

SOMERSET SCHOOLS' ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION COMBINED EVENTS AND RACE WALKING CHAMPIONSHIPS
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Millfield School, Street
Saturday/Sunday 26/27 April 2008

In late February, information and entry forms were sent to 67 schools and 17 clubs in Somerset, with a closing date of 28 March so that the programme could be prepared over the Easter holidays. As usual, substitutions could be made after the entry date, and indeed, on the days of competition.

We enjoyed the usual superb hospitality at Millfield, thanks to close liaison with Gary Jennings and the generosity of the school.

The meeting continues to gain in popularity, the total entry of 259 showing an encouraging increase on the 175 of 2002, the 192 of 2003, the 218 of 2004, the 235 of 2005, the 224 of 2006 and last year's figure of 254. One or two schools entered athletes for the first time, but, once again, thanks are due mainly to those loyal schools and clubs who appreciate the value of the unique atmosphere generated for their athletes by Combined Events competition.

The quality of performance in the Senior age groups was enhanced enormously when I received requests from two coaches to bring athletes of international standard who wished to contest an early Decathlon or Heptathlon. Therefore, I was more than happy to accept five athletes from Chris Bartram's Northern squad and nine from Ian Grant's coaching group whose conduct and performances throughout the week-end served to inspire our own youngsters. In fact, once Will Lambourne, Ashley Bryant and Ben Gregory joined our own Ben Gibb in the Senior Boys' Decathlon we had on view the Great Britain Under-20 team which would compete against France, Holland and Switzerland in Ashford three months later!

Dorset joined us once again, with an entry of 21. We also included six events for the Somerset County AA which could not be accommodated in their Track and Field Championships: Under-15 Boys' Hammer; Under-17 Men's Hammer; Under-20 Men's Hammer; Under-20 Women's Hammer; Under-17 Men's 1500m Steeplechase and a 2000m Steeplechase for Junior and Senior Men. There were no entries for the Senior Men's 110m Hurdles and the Women's Steeplechases could not be offered as the barriers at Millfield are not adjustable.

Despite a host of fine performances, no records were broken this year. Ben Gibb suffered the agony of no-heighting in the pole vault (where he was capable of scoring over 600 points) and finished with 5649. Adam Pengilly's 12-year-old record stands at 5865 points so 2009 should see Ben better that total, possibly by as much as 1200 points as he seeks qualification for the European Junior Championships in Novi Sad, Serbia.

The 2008 County Champions are:

Under -13 Boys' Quadrathlon (33 entries)

Matthew Cole	(Westfield)	795
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Junior Boys' Pentathlon (51)

Aaron Athersuch	(Buckler's Mead)	2214
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Junior Boys' 3000m Race Walk (3)

Tom Cleaves	(Brymore)	22-19.4
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<u>Intermediate Boys' Octathlon (25)</u>		
James Lelliott	(Millfield)	4294
<u>Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk (3)</u>		
Ben Casey	(Westfield)	29-23.0
<u>Senior Boys' Decathlon (10)</u>		
Chris Wakeford	(Millfield)	5671
<u>Senior Boys' 5000m Race Walk (1)</u>		
Alex Wright	(Brymore)	24-08.5
<u>Senior Men's Decathlon (3)</u>		
Stuart Richards	(Yeovil Olympiads A.C.)	3581
<u>Under -13 Girls' Quadrathlon (44)</u>		
Phoebe Bryant	(Danesfield)	633
<u>Junior Girls' Pentathlon (52)</u>		
Hilary Moorhead	(King's College)	2175
<u>Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon (19)</u>		
Amelia Richards	(Millfield)	3898
<u>Senior Girls' Heptathlon (7)</u>		
Hayley Steward	(Yeovil Olympiads A.C.)	3376
<u>Senior Women's Heptathlon (1)</u>		
Mel Sibley	(Yeovil Olympiads A.C.)	3120

Weather conditions were favourable (far better than those forecast); warm on both days, with a little drizzle to keep the Decathletes cool during their 1500m on the Sunday.

A number of teachers assisted our loyal band of officials and all worked incredibly hard throughout the entire week-end. Sally and Nick Higman (Referee and Technical Manager respectively) led the officials brilliantly, ensuring the meeting ran efficiently.

Computer scoring kept athletes, parents, teachers and coaches fully aware of totals and positions immediately after each event and thanks go to Brian Baker and Linda Tree for that vital service. Fully automatic timing and photo finish were in operation throughout the meeting, fascinating aspects of the week-end 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. 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

Yeovil Athletics Arena Saturday/Sunday 28/29 June 2008

The hosting county (Somerset) and the venue (Yeovil) for the 2008 South-West Regional Combined Events and Race Walking Championships were confirmed at the 2007 South-West Schools' AA Annual General Meeting, with Richard Bowden as the Local Organiser.

Initial information was sent to the relevant County Secretaries (with a copy for the Combined Events Team Manager) on 11 April with a reply slip to indicate probable numbers in each age group for all competitions (including Race Walks), and names of any officials able to attend; the replies being due by 23 May. The electronic system for entries operated smoothly and certainly made seeding of heats and pools a relatively straightforward task. All counties were in possession of a copy of the final programme on 21 June – thanks once more to Brian Baker's expertise on the computer.

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. The 2008 total of 109 will, hopefully, not see the beginning of another downward trend but we may remain proud of the fact that once again only the South-East Region (containing 5 Group A counties) bettered this total, with an entry of 131.

The detailed breakdown for 2008 is as follows:

	JB	IB	SB	JG	IG	SG
Avon	0	3	0	3	3	0
Channel Islands	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cornwall	4	4	0	4	4	0
Devon	4	3	0	4	4	1
Dorset	4	4	0	4	4	1
Gloucestershire	1	1	0	4	3	0
Somerset	4	4	4	4	4	4
Wiltshire	4	4	1	4	3	2
TOTALS	21	23	5	27	25	8

Inevitably, numbers actually competing did not quite match this entry (101 actually took part) with standards in depth not quite up to those we have seen in recent years. Consequently, only four individuals and two teams found places in the South-West "All-Time Top-10" rankings. Nevertheless, there was a superb Championship Best Performance in the Decathlon involving the Somerset Senior Boys, with the team scoring 18124 points to better Cornwall's 1996 total of 16693 by a margin of 1431 points; the individual winner, Ben Gibb, missing Neil Crossley's Championship Best score by an agonising 27 points!

It was gratifying to see that athletes from all seven competing South-West counties qualified for the E.S.A.A. Championships in September; the full list is as follows:

Junior Boys' Pentathlon (2948)

1. Harry Allen*	(Cornwall)	2568
2. Anthony Fitch*	(Dorset)	2528
3. George Rumney*	(Gloucestershire)	2384

Team Result (7816)

1. Somerset	6769
2. Cornwall	6680
3. Dorset	6478
4. Wiltshire	5598
5. Devon	5356

Intermediate Boys' Octathlon (5468)

1. Jamie Courtenay*	(Gloucestershire)	5194
2. Daniel Pearce*	(Cornwall)	4500
3. Adam McBraida	(Avon)	4470
4. James Lelliott*	(Somerset)	4452

Team Result (14009)

1. Avon	12875
2. Somerset	12552
3. Dorset	11603
4. Cornwall	11126
5. Wiltshire	10469

Senior Boys' Decathlon (6726)

1. Ben Gibb	(Somerset)	6699
2. Chris Wakeford	(Somerset)	6164
3. Andrew Machin*	(Wiltshire)	5796

Team Result (16693)

1. Somerset	18124 CBP
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Junior Girls' Pentathlon (3143)

1. Gaby Rowsell*	(Dorset)	2830
2. Hannah Claydon*	(Wiltshire)	2701
3. Katie James*	(Dorset)	2575

Team Result (7985)

1. Cornwall	7194
2. Wiltshire	7152
3. Somerset	6883
4. Dorset	6736
5. Devon	6380
6. Gloucestershire	6331
7. Avon	6073

Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon (4687)

1. Rebecca Chapman*	(Devon)	4177
2. Philippa Brett*	(Cornwall)	3880
3. Jenny Robinson*	(Devon)	3839

Team Result (12277)

1. Dorset	10063
2. Cornwall	9463
3. Avon	8694
4. Somerset	8472
5. Gloucestershire	7983

Senior Girls' Heptathlon (4649)

1. Sophie Skinner*	(Devon)	4371
2. Lucy Averill*	(Wiltshire)	3808
3. Ellie Burn*	(Dorset)	3456

Team Result (13129)

1. Somerset	8386
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*** Individual qualifiers for the ESAA Championships.**

Under-13 Boys' 1000m Race Walk

1. Brendan Kirkton	(Dorset)	8-26.3
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Junior Boys' 3000m Race Walk

1. Will Brewer	(Somerset)	18-32.2
2. Tom Cleaves	(Somerset)	18-46.3
3. Chris Chaffey	(Somerset)	20-09.6

Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk

1. Ben Casey	(Somerset)	27-51.8
2. Fingal Bleasdale	(Somerset)	29-36.7
3. Jay Brant	(Somerset)	34-07.1

Senior Boys' 5000m Race Walk

1. Alex Wright	(Somerset)	24-22.7
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I received invaluable assistance from colleagues in the Somerset Schools' AA (particularly Brian Baker with regard to the compilation of the programme) and I should pay tribute to the co-operation and helpfulness of the stadium ground-staff, and to all those officials from neighbouring counties who worked so hard throughout the two days. The Referee, Sally Higman, added international standard knowledge and commitment to the proceedings and her vast experience, together with that of other senior officials present, ensured the unique atmosphere of Combined Events was maintained. Members of the Somerset Schools' AA supported the event with customary loyalty throughout so announcing, scoring and certificate preparation and presentations all went smoothly.

Once again, it was good to see Pauline Wilson and Peter Cassidy prepared to come all the way from Essex in order to judge the race walks with Silvia Hanusova, from Exeter, taking on the role of Chief Judge.

One of the field judges on the Sunday, Roger Blades, had travelled from even farther afield; the time and effort he made (having attended the East Anglia Championships on the Saturday) was truly appreciated.

The venue for the 2009 Championships (due to be held on Saturday/Sunday 27/28 June) will be decided at the South-West Schools' Annual General Meeting at Wellington School on Saturday 18 October and colleagues will be informed of the venue following that meeting.

RICHARD BOWDEN

E.S.A.A. SAINSBURY'S COMBINED EVENTS AND RACE WALKING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Alexander Stadium, Birmingham
Saturday/Sunday 20/21 September 2008

The ESAA Combined Events and Race Walking Championships made a welcome return to their original home this year. Alexander Stadium, with its extensive facilities of international standard, is the perfect venue for the biggest Combined Events meeting in the country; its central location being a bonus, particularly when some teams have to leave for far-flung parts of England after 6.30pm on the Sunday.

With three teams and one individual athlete qualifying for the Combined Events Championships, and seven Race Walkers selected, our group would once again be one of the largest on show, and even when Tess Webb became unavailable because of her GAP year and Chris Wakeford pulled out with a hamstring injury we still arrived in Birmingham with a total of 18 athletes and 5 team managers.

We travelled with Berry's Coaches, sharing with the Devon group as usual, and stayed at Baron's Court Hotel in Walsall. We had used this hotel in previous years and returned mainly for the leisure facilities, though the journey by coach rather than mini-buses, together with the hotel costs made the trip the most expensive we have ever undertaken. When some athletes chose not to travel with the team and made alternative accommodation arrangements, we received no income from them so our original, carefully calculated budget became wildly inaccurate.

The weather was excellent and conditions were entirely favourable for the athletes and all events were held inside the stadium. The organisation by the Hereford and Worcester Schools' AA was most efficient and our athletes were given every chance to perform well.

Our full results were:

Junior Boys' 3000m Race Walk

Will Brewer	(Brymore)	5	17-45.37
Tom Cleaves	(Brymore)	9	19-42.03
Chris Chaffey	(Brymore)	10	19-43.25

Junior Boys' Pentathlon

Matthew St Clair	(Sexey's)	28	2241
Cameron Rafferty	(Huish Episcopi)	30	2218
Jake Cory	(Buckler's Mead)	33	2136
Aaron Athersuch	(Buckler's Mead)	35	1915
Team Score		6	6595

Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk

Ben Casey	(Westfield)	4	27-02.98
Fingal Bleasdale	(Brymore)	7	31-40.88
Jay Brant	(Brymore)	Disq	

Intermediate Boys' Octathlon

James Lelliott	(Millfield)	6	4776
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Senior Boys' 5000m Race Walk

Alex Wright	(Brymore)	2	22-40.30
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Senior Boys' Decathlon

Ben Gibb	(Brymore)	1	6905
Henry Biss	(Queen's College)	16	5212
Bryan Disney-Chilcott	(Queen's College)	20	4752
Team Score		3	16869

Senior Girls' Heptathlon

Hayley Steward	(Frome College)	20	3494
Sara Geary	(Yeovil College)	21	3356
Emily Jolley	(Yeovil College)	29	2192
Team Score		3	9042

Three athletes' performances are worthy of note – James Lelliott earned a top-6 place in the Intermediate Boys' Octathlon, missing an international vest by just 93 points after leading overnight. He remains in the same age group next year and will hopefully be inspired to strive for a place on the rostrum in Bedford. Alex Wright earned a silver medal in the Senior Boys' 5000m Race Walk to go with the gold he achieved in 2007; a fitting reward with which to end a Somerset athletics career which has epitomised all those qualities we would wish to see in our athletes.

The highlight for Somerset was a magnificent gold medal performance from Ben Gibb in the Senior Boys' Decathlon; a superb display which saw him defeat two of his Great Britain team mates from the international meeting against France, Holland and Switzerland in Ashford in late July. Ben's devotion to the event will surely drive him on to train with his customary dedication during the winter months in order to add the 300 or so points he will need to be in contention to represent Great Britain in the European Junior Championships in Novi Sad (Serbia) in July 2009.

RICHARD BOWDEN