

## **Kent Schools Cross Country Championships at Wilmington Grammar School for Boys - Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2010**

### **Tonbridge AC athletes at the front in county schools championships**

Wilmington Grammar School, near Dartford, hosted this year's Kent Schools Cross Country Championships, the event having been originally postponed from mid January, due to the heavy snow.

The courses around the school playing fields, although a little muddy in places, provided very fast going and with possible selection for the Kent teams, for the English Schools Championships, in March, also at stake, many races proved to be extremely competitive. More than six hundred runners finished across the age groups.

It proved to be a very good day for TAC athletes generally, with some good races to keep the spectators entertained. The fact that the age groups are a year different from the club ones, means that we got to see match ups between different runners than we had seen all Winter so far. In some ways the races give us an early look at the age groups that will compete next year, for example the Junior age group is next Winter's under 15 age group and the Inters, the under 17s.

Possibly due to the fact that there were no TAC team performances at stake, a few of us coaches/managers could relax a bit and enjoy the entertainment!

#### **Junior Boys**

The closest race of the day was the Junior Boys' event, for school years eight and nine. For much of the 3,800 metres race a group of five athletes were clear at the front and it was only in the last half mile that the group began to split. Four of the runners were members of Tonbridge Athletic Club, but it was the surprise package of the race, Nathan Marsh, of Judd School, who led into the final 400 metres. However, he had track specialist Sean Molloy close at hand and by the time they had hit the home straight Sean had launched into his sprint finish, eventually winning by just two seconds. Marsh secured a fine second place, before being followed home by George Duggan, Hanro Rossouw and Max Nicholls, as just nine seconds covered the first five athletes. Corey De'Ath placed 9<sup>th</sup>, having suffered from a heel injury in recent weeks, whilst Alex Kidd produced his best form of the Winter to take 11<sup>th</sup>, as more than one hundred finished.

Kent should have a very good team in this age group at the English Schools, when you consider that Max was 5<sup>th</sup> here and one of the best in England on his day.

#### **Junior Girls**

In the same age group for the girls Ruth Bourne took up the pace from the start and soon built up a good lead on Alice Wood. Ruth has been training regularly with Tonbridge AC and at the time of writing is about to sign up, having been a member of Windsor previously. Alice and her club colleague Leah Melvin, both ran well, Alice hanging on to second place, whilst Leah took a fine 5<sup>th</sup>, being only in year eight at school. Jemima Sneddon (10<sup>th</sup>), Dominique Von Oppel (11<sup>th</sup>) and Stephanie Von Oppel (16<sup>th</sup>) all placed high up. Hopefully, a few of these will progress over the next few months to give TAC a very strong team next Winter.

#### **Inter Boys**

The Inter Boys age group, for years ten and eleven, is one of the strongest, but Tonbridge AC athletes still managed to fill eight of the first ten positions. Robbie Farnham-Rose looked at his best, always at the front of proceedings. For much of the race, however, he had Henry Pearce, Chris Lloyd and Luca Russo in close company, until he gradually upped the pace. Robbie won by eight seconds over the 5500 metre course, whilst Henry took second from a fast finishing Chris Lloyd. Back to his best in sixth place, was Charlie Joslin-Allen, the first year ten runner to finish, having dropped out of the previous week's 'Southern'. Alex King (8<sup>th</sup>), Jamie Bryant (9<sup>th</sup>) and Jack Keywood (10<sup>th</sup>) all ran well in a field with sixty one finishers.

The strength of the age group was borne out by the fact that a week previously Jamie beat Tom Cox who was 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Senior race here.

### **Inter Girls**

Ellen Holmes managed to hold off Nicola Wilkinson, by just two seconds, for the silver medal in the Inter Girls' race, which was won by Invicta AC athlete Rebecca Weston. Kelsey Howard took 6<sup>th</sup> and Lucy Blackstone 11<sup>th</sup>.

For Nicola in particular this was a bit of a breakthrough race and if she can replicate this form in the National it could help TAC's under 15 girls to a high place.

### **Senior Girls**

Grace Nicholls continued her good recent form to convincingly win the senior girls' event, putting almost a minute between her and second placed Lucy Reid. Abbie Shepherd-Barron could not quite hold onto Lucy in the final stages, but took third place, whilst Jess Owen will be hopeful for county selection after her seventh place finish.

### **Senior Boys**

James Pigot, of Tonbridge School and Tonbridge AC almost snatched a win in the Senior Boys' race, having moved in to a twenty metre lead halfway around the third and final lap of the 6870 metre course. However, he could not quite shake off Jason Prickett (Invicta AC), who took the win by just four seconds. Tom Cox in third and Will Mitham in fourth will hopefully be selected for the Kent team, despite two or three good athletes being absent, whilst Dan Bryant placed fifth and Alex Wood seventh.

### **Year 7**

For the year seven runners there is no English Schools Championship, but both races help the selectors for an inter counties race in March. Stuart Brown, of Judd School and Tonbridge AC front ran to a win over Euan Nicholls, by fifteen seconds, whilst Toby Ralph (12<sup>th</sup>) and Jordan Muir (14<sup>th</sup>), both recent recruits to the club, ran very well, as 85 boys finished. In the year seven Girls' race Hannah Czarnowski had her best cross country run to date to take a fine fourth place.

### **Summary**

TAC athletes took five of the eight individual championships, if you count Ruth Bourne, plus had just over 50% of the top eight finishers in the Junior, Inter and Senior races. This should mean that by the time the selectors make up their Kent teams, TAC athletes should be well represented at this year's English Schools Championships, at Heaton Park Manchester on 20<sup>th</sup> March.

The big surprise of the day was Nathan Marsh of Judd in the Junior race, but as you can imagine we are doing as much as we can to get him signed up for TAC!

Mark Hookway