

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

**Millfield School, Street
Saturday and Sunday 29 and 30 April 2017**

On Tuesday 21 February, information and entry forms were sent to our 60 schools and colleges and the 4 major Track and Field clubs in Somerset, with a closing date of Thursday 30 March. The details were also emailed to the schools and colleges, to all the Somerset clubs and to various parents and coaches. The information was 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 18 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 Alan Richardson, excellent co-operation from Colin Ashman and his ground-staff and the generosity of the school. The track and the field event sites were in superb order, and cold refreshments were on sale on both days. Grateful thanks must go to everyone at Millfield School 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. The late-April weather brought us cool breezes on both days with some heavy drizzle on the Sunday and gusty winds (up to -3.2mps on the Saturday and -4.1mps on the Sunday) were frustrating in one or two heats on the track. The athletes did enjoy better luck in the Long Jumps, however, and overall the wind was calmer than those figures and generally helpful; still gusty though with readings of +0.0, +0.8, +3.2 and + 4.2 recorded in the same competition on the Sunday.

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 in 2014. An alarming slump to 164 in 2015 gave cause for concern and considering the numbers we had attracted in the past I reported that a Somerset total around 220 to 230 should be a realistic target. It was gratifying to get back beyond 200 last year with 206 but although I then reported that another 20 would be pleasing in 2017, we actually received 20 fewer Somerset entries this year with 186. Almost 100 guest competitors boosted the total to 285 though – plenty to keep the officials busy.

The recent trend within the county 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, 223 in 2014, 164 in 2015 and 206 last year. One or two schools and clubs entered athletes for the first time (King's Hall School, All Hallows School, Bridgwater College Academy, Robert Blake Science College and Frome Running Club), 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 standards of performances in the Senior age groups (and increasingly, in the younger competitions) 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 excellent numbers again this time. An important development since 2015 has been the inclusion of Under-18 Decathlon and Heptathlon competitions (at the request of UKA) so that some of the most talented athletes in the UK (and Ireland) 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 qualification for the European Youth Championships or the IAAF World Youth Championships. Once UKA decided there would be no Great Britain team in the 2017 IAAF World Youth Championships in Nairobi and Combined Events competitions were omitted from the Commonwealth Youth Games in Nassau, The Bahamas, there was no real take-up, just 2 Heptathletes trying to qualify in individual events.

I am delighted to report that 2 athletes, Sam Talbot (Great Britain) and Kate O'Connor (Ireland) achieved qualifying scores for the European Under-20 Championships in Grosseto, Italy, Sam posting the 2017 world-leading score of 7377 points and Kate going to number 5 in the world with 5360. Guests travelled from Cornwall, Devon, Wiltshire, Avon, Gloucestershire, South Wales, Warwickshire, The West Midlands, Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Surrey, Lincolnshire, Ireland, Jersey and Northern Ireland.

Dorset joined us once again, with 14 entries, making the grand total 285 which compares well with recent years – 299 in 2009, 277 in 2010, 308 (a record) in 2011, 268 in 2012, 289 in 2013, 295 in 2014, 257 in 2015 and 292 last year. 300 is the target in 2018.

Race Walks were offered for all age groups and alongside the usual entries from Brymore Academy we received entries from 2 Junior Girls – the first time girls had taken part. Therefore, Anna Rose (Crispin School) set a Championship Best Performance, the only one in the meeting.

The 2017 County Champions were:

Under -13 Boys' Quadrathlon (26 Somerset entries – 25 competitors)

Alex Painter	(Millfield Preparatory School)	973 points
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Junior Boys' Pentathlon (40-27)

Jami Schlueter	(Millfield School)	2730 points
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Junior Boys' 3000m Race Walk (2-0)

Intermediate Boys' Octathlon (17-11)

Toby Sauter	(Huish Episcopi Academy)	3771 points
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Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk (5-1)

Rhys Thomas	(Brymore Academy)	33:31.55
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Senior Boys' Decathlon (4-4)

Tim McKee	(Richard Huish College)	4366 points
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Senior Men's Decathlon (1-1)

James Slipper	(Taunton AC)	4475 points
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Under -13 Girls' Quadrathlon (33-25)

Emilia Smith	(King's Hall School)	716 points
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Junior Girls' Pentathlon (47-36)

Masie Jeger	(Millfield Preparatory School)	2614 points
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Junior Girls' 3000m Race Walk (2-2)

Anna Rose	(Crispin School)	21:38.42 CBP
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Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon (11-8)

Anna Brophy	(Millfield School)	4340 points
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Senior Girls' Heptathlon (6-4)

Georgia Silcox	(Yeovil Olympiads AC)	4240 points
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Senior Girls' Heptathlon (1-0)

A number of teachers, coaches and parents assisted our loyal band of officials (including a very welcome number from Wales) 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. We were very lucky to have the services of an international Starter in Alan Bell and a Starter's Assistant, Lesley Minervini.

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, another development which has enhanced the status of our Championships, thanks to 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 24 and 25 June 2017**

The organising county (Somerset) and the venue (The Bill Whistlecroft Athletics Arena, Yeovil) for the 2017 South-West Regional Combined Events and Race Walking Championships were decided at the 2015 South-West Schools' AA Annual General Meeting, with Richard Bowden and Brian Baker as the Local Organisers. The provisional timetable was agreed (largely a replica of the 2014 and 2015 editions), and an information letter was sent to County Secretaries (and other county contacts) on Wednesday 3 May with a reply requested by Friday 26 May. This letter (backed up by an email) implored all counties to support the meeting, provide officials 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 by Frome Printing Company, which ensured a neat, attractive finish. Unfortunately, the field cards, track slips, pins and numbers failed to be delivered so Somerset Schools' AA had to provide all those items.

Twenty years ago, entries were up around the 130 mark and after several years of slight decline – 117 in 1998, 121 in 1999 and 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 10 to fewer than 100 entries (99) for the first time in a decade. Although our target of 120 has not been achieved for several years, entries bounced back up to 111 in 2014, slipped back slightly to 104 in 2015 but returned to an improved 112 last year and a solid 108 this time (with a healthy number of 98 actually competing for the past three years, with 99 in 2014). As usual, only the South-East Region with 128 entries (110 participants) topped our totals. The remaining four Regions saw entries (and participants) of 101 (89) in the Midlands, 86 (74) in East Anglia, 84 (76) in the North-West and 78 (76) in the North-East. The South-West entries were as follows:

	Junior Boys	Inter Boys	Senior Boys	Junior Girls	Inter Girls	Senior Girls
Avon	4	4	1	4	4	1
Channel Islands	0	1	0	1	0	0
Cornwall	1	1	0	1	1	1
Devon	4	4	0	4	4	1
Dorset	2	1	2	4	1	3
Gloucestershire	2	4	2	4	3	3
Somerset	4	4	2	4	4	3
Wiltshire	4	4	1	4	0	1
TOTALS	21	23	8	26	17	13

With 98 athletes taking part (compared with 103 in 2009, 102 in 2010, 99 in 2011, 92 in 2012, 78 in 2013, 99 in 2014 and 98 in 2015 and 2016) the recent decline in participation has, hopefully, been halted. There were 3 Race Walk entries this year – interestingly, more girls than boys. Somerset entered 1 Intermediate Boy (Rhys Thomas) and 1 Junior Girl (Millie Salway), with Wiltshire entering an Intermediate Girl (Maddie George).

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 Brian Baker (Somerset Schools' AA Officials' Secretary), Sally Higman (Somerset County AA Officials' Secretary) and Keith Reed (South-West Schools' AA Officials' Secretary) in the recruitment of officials so that events were well staffed (though some Team Managers were required to assist). 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 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 officials' lunches were supplied by Yeovil Olympiads AC and Tim O'Neill was the First Aid provider.

Standards at the head of the fields remain extremely encouraging (with the boys fighting back this year), with 11 individuals and 5 teams achieving places in the South-West "All-Time Top-10" rankings. The highlights were an excellent individual Championship Best Performance of 4763 points by Emily Bee (a 2016 ESAA International) in the Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon which helped Devon to the team CBP score of 13818 (adding a massive 895 points to Somerset's 2016 total) and the top-3 Intermediate Boys who each scored over 5000 points to go 1, 2 and 3 in the 2017 England rankings in the Octathlon.

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 invitation to Boston: Ransford Akonai (JB Wiltshire), Peter Adeosun (JB Wiltshire), Rory Howorth (IB Wiltshire), Kaya Cairney (IB Cornwall), Toby Sauter (IB Somerset), Joseph Collins (IB Wiltshire), Kurt Cameron (SB Avon), Daniel Carpenter (SB Gloucestershire), Kieran Short (SB Wiltshire), Megan Hamilton-Strong (JG Devon), Tia Jackson (IG Avon), Cerys Lee (IG Somerset), Anna Brophy (IG Somerset), Georgia Doyle-Lay (SG Cornwall), Olivia Jones (SG Gloucestershire), Anya Turner (SG Devon) and Lottie Garratt (SG Somerset). In addition, two more Senior Boys were invited as there were fewer than 45 competitors in the 6 Regional Rounds – Tim McKee (Somerset) and George Shurley (Somerset) with Chloe Hunt (Somerset) brought into the Senior Girls' Heptathlon for the same reason.

All eight South-West counties featured in the ESAA Championships, with 52 qualifiers in the following numbers: Somerset 16, Dorset 9, Gloucestershire 8, Devon 7, Wiltshire 6, Avon 2, Cornwall 2 and Channel Islands 2.

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

Junior Boys' Pentathlon (Record - 3169)

1. Jami Schlueter	(Somerset)	2889
2. Craig Moncur*	(Devon)	2818
3. William Scammell*	(Wiltshire)	2521

Team Result (Record - 8003)

1. Somerset	7334
2. Wiltshire	7259
3. Devon	7140

Intermediate Boys' Octathlon (Record - 5786)

1. Jack Turner*	(Somerset)	5177
2. Evan Campbell*	(Channel Islands)	5129

Team Result (Record - 14009)

1. Gloucestershire	12949
2. Somerset	12679
3. Wiltshire	12396
4. Avon	11019

Senior Boys' Decathlon (Record - 7128)

1. Cameron Hale*	(Dorset)	5799
2. Jamie Worman*	(Gloucestershire)	5718

Team Result (Record - 18124)

No Team Scores

Junior Girls' Pentathlon (Record - 3221)

1. Lucy Woodward*	(Channel Islands)	2891
2. Lydia Smith*	(Somerset)	2817

Team Result (Record - 9176)

1. Dorset	8076
2. Somerset	7932
3. Devon	7157
4. Wiltshire	7027
5. Avon	6765
6. Gloucestershire	6468

Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon (Record - 4752)

1 Emily Bee	(Devon)	4763 CBP
2. Olivia Dobson	(Devon)	4742
3. Elise Thorner*	(Somerset)	4484
4. Emily Tyrrell	(Devon)	4313
5. Ellie Carrow*	(Somerset)	4258

Team Result (Record - 12923)

1. Devon	13818 CBP
2. Somerset	12874
3. Avon	10846

Senior Girls' Heptathlon (Record - 5014)

1. Bethan Burley	(Dorset)	4866
2. Georgia Silcox*	(Somerset)	4776
3. Natasha Smith*	(Gloucestershire)	4686

Team Result (Record - 13129)

1. Dorset	12629
2. Somerset	10854

The unique atmosphere of Combined Events was maintained throughout most of the weekend 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 usual presentations of the South-West Track and Field trophies.

The venue for the 2018 Championships (due to be held on Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 June) will again be the Bill Whistlecroft Athletics Arena, Yeovil, and the meeting will be organised by the Somerset Schools' AA. Devon Schools' AA will be the organising county for the 2019 South-West Regional Championships and the venue will be Exeter Arena as a dry run for the September 2019 ESAA Combined Events and Race Walking Championships.

RICHARD BOWDEN

ESAA COMBINED EVENTS AND RACE WALKING CHAMPIONSHIPS

**Princess Royal Sports Arena, Boston
Saturday and Sunday 16 and 17 September 2017**

The 2017 ESAA Combined Events and Race Walking Championships involved a lengthy trek of 240 miles to Lincolnshire but, once there, the group was treated to superb hospitality at the Boston Premier Inn and first-rate facilities at the Princess Royal Sports Arena.

The local organising county (under the leadership of their County Secretary, Guy Bull) was the Lincolnshire Schools' AA who deserve great credit as sound preparation and attention to detail were clearly evident throughout a wonderfully enjoyable and successful weekend.

With 2 teams and 8 individual athletes (the 3 Senior Girls also making a team) qualifying for the Combined Events Championships, plus 2 Race Walkers, our group was once again one of the largest on show. Inevitably we encountered a few hold-ups on the Friday journey on the motorways which took over seven hours from Taunton. We left Junction 25 at 10.30am and arrived at the Premier Inn at 5.45pm. The athletes were patient and well-mannered despite the delays and this encouraging attitude set the tone for the entire weekend. The Team Meeting took place at 6.30pm, followed by the evening meal at 7.00pm.

Devon joined the Somerset group once again (with 6 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). The team hotel was the Boston Premier Inn (and Brewer's Fayre Restaurant), just 3½ miles and a 15-minute journey to the stadium. This hotel had been selected and booked in October as I had become aware that to delay could well mean long, inconvenient journeys to the stadium on each morning.

The weather was chilly and mainly overcast throughout the weekend with breezes on both days. Torrential rain greeted the Junior Girls in their 800m heats and the Senior Boys in Pool 2 of the Decathlon Javelin. The organisation was most efficient, the stadium looked in fine condition and our athletes were given every chance to perform well.

Our full results were:

Junior Boys' Pentathlon

Jami Schlueter	(Millfield School)	3	2943 (PB)
Oliver D'Rozario	(Wellington School)	22	2419
Lewis Hembrow-McKinley	(Kings of Wessex Academy)	25	2390 (PB)
William Stokes	(Chilton Trinity School)	28	2231 (PB)
Team Score		3	7752

Intermediate Boys' Octathlon

Jack Turner	(Wellington School)	1	5207 (PB)
Toby Sauter	(Huish Episcopi Academy)	31	3792

Senior Boys' Decathlon

Tim McKee	(Richard Huish College)	24	4702 (PB)
George Shurley	(King's College)	29	3888

Junior Girls' Pentathlon

Lydia Smith	(Bishop Fox's School)	25	2633
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Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon

Elise Thorner	(Millfield School)	12	4608 (PB)
Anna Brophy	(Millfield School)	17	4378
Cerys Lee	(Wellington School)	30	4007
Ellie Carrow	(King's College)	33	3757
Team Score		3	12993

Senior Girls' Heptathlon

Lottie Garratt	(Strode College)	14	3652
Chloe Hunt	(Strode College)	24	2383 (PB)
Georgia Silcox	(Sexey's School)	DNF	

Junior Girls' 3000m Race Walk

Anna Rose	(Crispin School)	8	20:41.93 (PB)
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Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk

Rhys Thomas	(Brymore Academy)	3	34:52.23
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The Intermediate Girls' team achieved the hoped-for place on the podium but a similar third place for the Junior Boys was a real bonus as they beat The West Midlands by a single point (7752 to 7751). The major highlights were the bronze medals won by Rhys Thomas (Brymore Academy) in the Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk and Jami Schlueter (Millfield School) in the Junior Boys' Pentathlon, with Jack Turner (Wellington School) claiming an outstanding victory in the Intermediate Boys' Octathlon. These results earned England vests for Jami and Jack in the Home International Indoor Pentathlons in Glasgow on Friday 10 November.

17 of the 18 Somerset athletes had family support (most impressive at such a remote venue) and this particularly loyal group of parents and grandparents certainly helped engender a most encouraging team spirit. That was clearly evident on the Saturday evening (once the coach had broken down) and on the Sunday morning as several parents offered to assist with transport from and to the stadium, obviating the need for taxis. With the coach unable to undertake the return journey on the Sunday evening, a replacement was sent up from Taunton on the Sunday morning so we arrived home on schedule – around midnight at King's College.

Another factor which should never be underestimated is the incredible work carried out by the Team Managers – Jane Yandell, Lloyd Williams and Alan Richardson. (Richard Llewellyn-Eaton was due to join us but unfortunately he was taken ill on the Friday.) It should be noted that people continue to want to be involved with Somerset teams thanks to the excellent response we invariably see from the athletes and the appreciative support we enjoy on the part of parents and other family members. Superb care and attention to detail during an exhausting two days were afforded to yet another most deserving group of Somerset athletes whose reliability, conduct, pride and loyalty throughout the trip made the meeting a fitting end to another tremendous season.

RICHARD BOWDEN