

**English National Cross Country Championships**  
**Roundhay Park, Leeds, 27<sup>th</sup> February 2010**

About five thousand athletes and a similar number of supporters descended on Roundhay Park, Leeds, for the English National Cross Country Championships. Amongst them was a contingent of one hundred and sixty from Tonbridge Athletic Club, hoping to compete with the best clubs in England.

Roundhay Park had been subject to heavy rain in the days leading up to the championships, becoming very wet in places, but generally provided firm going over very tough courses. A hill known locally as 'Hill 60' provided the toughest test near the finish of each race, but long steady climbs and short sharp hills came at regular intervals.

Tonbridge AC had full teams in nine of the ten events, only being unable to complete a senior women's team. However, we came away from the championships with our best ever medal haul, that included two team wins, two team silver medals, an individual championship win and an individual bronze medal. With a couple of team fourth places, it was quite an extraordinary day in the club's history.

**Summary of team positions**

Under 13 girls 22<sup>nd</sup>  
Under 15 girls 4<sup>th</sup>  
Under 17 women 2<sup>nd</sup> (silver medals)  
Under 20 women 4<sup>th</sup>  
Senior women - incomplete team  
Under 13 boys 1<sup>st</sup> (gold medals)  
Under 15 boys 2<sup>nd</sup> (silver medals)  
Under 17 men 1<sup>st</sup> (gold medals)  
Under 20 men 7<sup>th</sup>  
Senior men 86<sup>th</sup>

**Individual top 10s**

Under 20 women - Grace Nicholls 7<sup>th</sup>  
Under 13 boys - George Duggan 1<sup>st</sup>  
Under 15 boys - Charlie Joslin-Allen 8<sup>th</sup>  
Under 17 men - Robbie Farnham-Rose 3<sup>rd</sup>

**Under 15 boys**

This was the first race of the day, where our strong, but young team was up against the pre-race favourites Shaftesbury, who had won both the National road and cross country relays in the Autumn. However, I knew we had a chance of upsetting the form book, if only everyone ran well.

Charlie Joslin-Allen was always amongst the lead pack and secured a fine 8<sup>th</sup> place, just 27 seconds away from the winner McMurray, from St Albans. He had remained at the very front of the race for three quarters of the distance, only losing ground towards the end.

Tom Devlin (26<sup>th</sup>) started much quicker than usual and was slightly disappointed not to finish a bit higher. Just five seconds quicker would have seen Tom eight places higher. Max Nicholls (31<sup>st</sup>) saved his best form of the season once again for the Big One, having placed 2<sup>nd</sup> in the under 13 race last year, wearing the vest of Ashford. Now as TAC he moved through very strongly, always overtaking other athletes to the end. Hanro Rossouw (36<sup>th</sup>) made up the team score, having an excellent run,

although at halfway I had thought he looked really tired. It was a great effort by Hanro and I was told he was the 4<sup>th</sup> finisher who is bottom of the age group, whilst Max was 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Giorgio Russo was maybe the pick of our other runners, finishing well above expectations in the top half of the field of 387 finishers.

There was a long wait for the team results to come out, but at no time did I think that we had won, as Shaftesbury had had their first two athletes home in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>. In the end we were just 8 points short, which really was down to a handful of seconds, since Hanro had seven runners within 5 seconds of him, in a similar way to Tom.

The u15 boys' silver medals extended our sequence of medal winning years in that age group to 5 years in a row.

### **Under 20 women**

Having won the Southern title I had hoped that we might sneak a medal in this event, but it was not to be.

Grace Nicholls had another fine run in the under 20 women's race, overcoming a slight calf strain in the days leading up to the race, to take 7<sup>th</sup> place. She gave it a real go and was in the top 4 for most of the race.

In the end we missed out on the bronze medals by just 3 points and if all had gone our way the team championship was within grasp, as Aldershot scored 154 to our 186 ie a win by 32 points. With Lowri Richards and Megan Brickell both sidelined through injury, it was a frustrating result. Aldershot can make a similar claim with injuries though.

Despite all this, it was the first time ever that TAC has completed a team in this age group.

After the first two races I was beginning to think that this just might not be our day, but things were about to change in dramatic fashion....

### **Under 17 women**

It is always difficult to assess how the team is doing overall in such big fields, but I don't think any of us felt that there was a medal chance here, when watching the race. Our girls were running well, but with nobody at the sharp end it is difficult to get a team medal.

When the scores were finally announced Aldershot had won by a massive amount, but a lot of other teams were extremely close. We totalled 205, with another three of the 38 teams within 73 points. Apart from Aldershot we were the only club who had all four scorers in the top 100, which was quite unusual.

When the announcement was made there was huge excitement in our camp, since by then we also knew unofficially that we had done so well in one of the next races as well.

The girls were jumping up and down hugging each other and everyone in sight and it proved to be one of the most emotional moments of the weekend. All four of them

have had some tough setbacks to deal with over the Winter and this showed in the reaction to their medals.

Just when I thought it was emotional enough Ryan Driscoll bravely admitted that he had a tear in his eye himself, as he was so pleased for them and this pretty much set a few of us off !

Kelsey Howard and especially Hope Simpson also had terrific races, being unlucky not to score.

The under 17 women's silver medal was the best TAC female team performance since an under 13 win in 1985.

Lucy Reid, our first scorer home, underlined her intentions for next year by going for an hour's run, on Sunday, after the long coach journey home.

### **Under 13 Girls**

This is quite an inexperienced group that we have and therefore a field of over 400 finishers is quite a daunting prospect anyway. So for someone, who has never raced in an official race for TAC it must be even more nerve wracking.

Alessia Russo had just turned 11 years old and so had been unable to contest any other under 13 races so far this Winter. She is a good footballer by all accounts (so not sure why she plays for Charlton juniors!) and has been coming along to the club for some time with her brothers.

The week before a very nervous Alessia had completed a training session of 2 x 10 minutes steady running with a group of our older athletes and had been quite tentative. However, when it came to the National she was transformed and really attacked the race, ending up as our second scorer in 86<sup>th</sup> place, with still two more years in the age group.

Sian Driscoll improved massively on her position of a year ago to finish 60<sup>th</sup>.

### **Under 17 Men**

I don't think that I have ever witnessed such an exciting team race as this, from our point of view. We have great strength in depth in this age group, as demonstrated by having 15 in the squad.

The race went like a dream. In the Autumn our three-man teams had finished 7<sup>th</sup> in the National Road Relays and 4<sup>th</sup> in the National Cross Country Relays, however, a 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the Southern Cross Country Championships showed that we were in with a shout.

Aldershot were probably the outstanding favourites, but with a few things going our way we could get close.

In the end not everything did go our way, as Josh Bentham jarred his back early in the race, on a steep downhill, having been with the leaders. This effectively ended Josh's chances of helping the team. However, the others rose to the occasion and ran incredible races.

Robbie Farnham-Rose was always near the front and although Richard Goodman (5<sup>th</sup> in European under 20s) pulled away Robbie stayed with the others. In fact as the finish approached he moved into second place for a few strides but was pipped right on the line by GB youth international Tom Curr, who won last year's English Schools'

3000 metres championship. Robbie is a year younger than the two who beat him and like all three of our other scorers is still in this age group for 2011.

Henry Pearce (15<sup>th</sup>), Luca Russo (21<sup>st</sup>) and Chris Lloyd (22<sup>nd</sup>) gave Tonbridge a 24 point cushion over pre-race favourites Aldershot. Tom Cox, so impressive with his training all Winter, underlined his massive improvement with a superb 36<sup>th</sup> position, with Jamie Bryant in 50<sup>th</sup> also having an excellent run. Ryan Driscoll in 71<sup>st</sup> was also really pleased with his performance

The under 17 men's team win was the first TAC victory in an age group older than u13 or u15 since 1986, when the under 20s won and all 4 scorers are still in this age group next year!

### **Under 15 Girls**

Just eleven places in more than 200 points separated us from yet another team medal, as the team finished 4<sup>th</sup> of 38 teams.

Nicole Taylor had a superb run to lead the team home and second scorer, Pandora Banbury, dug out her best race for a long time, from somewhere.

The girls' training partner, Ruth Bourne, who is at Sevenoaks School, had a terrific run to place 6<sup>th</sup>, running for Windsor, whilst having another year in this age group. Ruth intends transferring to TAC, so if we took her position into consideration we would have picked up the silver medals !

### **Under 20 Men**

Andy Combs was always to the fore, in his first year in this age group and had a very solid race for 16<sup>th</sup>, whilst Sam Bradley, having felt sick all week, had a respectable run for 44<sup>th</sup>.

James Taylor gathered momentum throughout to move through the field, whilst James Pigot, by his own admission started very quickly and tired over the very tough 10km course. Nevertheless the team's 7<sup>th</sup> place was the best TAC position in this age group since 1993.

### **Under 13 Boys**

In Championships like these it is quite easy for the favourites to come unstuck and our team would have been most people's tip to win, having won both the Autumn relay championships and also the Southern. Also George Duggan would have been considered as a potential winner, which put added pressure on his young shoulders.

As things turned out George was soon in the lead pack of four athletes and I can remember shouting across to him to be patient, as he was about to hit the front after just 600 metres. However, he did look good and in control.

George ran strongly to a six second victory to become the club's first individual 'National' cross country champion since ex-Olympian, Andy Graffin's win, in the under 20 race, back in 1998. I found myself shouting at George in the home straight, as he spent most of the last 150 metres looking around to see where his pursuers were.

Next in was Stuart Brown with an excellent 17<sup>th</sup>, whilst still in the age group next year. Tim Faes bounced back from illness in January to help take the team gold medal and Euan Nicholls continued his habit of sneaking in to the scoring team to wrap up the win. Euan, like Stuart, will hopefully be in this race in 2011.

Miles Weatherseed was the 'unlucky' fifth man home, but still with a fine 65<sup>th</sup>, whilst perhaps the best run of all came from Luke Gunter, who performed far beyond any predictions in 137<sup>th</sup>.

The under 17 men, under 17 women and under 15 boys all had to go to their medal presentation when the under 13 boys' race was on, but came out just as it was finishing. By all accounts George Duggan was mobbed by everyone, just as he was about to be interviewed by an Athletics Weekly reporter. A great example of team spirit.

### **Senior Women**

Once again TAC, for the third year in a row had three women competing, although this time they were all mums of young athletes.

Pippa Blackstone led the other two home, whilst Liz Farndon and Helen Cohen 'fought' a battle all the way around the 8km course, seemingly joined at the hip. It was so close that I had to delay getting involved in any celebrations after the under 13 boys' race and headed, with my camera and video to the mud in the home straight. There I saw Liz appear, with what looked like a vital ten metre lead on Helen. However, stride by stride Helen closed and as they approached the line they were level. The chip timing system gave them the same time, but Liz was declared the 'winner' in 430<sup>th</sup> to Helen's 431<sup>st</sup>. Helen still disputes this fact!

Well done ladies on providing the race of the day.

### **Senior Men**

In a similar way to the women the team was mainly made up of dads, who have joined the club. However, it was Dan Bradley who was first home, improving significantly on his position of last year, with a fine run.

All of the others got around, despite various aches and pains and after the odd tipple in the evening, somehow managed to hit the dance floor in most cases !

The team finished 86<sup>th</sup> overall, but it was good to complete one.

### **Awards**

These were the awards that we presented at the Saturday night's dinner –

5<sup>th</sup> 'man' home in winning squad (where 4 score) – Miles Weatherseed (u13) and Tom Cox (u17)

Highest placed male athlete – George Duggan 1<sup>st</sup>  
Highest placed female athlete – Grace Nicholls 7<sup>th</sup>

Best National debut, male – Henry Pearce 15<sup>th</sup>  
Best National debut, female – Alessia Russo 86<sup>th</sup>

Best male performance, above predictions – Giorgio Russo  
Best female performance, above predictions – Pandora Banbury

Most improved male from previous years – Luke Gunter  
Most improved female from previous years – Sian Driscoll

## **Summary**

The set of team results were the best at the 'National' in TAC history.

We had a record number of TAC competitors finishing in the following races –

Under 13 boys – 13

Under 17 men – 15

Under 20 women – 6

Senior women – 3 (equals record)

Total male – 50

Total women – 33

Overall – 83 (highest previously 67 in 2009)

Senior Men – 7 (most this century)

This trip was the biggest that we have yet put on, with more people attending than at the UK Young Athletes final, at Manchester, in 2008.

For those of you who came on the trip I would like to thank you for making it perhaps the best weekend in my athletics memory. Not only was this the biggest trip in our history, with around 160 people attending, but it was also perhaps the least stressful. Everyone was at bus pick ups on time, followed the schedules and supported others. I cannot remember a Saturday night dinner and party with so many clearly having such a great time and getting on with each other. The hotel staff remarked on what a terrific bunch of people you all are.

One of the aspects that stood out for me was that a number of very good athletes, who did not quite score for medal winning teams, seemingly shrugged off any disappointment that they might have had and were just pleased for their team mates.

I have received a number of stories about people from other clubs recognising not only how well TAC teams performed, but also how we were out in force supporting each other.

Finally, when I arrived home and fired up my computer I found an email from John Sanders, who had completed an analysis of the team results in the younger age groups. I have shown this below. If we did add the seniors in, it wouldn't look so great, but hopefully one day we can put that right.

Well done to everyone!

Mark Hookway  
Team Manager

**English National Cross Country Championships 2010**  
**Analysis of under 13 to under 20 races, by John Sanders (1<sup>st</sup> = 12 points, 2<sup>nd</sup> = 11, etc)**

Rank	Club	U13 G	U15 G	U17 W	U20 W	U13 B	U15 B	U17 B	U20 M	Tot
<b>1</b>	<b>Tonbridge AC</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>70</b>
2	Aldershot Fanham & D AC	5	12	12	12			11	10	62
3	Shaftesbury Barnet Harriers				10		12	10	9	41
4	Bedford & County AC		11	10			6	8	5	40
5	Leicester Coritanian	9	8	8		8	5			38
6	Warrington AC	7				4		4	12	27
7	Lincoln Wellington AC			5	11			9		25
=8	Chelmsford AC	11	10							21
=8	Chiltern Harriers AC	10				11				21
10	Charnwood AC	8		1		10				19
=11	Bracknell AC	12	6							18
=11	Leeds City AC							7	11	18
13	Windsor Slough E & H AC	1	7			7	2			17
14	Vale Royal AC		5	6		5				16
15	Liverpool Harriers & AC	2	2				9			13
=16	Halesowen AC					6	4			10
=16	Trafford AC						10			10
=18	East Cheshire Harriers &			9						9
=18	Mansfield Harriers & AC					9				9
=20	Bristol & West AC						8			8
=20	Notts AC								8	8
=22	Birchfield Harriers			7						7
=22	Coventry Godiva Harriers						7			7
=22	Woodford Green & Essex Ladies								7	7
=25	Invicta East Kent AC	6								6
=25	Ipswich Harriers							6		6
27	Liverpool Pembroke & S AC							5		5
=28	City of Stoke AC	4								4
=28	Gosforth Harriers & AC			4						4
=28	Leigh Harriers & AC		4							4
=31	Corby AC	3								3
=31	Herne Hill Harriers			3						3
=31	Preston Harriers					3				3
=31	Reading AC			2			1			3
=31	Rotherham Harriers & AC		3							3
=31	Wakefield District Harriers AC						3			3
=31	Gateshead Harriers							3		3
=38	Tamworth AC					2				2
=38	Cannock & Stafford AC							2		2
=40	Royal Sutton Coldfield AC		1							1
=40	West Suffolk AC					1				1
=40	Blackheath & Bromley H AC							1		1