

SOMERSET SCHOOLS' ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION COMBINED EVENTS AND RACE WALKING CHAMPIONSHIPS

**Millfield School, Street
Saturday and Sunday 28 and 29 April 2012**

On Friday 17 February, information and entry forms were sent to 66 schools and colleges and 17 clubs in Somerset, with a closing date of Friday 23 March so that the programme could be prepared during the Easter holidays. In addition, the details were emailed to all contacts by Brian Baker and Lloyd Williams to ensure 'blanket coverage' - despite this extensive publicity, however, Somerset entries dipped below the 200 mark for the first time in almost ten years. As usual, substitutions could be made after the entry date, and indeed, on the days of competition. Final details were sent to all competing schools, colleges, clubs and guests on Monday 16 April.

With preparations all in hand, we knew we could expect the usual excellent hospitality at Millfield, thanks to close liaison with Gary Jennings and the generosity of the school. The track and the field event sites would surely be in superb order, as always, offering the athletes every chance to perform at their early-season best. Grateful thanks must go to Millfield for such attention to detail and we looked forward to our usual flying start to what was hoped would be another thoroughly enjoyable, successful campaign.

The meeting continues to be popular; though the total Somerset entry of 190 represented a significant drop in numbers this year. 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 and 240 last year. 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 and camaraderie.

Since 2008 the quality of performance in the Senior age groups has been enhanced enormously with the acceptance of guest competitors (many of international standard) and 2012 attracted the strongest Heptathlon and Decathlon fields ever assembled for our meeting. Some of these visiting athletes would be seeking World Junior Championships qualifying scores for Barcelona in July, European Championships qualifying scores for Helsinki in late June and even Olympic qualifying marks! This year the 26 guests came from Cornwall, Gloucestershire, South Wales, the Midlands, Shropshire, Oxfordshire, Hertfordshire, Essex, Kent, Manchester and Sheffield. Dorset joined us once again, with 27 entries, whilst interest continues to grow to our east with Wiltshire Schools' AA (and St Laurence School) making 25 entries.

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 seven from Brymore School.

Sadly, all our communications, preparations, optimism, enthusiasm and anticipation were to no avail as the meeting had to be abandoned on the Sunday morning due to severe storms and gale force winds! Saturday's programme escaped the worst of the weather and in cool, blustery conditions (with some wind speeds in the 100m heats and Hurdles events above 4mps against and some of the Intermediate Girls battling into a 5.2mps head-wind) the Under-13 Boys' Quadrathlon and the Junior Boys' Pentathlon were completed.

The two 2012 County Champions are:

Under -13 Boys' Quadrathlon (28 Somerset entries – 23 competitors)

Bradley Seager	(Yeovil Olympiads AC)	610 points
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Junior Boys' Pentathlon (35 - 25)

Matthew Trickey	(Westfield Academy)	2567 points
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Numbers of entries and competitors in the other age groups were:

Junior Boys' 3000m Race Walk (4)

Cancelled

Intermediate Boys' Octathlon (18 - 10)

Abandoned

Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk (3)

Cancelled

Senior Boys' Decathlon (7 - 7)

Abandoned

Senior Men's Decathlon (3 - 3)

Abandoned

Under -13 Girls' Quadrathlon (35)

Cancelled

Junior Girls' Pentathlon (40)

Cancelled

Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon (17 - 13)

Abandoned

Senior Girls' Heptathlon (5 - 1)

Abandoned

Senior Women's Heptathlon (2 - 2)

Abandoned

A number of teachers, coaches and parents assisted our loyal band of officials and all worked incredibly hard throughout Saturday. Sally and Nick Higman (Referee and Technical Manager respectively) led the officials brilliantly, and it was tragic that the meeting could not be completed after their excellent efforts.

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 as usual - 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

Exeter Arena
Saturday 30 June and Sunday 1 July 2012

The organising county (Somerset) and the venue (Millfield School - subject to confirmation) for the 2012 South-West Regional Combined Events and Race Walking Championships were decided at the 2010 South-West Schools' AA Annual General Meeting, with Richard Bowden as the Local Organiser. The alteration to the usual dates in 2012 due to the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations (and therefore a later half-term) meant that the meeting would fall on the last week-end of the Millfield term – an unworkable clash – so Exeter Arena became the 2012 venue.

As we are all aware, the superb Exeter Arena facilities are perfect for the South-West Regional Combined Events and Race Walking Championships, though various costs have escalated considerably in recent years and the meeting inevitably runs far over-budget when staged there. On a brighter note, although it has become customary in these reports to bemoan the lack of officials, 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 throughout the South-West so that all events were well staffed and Team Managers were not pressed into action as has been the case in past years. We were delighted to welcome Roger Blades to our field teams on the Sunday.

The electronic system for entries operated smoothly and certainly made seeding of heats and pools a relatively straightforward task, though some counties persist in failing even to estimate personal best performances for some athletes, possibly disadvantaging them in their allocation to heats and pools. From the electronic entries, Brian Baker organised the lists of competitors and details of heats and pools 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, and the final printed programmes were produced quite easily during the next few days.

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 participation. The total entry of 120 in 2011 maintained our optimism but we fell back to 109 this year with a surprising (and disappointing) total of only 14 entries in the Intermediate Boys' Octathlon. That having been said, once again only the South-East Region with 139 entries (115 participants) topped our total. The remaining four Regions saw entries (and participants) of 85 (67) in the North-East, 78 (63) in the Midlands, 77 (61) in East Anglia and 74 (55) in the North-West. The detailed breakdown for the 2012 South-West entries is as follows:

	JB	IB	SB	JG	IG	SG
Avon	4	0	2	4	4	1
Channel Islands	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cornwall	4	3	1	4	1	1
Devon	4	1	0	4	4	3
Dorset	4	2	3	4	4	0
Gloucestershire	1	0	1	1	4	0
Somerset	4	4	4	4	4	3
Wiltshire	4	4	1	4	4	0
TOTALS	25	14	12	25	25	8

Inevitably, numbers actually competing did not quite match this entry with 92 athletes taking part this year (compared with 99 in 2011, 102 in 2010 and 103 in 2009) so there is a steady decline in participation which gives some cause for concern. However, standards at the head of most fields remain encouraging, even though only two individuals and three teams achieved places in the South-West "All-Time Top-10" rankings. The highlight was a magnificent Championship Best Performance of 5786 points in the Intermediate Boys' Octathlon by Nicholas Hunt (Dorset) who added well over 300 points to the previous best South-West score and went second on the UK All-Time list (behind the 5800 points amassed by Edward Dunford during an Under-17 Decathlon in September 2001).

It was gratifying to see that athletes from all seven competing South-West counties qualified for the E.S.A.A. Championships in September in the following numbers: Somerset 15, Gloucestershire 6, Cornwall 5, Dorset 4, Wiltshire 4, Avon 3, Devon 2.

The leading results and the full list of qualifiers for the ESAA Championships are as follows:

Junior Boys' Pentathlon (3169)

1. Matthew Trickey	(Somerset)	2704
2. Imran Qureshi*	(Gloucestershire)	2662
3. Jonathan Hill	(Somerset)	2520
4. Jacob Spence*	(Avon)	2510
5. Harry Jackson*	(Dorset)	2409

Intermediate Boys' Octathlon (5468)

1. Nicholas Hunt*	(Dorset)	5786 CBP
2. Brendon Timewell	(Somerset)	4414
3. Matthew Cole	(Somerset)	3940
4. James Tostevin	(Somerset)	3917
5. Gio Downie*	(Wiltshire)	3754
6. Tim Kirkman	(Somerset)	3577
7. George Walker*	(Dorset)	3564

Senior Boys' Decathlon (6726)

1. James Taylor*	(Gloucestershire)	5705
2. Harry Hall	(Somerset)	5394
3. Matthew St Clair	(Somerset)	5124
4. Ben Davies*	(Wiltshire)	5115
5. Aaron Athersuch	(Somerset)	4663
6. Daniel Martin*	(Dorset)	4279

Junior Girls' Pentathlon (3143)

1. Ellen Barber*	(Somerset)	2747
2. Grace Redmond*	(Wiltshire)	2742
3. Jessica Dobson*	(Devon)	2593

Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon (4687)

1. Emily Dixon*	(Wiltshire)	4331
2. Jordanna Morrish*	(Somerset)	4151
3. Kate Davies	(Gloucestershire)	4098
4. Anicia Skeates*	(Avon)	3910

Senior Girls' Heptathlon (4649)

1. Alice Vage*	(Cornwall)	4036
2. Anna Alexander-Holmes*	(Somerset)	3648
3. Rosie Barrett*	(Devon)	3385
4. Katherine Godfrey*	(Avon)	3188

*** Individual qualifiers for the ESAA Championships.**

Junior Boys' 3000m Race Walk

1. Huw Edwards	(Somerset)	21-23.15
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Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk

1. Gareth Stockton	(Somerset)	30-42.70
2. Harry Orr	(Somerset)	33-57.20

Throughout a thoroughly enjoyable week-end 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 venue for the 2013 Championships (due to be held on Saturday 22 and Sunday 23 June) will be Exeter Arena once again, this time organised by the Devon Schools' AA.

With regard to the organising county and venue for the 2014 Championships, a letter inviting 'bids' was sent to County Secretaries (supported by an email to other interested parties within South-West counties) on Thursday 4 October with responses due by Friday 26 October. The 2014 hosting county and venue will then be decided at the South-West Schools' AA Annual General Meeting at Wellington School on Saturday 3 November and colleagues will be informed of the details following that meeting.

RICHARD BOWDEN

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

**Bedford International Stadium
Saturday and Sunday 15 and 16 September 2012**

The ESAA Combined Events and Race Walking Championships returned to Bedford International Stadium after a three-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 week-end.

With three teams and three individual athletes qualifying for the Combined Events Championships, and two Race Walkers selected, our group would once again be one of the largest on show. Unfortunately, injury forced Anna Alexander-Holmes to withdraw from the Senior Girls' Heptathlon, nevertheless, we finally arrived in Bedford with a total of 16 athletes and 5 Team Managers. I say "finally" because we encountered several hold-ups on the Friday journey which took five-and-a-half hours from Taunton. (I note the trek took six hours from Wellington in 2009). Nevertheless, the athletes were patient and well-mannered despite the delays and this encouraging attitude set the tone for the entire week-end.

We switched 'allegiance' from our usual travel partners, Devon (who had only two qualifiers, making their own transport arrangements) to other South-West comrades, Cornwall, with the entire group staying at the Bedford Premier Inn (Priory Marina) within easy walking distance of the stadium. This hotel had been selected and booked in April, mainly for the athletes' convenience (many could return to the comfort of their rooms immediately following competition on the Saturday without having to wait for the Junior Boys' Pentathlon Presentation). With one Devon competitor withdrawing three weeks before the competition the remaining athlete requested accommodation with just five days to go and we were happy to welcome her (and her mother and sister) to the group. Once several athletes declined to travel and stay with the teams it was clear that we would need only a 29-seater coach so Les Neville sought quotes from various coach companies. We settled on Knight Brothers of Taunton which proved to be sound choice and a significant money-saver.

The weather was very warm on the Saturday but overcast and much cooler on the Sunday; however, conditions were 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' 3000m Race Walk

Huw Edwards	(Brymore)	Disqualified
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Junior Boys' Pentathlon

Matthew Trickey	(Westfield)	6	2753
Jonathan Hill	(King Arthur's)	21	2376
Harry Atkinson	(Sexey's)	24	2210
Calum Eley	(Millfield)	31	2081
Team Score		3	7339

Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk

Gareth Stockton	(Brymore)	6	30-24.60
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Intermediate Boys' Octathlon

Brendon Timewell	(Buckler's Mead)	4	4824
Matthew Cole	(Westfield)	26	3817
James Tostevin	(Preston)	29	3730
Tim Kirkman	(Downside)	34	3466
Team Score		2	12371

Senior Boys' Decathlon

Harry Hall	(West Somerset)	4	5646
Matthew St Clair	(Millfield)	18	4652
Aaron Athersuch	(Yeovil College)	25	4153
Joe Trickey	(Sexey's)	27	4038
Team Score		3	14451

Junior Girls' Pentathlon

Ellen Barber	(King's School)	26	2429
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Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon

Jordanna Morrish	(Millfield)	4	4288 (NS)
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Three athletes' performances are worthy of particular note. Harry Hall battled bravely, despite a persistent injury, to finish one place outside the medals in his first year of Decathlon. Jordanna Morrish demonstrated tremendous competitive qualities to finish in fourth place in the Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon to earn another England vest in the Schools' Indoor Home International Combined Events Championships at the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow, in December. Jordanna will be joined in the England team by Brendon Timewell who showed typical determination (and talent) to post several PBs and hold on to fourth place in the Intermediate Boys' Octathlon by just 43 points.

The team enjoyed tremendous support from our loyal group of parents, and they certainly helped engender a fantastic team spirit which was most definitely a major factor in a great many performances. Another factor which should never be underestimated is the incredible work carried out by the Team Managers. Eight individuals had indicated their availability but on this occasion only five were needed, though it should be noted that people do 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 throughout an exhausting two days were afforded to yet another most deserving group of Somerset athletes whose reliability, conduct, pride and loyalty throughout the week-end made the meeting one of the most enjoyable I have ever attended.

RICHARD BOWDEN