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Alan Newman's reports appear in the KM every Friday

KENT CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE, NEW BARN PARK, SWANLEY

The Kent Cross Country League 2013-14 season kicked off in style with big fields, new competing teams and quality racing on a revised course at New Barn Park, Swanley on Saturday, writes Alan Newman. New entrants this winter are South Kent Harriers, Newington AC, Medway Tri, Hayesbrook School and Claremont School. Conditions underfoot were excellent following the heavy rain earlier in the week.

Senior Men

Tonbridge AC made a statement of intent in the men's race by comfortably taking the team race from defending Kent Messenger Cup holders, Medway and Maidstone and Cambridge Harriers. Tonbridge also took an early lead in their Duodec trophy defence from Medway and Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Harriers after placing their 12 scorers inside the top 33 finishers.

The start was delayed by 15 minutes to allow the nearly 200 entries time to arrive and Tom Collins (Medway and Maidstone) took an early lead he was never to relinquish. The first lap saw Collins edge ahead of Adam Wright (Cambridge Harriers) and Corey De'ath (Tonbridge), who are both under-20 juniors. Lap two was most notable for the progress made by Mike Coleman (ex M&M) for his new club, South Kent Harriers, as he moved onto the leader's shoulder.

Collins stayed strong to take the victory by 13 seconds from Coleman and the fast finishing Ben Cole (Tonbridge). With Tonbridge juniors De'ath and James West next across the line ahead of Sam Coombes (Dartford Harriers) the die was cast in favour of a convincing win for the West Kent club.

Max Nicholls (7th) and Chris Olley (8th) added to the dominant Tonbridge team display and could join De'ath, West and others in a strong Kent squad at the English Schools championships in March.

Top masters performances were achieved by M40 Chris Minns (Beckenham, 17th), M50 Andy Howey (Tun Wells, 50th) and M60 Mark Taylor (Tun Wells, 125th). The M70 masters ran with the women and the winner was the exceptional defending champion, Eric Schofield (Tun Wells).

The remaining men's league races will be held at Somerhill School, Tonbridge on October 26; Sparrows Den, Hayes on November 30 and Parkwood School, Swanley on February 8.

Senior Women

Rebecca Weston (Invicta East Kent) raced away from over 100 starters in the first Kent Women's cross country league race at Swanley Park to win with 85 seconds to spare from leading W35 master Alice Heather-Hayes (Tonbridge Wells Harriers) and Clare Reeves (Bexley).

With reigning champion Tina Oldershaw (Paddock Wood) absent, the Cliff Temple Memorial individual trophy is on offer and few would bet against the talented 19-year-old IAAF World Cross Country representative on this form. Ruth Bourne (U20 Tonbridge) and W40 masters Jennie Butler (Blackheath and Bromley Harriers) and Louise Knight (Medway and Maidstone) completed the top six.

More than half the top 20 were master athletes and the higher age group winners were W45 Sharon Hawkins (Invicta East Kent, 8th) and W60 Sally Musson (Tonbridge, 35th).

Weston led her Invicta team mates to team success over Medway and Maidstone and trophy holders Blackheath and Bromley at three-to-score. Medway and Maidstone's strength in depth secured an early lead over Blackheath and Bromley and Tonbridge at six-to-score.

The other women's matches are at Somerhill School, Tonbridge on October 26; Beech Grove Academy, Nonington on November 9 and Parkwood School, Swanley on February 8.

Young Athletes

The number of athletes competing in the Kent Young Athletes cross country league at Swanley Park on Saturday increased by 20% to 278 compared to the opening fixture at the same venue last year. Tonbridge won two male individual and two team events but were far less dominant than in previous seasons. Blackheath and Bromley Harriers, Invicta East Kent, Cambridge Harriers and Dartford Harriers also enjoyed moments in the limelight as success was more evenly distributed in the female races.

Michael Eagling (Blackheath) set the tone with a win in the under-13s from Alex Kavanagh (Thanet) and Peter Guy (Blackheath). Blackheath Harriers took the team honours with Henri-James Cowie (5th) completing the scoring from Thanet Road Runners and Medway and Maidstone. Team champions, Tonbridge, made an uncharacteristically slow start in fifth place.

Defending champion Alasdair Kinloch and Jamie Goodge set Tonbridge up for victory in the under-15s with Scott Rowatt (4th) securing the necessary points advantage. Noah Armitage-Hookes (Cambridge Harriers) was third and his team took that place behind Blackheath Harriers.

Will Fuller and Richard Webb made the perfect start for Blackheath in the under-17s race but Tonbridge athletes packed the next five positions led by George Duggan, Chris Cohen and Stuart Brown. Title holders, Tonbridge won this age group from Blackheath Harriers and Bexley.

The under-20 men generally prefer to compete against the senior men these days but Sean Molloy and Nathan Marsh enjoyed a private battle at the front for Tonbridge with Philip Huleatt third for defending champions Beech Grove Academy. With only nine runners there was no team race result declared. Kathleen Faes led Tonbridge to victory in the under-13 girls' race after a front running effort that took her 33 seconds clear for the biggest winning margin in the young athletes' races. Millie Smith (Blackheath) chased in vain as Kelsi Cornish and Ellen Crombie secured victory for Tonbridge from champions Blackheath and Medway and Maidstone.

Sabrina Sinha (Cambridge Harriers) opened her account with victory in the under-15s over title holder Jessica Keene (Blackheath) and last year's under-13 winner Holly Page (Dartford Harriers). Blackheath packed well for success in defence of their trophy with Naomi Kingston and Kelsey Fuss next home to deny Invicta East Kent and Tonbridge.

Amy Old (Invicta) took the win over Niamh Bridson-Hubbard (Blackheath) and individual champion Sian Driscoll (Tonbridge) in the under-17s. Their teams finished in the same order as Invicta made the ideal start in their title defence

Cassie Benson (Dartford Harriers) defeated Bethony Frost (Blackheath) in the under-20s race held simultaneously with the under-17s. No teams finished as eleven juniors chose to support their clubs in the senior women's race.

The young athletes' league will continue with matches at Somerhill School, Tonbridge on October 26; Beech Grove Academy, Nonington on November 9 and Sparrows Den, Hayes on November 30.

Alan Newman