

SOMERSET SCHOOLS ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

Secretary

Mr. B. Baker
"Greenfields"
Wanstrow
BA4 4TF
Mobile. 07855749543
Email. BrianBakerGFW@gmail.com



Treasurer

Mrs K Cobb
Hazlegrove School
Sparkford
BA22 7JA
Mobile. 07756873129
Email. kc@hazlegrove.co.uk

www.somersetschoolsathletics.org.uk

2022 Cross-County Report

For many years my belief and aim has always been to stage the County Cross-Country Championships on a true cross-country course - that being athletes running across the countryside.

I fully realise that at times this has been a little counter-productive when the National Championships are on flat, parkland courses; but the memories of having competed on an Association course will be everlasting for the competitors, and their families.

This belief has struck a chord with many and none more so than Bob Gutteridge. Whilst taking his dog for a long walk Bob realised he 'had a course'.

The seeds, therefore, were sown some four years ago to stage the championships in his hinterland of South Petherton. After much liaison with the hugely supportive owners, Richard and Tracey Killen, and many inspections the Championships took place at Barcroft Hall.

County Championships (Saturday 22nd January) -

The course was truly across- country, containing: steep slopes, difficult cambers, wooded areas, some mud, long grass, ditches and turnip fields! The highest point of the course gave splendid views across the County whilst spectators found the many vantage points to watch the races unfold. The course was certainly not easy and certainly a challenge which many, if not all, athletes enjoyed after having finished.

The venue also had its challenges, the most notable being the car parking. The weather was warm, mild and thankfully dry. If even a short shower had occurred then it would have been most difficult to get cars out of the car parking field; even with a tractor on standby! Also the size of the field could only contain all the cars, by chance, as late arrivals took the position of early leavers.

If any venue is to be in the countryside then much prior preparation (eg. grass cutting, chippings laying, rolling, branch lopping, turnip topping) and infrastructure (eg. stakes, tape, gate removal, toilets, first aid, power supply, refreshments) has to be completed.

Massive thanks to all involved in helping to stage the event especially the stalwarts making numerous visits in the months and weeks leading up to the event and the loyal band of helpers and officials on the day who invariable carry out various tasks both before the first gun and after the last runner crosses the line. "Thank you." And, of course, a special "Thank You and Well Done" to Bob.

With the Championships taking place after the Covid gap coupled with it not being practical to collect parking fees it was decided that an entry system similar to that used in the track and field championships should be utilised. This meant that following the Area Championships, secretaries would inform students of their selection for the Area team. Athletes then had to confirm their selection via the SSAA website to a JotForm on which payment was made for entry. This fee was raised from previous years to include a parking element. It was these confirmations of selection that were used to construct individual race entries. As is customary there were seven championship races with the Intermediate and Senior Girls' race combined.

SOMERSET SCHOOLS ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

The Champions and statistics of the Championships are:

	Individual	Team	School	Entries	Finishers	
Minor Girls	Grace Baker	Sedgemoor	Hugh Sexey's	60	52	+4
Junior Girls	Daisy Abernethy	Yeovil	Hazlegrove School	62	54	+3
Inter Girls	Sophie Nicholls	Mendip	Wells Cathedral School	32	28	+6
Senior Girls	Freya Buglas	Mendip	Millfield School	16	10	-6
Minor Boys	Tom Barnett	Taunton	Taunton School	49	42	-10
Junior Boys	Charlie Court	Mendip	Crispin School	55	44	-5
Inter Boys	Harrison Williams	Mendip	Wells Blue School	48	41	-1
Senior Boys	Joe Ponter	Yeovil	Yeovil College	22	18	-3

Sophie Nicholls and Joe Ponter both moved up an age group and retained their County Champion status.

With the Covid legacy overarching all Association activities the number of competitors could not be easily predicted. This not only has a bearing upon the event's income but also the support which can be directed towards following competitions. A comparison of the pre and post Covid championships shows:

	Entries	Finishers	Car Park	Income
2020	453	301	240	£1560
2022	344	289		£1720

This suggests that the 2022 system, which is in fact in line with many other championships, is preferential and, I feel, should be maintained wherever the event is staged.

Junior Championships (Monday 7th February) -

These traditional championships took place as usual at King's College with Richard at the helm of the day's organisation.

As with the County Championships entry numbers could not be predicted following the Covid year's break. It was most encouraging that entries came rolling in and surpassed the previous two years and that four schools (Oakfield, Preston, St Dunstan's and Stanchester) had not entered teams in recent years. Although some schools entered individual athletes many schools entered at least minimum size teams. Consequently many schools managed to complete the team competition.

	Entries	Finishers	Non-finishers	%	Schools
2017	284	185	98	35%	20
2018	385	283	102	26%	24
2019	231	180	51	22%	17
2020	309	235	74	23%	22
2022	353	263	90	25%	21

A champion's badge was presented to each individual winner as they exited the funnel; this was followed, by post, with certificates to the first six and the winning team in each age group.

The champions and finishers were:

	Individual		Finishers	Team	
Year 7 Girls	Iona Murray	Millfield Prep	75	Millfield Prep	(13)
Year 7 Boys	Tom Barnett	Taunton Prep	72	Taunton Prep	(10)
Year 8 Girls	Daisy Abernethy	Hazlegrove	47	Taunton Prep	(6)
Year 8 Boys	Caleb Gifford Groves	Millfield Prep	68	Taunton Prep	(12)

(Bracketed - number of finishing teams)

Special congratulations to Tom Barnett and Daisy Abernethy as they 'doubled up' on their County Championships' title.

SOMERSET SCHOOLS ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

South-West Schools' AA Cross-Country Championships (Saturday 5th February) –

Report by Richard Bowden

The Selection Meeting for the South-West Schools' AA Championships took place over Zoom on Sunday 23 January, the day after the Somerset Schools' AA Championships.

Selection of the 80 runners and 48 reserves proved fairly straightforward as the first 10 in each age group were available and almost every athlete to be considered had competed at Barcroft Hall – so once our policy of automatic selection for the first 4 finishers had been followed, the next 6 selections fell neatly into place. We did select a known athlete who failed to finish in the Intermediate Girls' age group and 2 Seniors (1 boy and 1 girl) who were unable to compete (with previous head-to-head competitions taken into account).

The team was displayed on the SSAA website immediately after selection and the webform proved its worth once again as the responses began to flood in within a few minutes of publication. Official selection letters were sent to all the schools and colleges on the Monday and each webform was acknowledged by an email reply giving more detailed information, so our methods of communication remained most efficient. By Tuesday 25 January we had heard from 63 of the selected athletes, on Friday 28 we needed to hear from 9 but on 31 January all the webforms had been submitted. A significant number of webforms proved useful in supplying the correct spelling of athletes' names and/or the correct date of birth.

We had been unable to carry out the usual availability/kit administration immediately after each race at Barcroft Hall so, perhaps unsurprisingly, there were 8 withdrawals this year (1 x MG, 1 x JB, 2 x IB, 3 x SG, 1 x SB) through clashes with swimming or gymnastics competitions, injury, illness and a few positive Covid tests. When an athlete withdrew at 8.00am on race day by 8.20am a reserve (fortuitously from the same school) gratefully accepted the opportunity to run. Emails flooded in almost daily from the Meeting Organiser so our Team Managers were inundated with late information in the lead-up to the event.

The Championships were hosted by Wiltshire Schools' AA and took place on the shared campus of Sheldon School and Hardenhuish School, Chippenham on Saturday 5 February. In line with all our South-West Championships, athletes were asked to make their own travel arrangements and this worked successfully, with the Hazlegrove School mini-bus (carrying all the kit) able to park at the Somerset team base on a playground near the Start/Finish area. BACS payments proved a popular method so there was not as much money to collect as in previous years but we did experience the usual confusion as to whether some schools would be paying so there was a good deal of 'chasing' fees and kit money after the Championships.

Various aspects of team administration (collection of fees, kitting-out and meeting SSAA staff) went quite well, thanks to the invaluable assistance of the 10 Team Managers, all of whom were in place between 10.00am and 11.00am. Almost all the athletes arrived by 11.30am, with the plan for 4 teams to kit-out before walking the course, the other 4 walking the course first.

After atrocious weather at these Championships in recent years (gales in Bournemouth in 2014, torrential rain in Cheltenham in 2016 and Truro in 2017 and the complete cancellation of the event due to heavy snow in Bath in 2019), we were incredibly lucky with the conditions in 2020 as the athletes were treated to a firm, flat course and warm sunshine in Bournemouth. Conditions were not quite as pleasant this year - windy on the exposed sections though dry underfoot.

Somerset won 4 individual medals: Minor Girls' bronze for Grace Baker (Hugh Sexey Middle School); Minor Boys' silver for Tom Barnett (Taunton School); Intermediate Girls' silver for Sophie Nicholls (Wells Cathedral School) and Senior Boys' silver for Joe Ponter (Yeovil College).

There was no individual gold nor any team success but the Minor Boys lost to Gloucestershire by only 7 points, a gratifying aspect being that the 10 athletes came from 7 different schools: Taunton School, Hazlegrove School, King's Hall School, Maiden Beech Middle School, Westfield Academy, St Dunstan's School and Wellington School.

SOMERSET SCHOOLS ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

The table below shows our team performances and the position of the first Somerset runner home.

A Gp	Winner	Winning Team	1 st Somerset Finisher	Team Position
MG	Ava Sutton (Cornwall)	Dorset	Grace Baker (Hugh Sexey) 3	4
JG	Olivia Steer (Devon)	Gloucestershire	Daisy Abernethy (Hazlegrove) 5	4
IG	Innes Fitzgerald (Devon)	Devon	Sophie Nicholls (Wells Cathedral) 2	4
SG	Emily Shaw (Dorset)	Avon	Freya Buglass (Millfield) 11	5
MB	Patrick Paul (Gloucestershire)	Gloucestershire	Tom Barnett (Taunton School) 2	2
JB	Will Birchall (Dorset)	Avon	Tom Webb (Millfield) 4	5
IB	Alex Adams (Gloucestershire)	Wiltshire	Dillon Millard (Bishop Fox's) 14	4
SB	Ed Bird (Dorset)	Dorset	Joe Ponter (Yeovil College) 2	3

The athletes showed great pride in competing for Somerset, clearly wanted to do their best for the county and were urged on by a great many family members and friends.

I was accompanied by 10 other Team Managers: Jo Pike, Nick Somerville, Katie Cobb, Adrian Palmer, Jason Allen, Steve Ladd, Jane Yandell, Simon Prior, Richard Llewellyn-Eaton and Brian Baker. They demonstrated their usual tremendous loyalty and enthusiasm in providing invaluable assistance with kitting-out, offering useful advice whilst walking the course and encouraging our runners throughout their races.

English Schools' AA Cross-Country Championships (Saturday 19th March) - Report by Richard Bowden

The 2022 venue was Hop Farm, Kent, but with continuing uncertainty over the Covid regulations we decided from the outset that it would not be wise to consider coach travel and twin rooms in a team hotel. Therefore, athletes were required to provide their own transport and arrange overnight accommodation on Friday 18 March. Parents and schools readily accepted that these plans were necessary and they meant that the basic fee to each athlete could be kept down to just £15.00.

Katie Cobb booked 8 double rooms (single occupancy) with breakfast for our Team Managers at the Tonbridge (Pembury Road) Premier Inn for Friday 18 March at a total cost of £752.00 which shows how expensive ESAA Championships can be for a County Association. The Team Managers met by 8.00pm for the evening meal and all the athletes had been notified of the Premier Inn so that those who wished to stay with us would be able to do so. The Premier Inn was just 20 minutes from the course.

Selection had taken place on Zoom on Wednesday 9 February, 4 days after the South-West Schools' AA Championships. As is always the case, thorough consideration was given to each athlete as age group teams had to be cut from 10 at South-West level to 8 in Kent.

The website was again used to notify selected individuals and reserves quickly and to indicate confirmation of availability, with selected athletes required to download the detailed information pack and ensure each school had a copy. The schools were notified of the selected team by post and asked to consider offering financial assistance so it was gratifying to note that some were again most generous in their responses.

It was just as well that the team was selected and displayed over a month before the ESAA Championships. While some athletes took only a matter of hours to confirm they had downloaded the information and just a few days to send their 2 forms and payments, others took over 2 weeks to confirm the download and struggled to meet the deadline of Friday 25 February for the submission of the required documents - even though these could be emailed without the payments, if necessary. The last 2 athletes downloaded the documents on Monday 28 February and the last athlete to return the forms by email did so on Friday 11 March, despite several reminders.

In a team of 48, withdrawals are almost inevitable, though there were just 2 this year. Tommy Hummel (Richard Huish College) withdrew injured from the Senior Boys' team on 24 February and Ruby Barker (Senior Girl - Millfield School) fell victim to a positive Covid test on 17 March, just 24 hours before she was due to travel. All 3 reserves for the Senior Girls' team had declared themselves unavailable so the team competed with 7 runners. Henry Hawkins (King's College) took Tommy Hummel's place.

Unfortunately, another positive Covid test on the day of travel meant that Jane Yandell was unable to join us as a Team Manager. Luckily Charlotte Fisher was due to be in attendance in any case so we were delighted to be able to welcome her back to the group.

Our travel and accommodation arrangements meant it was not possible to hold a Friday-night Team Meeting but as 42 of the 47 athletes chose to meet their team mates at the course at 10.30am (the other option being

SOMERSET SCHOOLS ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

arrival 1½ hours before the race) there was plenty of time to meet the Team Managers, collect kit, walk the course and ask any questions.

Car parking was close to the team bases and the Somerset event shelter again proved very useful. Conditions were warm and fast races were the order of the day on a relatively flat course. Individual results appeared on the website as soon as possible but although we were informed of the various winning counties I have been unable to find the total scores or placings of the Somerset teams.

Age Group	Winner	Winning Team	1 st Somerset Finisher	Team Position
JG	Shaikira King (Leics & Rut)	Surrey	Daisy Davies (Huish Episcopi) 77	?
IG	Jess Bailey (Cumbria)	Buckinghamshire	Sophie Nicholls (Wells Cathedral) 3	?
SG	Louise Hackett (Staffordshire)	Surrey	Freya Buglass (Millfield) 62	?
Aggregate Girls B Counties		Buckinghamshire	?	?
JB	Jack Meyburgh (Surrey)	Hampshire	Charlie Court (Crispin) 35	?
IB	Brandon Pye (Durham)	Sussex	Dillon Millard (Bishop Fox's) 74	?
SB	Louis Small (Kent)	Kent	Joe Ponter (Yeovil College) 6	?
Aggregate Boys B Counties		North Yorkshire	?	?

Huge thanks go to the Team Managers who prepared and supported our athletes so well: Katie Cobb (JG), Jo Pike (IG + Safeguarding Officer), Charlotte Fisher (SG), Adrian Palmer (JB), Jason Allen (IB), Simon Prior (SB) and Richard Llewellyn-Eaton (Overall).

Unfortunately there was no team silverware but we could not have asked anything more from our athletes. In a national event where a top-50 finish is a real achievement, the individual highlights were 35th place for Charlie Court in the Junior Boys' race, 6th for Joe Ponter in the Senior Boys' race and another magnificent bronze medal for Sophie Nicholls in the Intermediate Girls' Championship, following her Junior Girls' bronze in 2020.

That meant England representation for Sophie in the SIAB Cross-Country Championships at Pembrey Country Park, South Wales, where she finished in 4th position. This made up somewhat for the cancellation of the SIAB Championships in Falkirk in 2020 when Sophie had been due to represent England, having finished 3rd in the ESAA Championships in Liverpool.