALKING CHAMPIONSHIPS

**Millfield School, Street
Saturday and Sunday 25 and 26 April 2015**

On Thursday 19 February, information and entry forms were sent to 67 schools and colleges and the 4 major Track and Field clubs in Somerset, with a closing date of Friday 20 March so that the programme could be prepared during the Easter holidays. The details were also emailed to the schools and colleges, and to all the Somerset clubs by David Cooke. The information was also sent to the Dorset Schools' AA, the Dorset County AA and to all those guest competitors who had competed in recent years.

Final details were sent to all competing schools, colleges, clubs and guests on Tuesday 9 April. As usual, substitutions could be made after the entry date, and indeed, on the days of competition.

We enjoyed the usual first-class hospitality at Millfield School, thanks to close liaison with Gary Jennings, excellent co-operation from the ground-staff and the generosity of the school. The track and the field event sites were in superb order, offering the athletes every chance to perform at their best. Grateful thanks must go to everyone at Millfield for such attention to detail and to Nick and Sally Higman for their careful inspections and meticulous preparation of the field event areas and all the implements. Weather conditions were generally favourable, with warmer temperatures on the Saturday, though wind speeds were up to +4.4 for one heat on the first day but turned to a maximum of -3.1 on day 2. Overall, however, the wind was calmer than those figures and not that much of a factor.

The meeting continues to be popular and after a dip below 200 Somerset entries in 2012 (for the first time in almost a decade) it was good to see a total of 205 in 2013 and a further rise to 223 last year. An alarming slump to 164 this year gives some cause for concern though and shows that far too many schools fail to give their talented all-round athletes the chance to take part. Pentathlon entries were well down and 18 Somerset entries in the Under-13 Boys' Quadrathlon (representing just 8 schools) was a particular disappointment. We have attracted far more entries in the past; between 220 and 230 in total should be a realistic target.

The recent trend has been: 175 entries in 2002, 192 in 2003, 218 in 2004, 235 in 2005, 224 in 2006, 254 in 2007, 259 in 2008, 268 in 2009, 203 in 2010, 240 in 2011, 190 in 2012, 205 in 2013 and 223 in 2014. One or two schools entered athletes for the first time, but, once again, thanks are due mainly to those loyal schools and clubs who support the meeting year after year, appreciating the value of the unique atmosphere generated for their athletes by Combined Events competition.

Since 2008 the quality of performances in the Senior age groups have been enhanced enormously with the acceptance of guest competitors (many of international standard) and I am delighted to say that after their 2014 absence they returned in good numbers this time. An important development was the inclusion of Under-18 Decathlon and Heptathlon competitions this year (at the request of UKA) so that some of the most talented athletes in the country would have an opportunity to take part in a high-quality meeting using IAAF Youth hurdles and implements with EDM, photo-finish and fully automatic timing with a view to selection for the IAAF World Youth Championships in Cali, Colombia. I am delighted to report that Sam Talbot, Niamh Emerson and Elizabeth Morland (Ireland) achieved that selection due, in no small part I hope, to competing in our meeting. This year various guests travelled from Cornwall, Devon, Wiltshire, Avon, Gloucestershire, South Wales, Birmingham, Coventry, Derbyshire, Manchester, Yorkshire, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Essex, London, Kent and Ireland.

On the 'domestic' front the highlight was a magnificent Championship Best Performance by Victoria McCabe (King's School) in the Junior Girls' Pentathlon. Victoria added 132 points to Emily Bonnett's 2002 total, albeit with the 3.00kg Shot rather than the 3.25kg implement.

Dorset joined us once again, with 24 entries and interest continues to grow to our east with Wiltshire Schools' AA (and St Laurence School) submitting 33 entries. Therefore, the grand total was 257 and at least that number compares a little more favourably with recent years – 299 in 2009, 277 in 2010, 308 (a record) in 2011, 268 in 2012, 289 in 2013 and 295 last year.

With the Somerset County AA Track and Field Championships continuing to be a two-day meeting we did not need to incorporate any additional events this year, though Race Walks were offered for all age groups, attracting a total entry of three Junior Boys from Brymore Academy.

The 2015 County Champions were:

Under -13 Boys' Quadrathlon (18 Somerset entries – 16 competitors)

Jamie Schluter	(Millfield Preparatory School)	998 points
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Junior Boys' Pentathlon (44 - 29)

Jack Turner	(Wellington School)	2544 points
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Junior Boys' 3000m Race Walk (3 - 3)

Herb Elliott	(Brymore Academy)	22:04.00
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Intermediate Boys' Octathlon (15 - 10)

Cliff Schwabauer	(Millfield School)	3962 points
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Senior Boys' Decathlon (4 - 3)

Matthew Trickey	(King's School)	5600 points
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Senior Men's Decathlon (2 - 2)

Ben Gibb	(Yeovil Olympiads A.C.)	5754 points
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Under -13 Girls' Quadrathlon (30 - 21)

Ciara Alexander	(Heathfield School)	570 points
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Junior Girls' Pentathlon (38 - 31)

Victoria McCabe	(King's School)	2834 points CBP
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Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon (10 - 10)

Georgia Silcox	(Westfield Academy)	3871 points
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Senior Girls' Heptathlon (3 - 2)

Ellen Barber	(King's School)	4457 points
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Senior Women's Heptathlon (0 - 0)

A number of teachers, coaches and parents assisted our loyal band of officials and all worked incredibly hard throughout the entire weekend. As usual, Sally and Nick Higman (Referee and Technical Manager respectively) led the officials brilliantly, ensuring the meeting ran efficiently. Larry Tulett (Track Referee) led the track team with his customary calm approach.

Computer scoring kept athletes, parents, teachers and coaches fully aware of totals and positions immediately after each event and thanks go to Brian Baker for that vital service. Fully automatic timing and photo-finish were in operation throughout the meeting, fascinating aspects of the weekend for the athletes, and another development which has enhanced the status of our Championship, thanks to the time and effort put in by David Cooke and Eleanor Brock. This is typical of the superb co-operation between the Somerset Schools' AA and the Somerset County AA.

RICHARD BOWDEN

ESAA SOUTH-WEST REGIONAL COMBINED EVENTS AND RACE WALKING CHAMPIONSHIPS

**The Bill Whistlecroft Athletics Arena, Yeovil
Saturday and Sunday 27 and 28 June 2015**

The organising county (Somerset) and the venue (The Bill Whistlecroft Athletics Arena, Yeovil) for the 2015 South-West Regional Combined Events and Race Walking Championships were decided at the 2013 South-West Schools' AA Annual General Meeting, with Richard Bowden as the Local Organiser. Nick and Sally Higman hosted our initial Planning Meeting on Thursday 11 December where the provisional timetable was designed (largely a replica of the 2014 edition), and an information letter was sent to County Secretaries on Friday 17 April with a reply requested by Friday 29 May. I implored all counties to support the meeting and repeated an overall target of 120 entries.

The electronic system for entries operated smoothly, though, as I report every year, some counties persist in failing even to estimate personal best performances for some athletes. This causes a good deal of trawling through Power of 10 to ascertain season's best performances so that athletes are not disadvantaged in their allocated heats and pools. Once those performances were added to the entry forms Brian Baker quickly organised the start-lists of competitors and their seeding so that this information could be given to Team Managers at the South-West Schools' AA Track and Field Championships a week prior to the meeting. Once again, the programmes were printed professionally this year, by Frome Printing Company, which ensured a neat, attractive finish.

Some years ago, entries were up around the 130 mark and after several years of slight decline – 117 in 1998, 121 in 1999, 114 in 2000 – an encouraging 126 entered in 2001 and 121 in 2002. There followed an alarming dip to a total of 93 in 2003 and 96 in 2004, so I was pleased to note that the decline had been arrested with 121 entries in 2005, 113 in 2006 and 116 in 2007. I was hopeful that the 2008 total of 109 was not about to herald the beginning of another downward trend but increases to 119 entries in 2009 and 118 in 2010 suggested healthier interest. The total entry of 120 in 2011 maintained our optimism but we fell back to 109 in 2012 and I was dismayed to report that the 2013 total fell by a further ten to fewer than 100 entries (99) for the first time in a decade. Although our target of 120 has not been achieved in the last two years, entries bounced back up to 111 in 2014 but slipped back to 104 this year (with 97 actually competing). However, once again only the South-East Region with 138 entries (123 participants) topped our totals. The remaining four Regions saw entries (and participants) of 99 (87) in the Midlands, 87 (73) in the North-East, 84 (76) in the North-West and 80 (63) in East Anglia. The South-West entries were as follows:

	Junior Boys	Inter Boys	Senior Boys	Junior Girls	Inter Girls	Senior Girls
Avon	4	4	0	4	4	1
Channel Islands	1	0	0	0	0	0
Cornwall	1	2	0	1	2	0
Devon	4	4	0	4	3	4
Dorset	1	1	1	3	4	0
Gloucestershire	2	2	1	4	3	1
Somerset	4	4	4	4	4	1
Wiltshire	4	4	1	4	4	0
TOTALS	21	21	7	24	24	7

With 97 athletes taking part (compared with 103 in 2009, 102 in 2010, 99 in 2011, 92 in 2012, 78 in 2013 and 99 in 2014) the recent decline in participation has, hopefully, been halted. In fact, the number was 98 as Linton Gardner (Hereford and Worcestershire) competed in the Senior Boys' Decathlon to achieve a score with photo-finish and fully automatic timing, seeking possible selection for the European Junior Championships. There were three Race Walk entries this year, in the Junior Boys' age group.

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 Pat Gillett (Somerset Schools' AA Officials' Secretary) and Sally Higman (Somerset County AA Officials' Secretary) in the recruitment of officials so that events were well staffed. With Sally Higman 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 David Cooke and Eleanor Brock (Somerset), with Track Referee Larry Tulett (Somerset) 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 provider and certificate printer! The officials' lunches were provided by Yeovil Olympiads AC.

Standards at the head of most fields remain encouraging (especially in the Girls' age groups), with eight individuals and seven teams achieving places in the South-West "All-Time Top-10" rankings. In fact, there were

additions to every individual and team list except amongst the Intermediate Boys' team scores. The highlights were magnificent team score Championship Best Performances by Somerset in each of the youngest age groups with the Junior Boys scoring 8003 points and the Junior Girls adding a massive 395 points to the old total with 8766.

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 progressed to Bedford: Olivia Dobson (JG Devon), Samantha Harris (JG Devon), Anya Turner (IG Somerset), Emily Joseph (IG Devon), Rob Worman (JB Gloucestershire), Jake Nickerson (JB Wiltshire), Rory Howorth (JB Wiltshire), Samuel Gooding (JB Devon), Maksym Obermok (JB Wiltshire) and Danny Burrowes (SB Wiltshire).

Although it was most pleasing to see a Channel Islands athlete qualifying for the ESAA Championships in September, unfortunately Cornwall had no athletes progressing. South-West representatives qualified for Bedford in the following numbers: Somerset 18, Devon 9, Dorset 6, Wiltshire 5, Gloucestershire 4, Avon 2 and Channel Islands 1.

The leading results and the list of automatic qualifiers* for the ESAA Championships were as follows:

Junior Boys' Pentathlon (Record - 3169)

1. Jack Turner	(Somerset)	2824
2. Ollie Thorner	(Somerset)	2684
3. Evan Campbell*	(Channel Islands)	2599
4. Jaylan Bacon*	(Avon)	2582

Team Result (Record - 7816)

1. Somerset	8003 CBP
2. Wiltshire	7148
3. Avon	6714
4. Devon	6643

Intermediate Boys' Octathlon (Record - 5786)

1. Ryan Long*	(Dorset)	4933
2. Cliff Schwabauer	(Somerset)	4499
3. Sam Dove	(Somerset)	4050
4. Callum Short*	(Wiltshire)	3825

Team Result (Record - 14009)

1. Somerset	12092
2. Avon	10323
3. Wiltshire	10179
4. Devon	6793

Senior Boys' Decathlon (Record - 7128)

1. Josh Brown	(Somerset)	6406
2. Imran Qureshi*	(Gloucestershire)	5469
3. Matthew Trickey	(Somerset)	5455
4. George Walker*	(Dorset)	5377

Team Result (Record - 18124)

1. Somerset	16406
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Junior Girls' Pentathlon (Record - 3143)

1. Emma Bakare*	(Avon)	3012
2. Victoria McCabe	(Somerset)	2980
3. Isobel Pinsky*	(Devon)	2973

Team Result (Record - 8371)

1. Somerset	8766 CBP
2. Devon	8728
3. Avon	7650
4. Wiltshire	6933
5. Gloucestershire	6783
6. Dorset	6243

Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon (Record - 4687)

1. Isabel Wakefield*	(Devon)	4613
2. Natasha Smith*	(Gloucestershire)	4488

Team Result (Record - 12767)

1. Dorset	11905
2. Somerset	11538
3. Gloucestershire	10782
4. Wiltshire	10061
5. Avon	9289

Senior Girls' Heptathlon (Record - 4847)

1. Emma Barber*	(Somerset)	4620
2. Lilian Goddard	(Devon)	4199
3. Jessica Dobson	(Devon)	4198
4. Jenna Bierton	(Devon)	3642
5. Jessica Robins*	(Gloucestershire)	3361

Team Result (Record - 13129)

1. Devon	12039
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Throughout a thoroughly enjoyable weekend the unique atmosphere of Combined Events was maintained thanks to some excellent performances, rousing team spirit and the commitment of so many individuals and groups mentioned earlier. The team aspects were enhanced by the presentation of the South-West Track and Field trophies won the previous weekend.

The venue for the 2016 Championships (due to be held on Saturday 25 and Sunday 26 June) will be Exeter Arena and the meeting will be organised by the Devon Schools' AA.

With regard to the organising county and venue for the 2017 South-West Regional Championships, the usual letter to County Secretaries (supported by an email to other interested parties within the counties) inviting 'bids'

to stage the meeting will be sent out by the end of September. The hosting county and venue will then be decided at the South-West Schools' AA Annual General Meeting at Wellington School on Saturday 17 October.

RICHARD BOWDEN

ESAA COMBINED EVENTS AND RACE WALKING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Bedford International Stadium
Saturday and Sunday 19 and 20 September 2015

The ESAA Combined Events and Race Walking Championships returned to Bedford International Stadium after a two-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 whose ground-staff have a national reputation second-to-none, we could be sure we were in good hands, and so it proved throughout a wonderfully enjoyable weekend.

With four teams and two individual athletes qualifying for the Combined Events Championships, and three Race Walkers selected, our group would once again be one of the largest on show in Bedford, with a total of 21 athletes and 5 Team Managers.

Despite leaving Taunton two hours earlier than in 2012 we still encountered several hold-ups on the Friday journey which took almost six hours – including a mandatory half-hour break just nine miles from our destination. In 2012 the journey had taken five-and-a-half hours and the trek took six hours from Wellington in 2009.

Devon joined the Somerset group once again (with 8 qualifiers) and shared the Somerset transport and accommodation. A 33-seater coach from Knight Brothers of Taunton again proved our best option (and a significant money-saver) and the team hotel was the Bedford Priory Marina Premier Inn within easy walking distance of the stadium. This hotel had been selected and booked a year in advance, mainly for the athletes' convenience. Breakfast times could be staggered and many of the athletes could return to the comfort of their rooms immediately following competition on the Saturday without having to wait for the Junior Boys' Pentathlon Presentations.

The weather was pleasantly warm throughout both days and generally favourable for the athletes. The organisation was most efficient, the stadium looked magnificent and our athletes were given every chance to perform well.

Our full results were:

Junior Boys' Pentathlon

Ollie Thorner	(Millfield School)	5	2846 (PB)
Jack Turner	(Wellington School)	7	2739
Iain Adams	(Heathfield School)	37	2160 (PB)
Ben Le Rougetel	(Millfield School)	-	DNF
Team Score		3	7745

Intermediate Boys' Octathlon

Cliff Schwabauer	(Millfield School)	19	4211
Sam Dove	(Kingsmead School)	24	3995
George Watts	(Brymore Academy)	32	3539
Oliver White	(King's School)	34	3349
Team Score		5	11745

Senior Boys' Decathlon

Josh Brown	(Millfield School)	6	6192
Matthew Trickey	(King's School)	16	5176
James Slipper	(King's College)	23	4413
Harry Atkinson	(King's School)	26	4268
Team Score		4	15781

Junior Girls' Pentathlon

Victoria McCabe	(King's School)	6	3099 (PB)
Elise Thorner	(Millfield School)	11	3004 (PB)
Anna Brophy	(Millfield School)	12	2985 (PB)
Cerys Lee	(Wellington School)	24	2665 (PB)
Team Score		1	9088 (CBP)

Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon

Anya Turner	(Wellington School)	4	4480 (PB)
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Senior Girls' Heptathlon

Ellen Barber	(King's School)	4	4648 (PB)
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Junior Boys' 3000m Race Walk

Herb Elliott	(Brymore Academy)	3	20:28.69
George Clay	(Brymore Academy)	5	21:13.12 (PB)
Charlie Wilson	(Brymore Academy)		DISQ

The Junior Boys' team achieved the expected place on the podium (having set the best team score in qualification) but the major highlights were on the Girls' side. All six girls achieved Personal Best scores and those enabled Somerset to enjoy individual and team success. Anya Turner's fourth place in the Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon earned her an England vest at the Home International Indoor Pentathlons in Glasgow on Saturday 12 December and the Junior Girls' magnificent 9000+ score beat their own qualification-leading 8766 points and topped the ESAA Championships 2014 CBP by 586 points. The 2012 Hampshire score of 8973 with the 3.25kg Shot was also surpassed – and would have been even if the slightly heavier implement had still been in use, I venture to suggest.

Almost every Somerset athlete had family support and this particularly loyal group of parents and grandparents certainly helped engender a most encouraging team spirit.

Another factor which should never be underestimated is the incredible work carried out by the Team Managers. Jane Yandell and Richard Llewellyn-Eaton were joined by debutant Lloyd Williams (a former Somerset Schools' AA Decathlete) and Godfrey Fry who returned to the fold after a number of years – with fond memories of those good old Rollason Wood Hotel weekends in Birmingham the 1980s.

A good deal of effort was made this year to secure the services of a team physiotherapist – currently training at Sheffield University – but we fell at the final hurdle when her present qualifications were not quite sufficient. Further attempts will be made in 2016.

It should be noted that people continue to want to be involved with Somerset teams thanks to the excellent response we invariably see from everyone who dons the red vest. Superb care and attention to detail during an exhausting two days were afforded to yet another most deserving group of Somerset athletes throughout the trip, making the meeting a fitting end to another tremendous season.

RICHARD BOWDEN