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Alan Newman's reports appear in the KM every Friday

KENT CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE

The halfway stage was reached on Saturday in the Kent Cross Country League at Somerhill Schools, Tonbridge, with strong fields and exciting racing in challenging weather conditions, writes Alan Newman.

Home club Tonbridge AC, local rivals Medway and Maidstone and Blackheath and Bromley Harriers shared the team honours in the senior races as 277 athletes tackled the steep hills and swift descents this venue is noted for.

Senior Men

Defending champions, Medway and Maidstone raced back to top form to nick the senior men's team race by a point from hardworking hosts, Tonbridge AC. At twelve-to-score, M&M were rather more dominant with their dozen scoring runners inside the top hundred in a field of 174 finishers.

Mike Coleman (South Kent Harriers) showed his cross-country pedigree on one of the toughest courses in Kent with a narrow victory over top junior Adam Wright (Cambridge Harriers), previous race winner Tom Collins (M&M) and Max Nicholls (U20, Tonbridge). This result puts Coleman a point ahead of Collins in the league table, with Wright and Nicholls disputing third place.

Alex Gibbins (Blackheath and Bromley Harriers) was fifth and Tom Cox was sixth for Tonbridge. Great running from the experienced M50 Graeme Saker (Tonbridge, 14th) and M45 Barry Royden (M&M, 15th) made very little difference to a team result that went to the wire, with M45 Richard Tomlinson (M&M, 20th) salvaging vital points ahead of Jamie Bryant (Tonbridge, 23rd).

Jim Addison (M40 Beckenham, 12th) was the leading over-40 master and takes the lead in that category from M&M's Royden and Tomlinson. Saker was easily top M50 and M60 honours went to Steve Barnfield (Tonbridge Wells Harriers, 115th). The M70 men had their own race over a shorter course, with Bryon "Spud" Taylor (TWH) the sole participant to take the lead in the league table.

With two events to run the men's team race is tight. The Kent Messenger Cup at four-to-score is shaping up as a straight fight between Tonbridge and M&M, with Cambridge Harriers leading the chasing pack. The Duodec trophy battle sees Tonbridge and M&M locked together, with TWH the nearest challengers.

The men's league will conclude with races at Sparrows Den, Hayes on November 30 and Parkwood School, Swanley on February 8.

Senior Women

Miranda Heathcote paid a welcome visit to Kent from her base in Cornwall to win the Kent Women's League race by a healthy 46 seconds. Heathcote was the Cornwall and British W40 5000m champion in 2012 and 15 years ago she finished fourth in the AAA 10 mile road race championships in 56min38sec. The former England international defeated a field of 103 runners at Tonbridge, where three master athletes were in the top five. Heathcote was well clear of U20 Nicole Taylor (Tonbridge), who helped her club to success. W35 Alice Heather-Hayes (TWH) completed the podium ahead of another Tonbridge junior, Nicola Wilkinson and leading W45 Maria Heslop (Paddock Wood).

Katie Murray finished sixth to lead Blackheath to second team place ahead of TWH. Tonbridge closed their top six inside 29 places to also take the six-to-score team from Blackheath and TWH. Overall there is now one league point between Blackheath, Tonbridge and Medway and Maidstone in both team categories with two matches left to decide the issue.

In the individual race for league positions, Heather-Hayes is in pole position followed by Clare Reeves (Bexley) and Emily McKane (Invicta East Kent). Heather-Hayes also tops the masters' table from Sharon Hawkins (Invicta) and Jenny Fowler (Medway and Maidstone).

The remaining women's league matches are at Beech Grove Academy, Nonington on November 9 and Parkwood School, Swanley on February 8.

Young Athletes

There were 281 athletes competing in the eight age groups in the Kent Young Athletes cross country league at Somerhill School as entries continue to surpass previous records. Tonbridge took the initiative in three of the male team races and also enjoyed success in the under-13 girls. The other team winners were Beech Grove Academy, Blackheath and Bromley Harriers and Invicta East Kent as the league tables began to take shape.

Charlie Crick (Tonbridge) held a five seconds advantage at the line in the under-13s race from individual league leader Michael Eagling (Blackheath) and Alex Kavanagh (Thanet Road Runners). Tonbridge, with Dan Schofield (4th) and Oliver Plunkett (9th), took the team race from the league leaders Blackheath and Invicta East Kent to improve their overall position.

Alasdair Kinloch, Jamie Goodge and Tom Kendrick ensured the perfect team score for Tonbridge in the under-15s. Noah Armitage-Hookes (Cambridge Harriers) did his best to prevent a clean sweep for the home team but it was Blackheath who finished second team. Tonbridge are now edging ahead of Blackheath and Cambridge Harriers in the league table as Kinloch is looking hot favourite to retain his individual title.

Will Fuller (Blackheath) took his second victory of the season in the under-17s from Stuart Brown (Tonbridge) and Joseph O'Hara (Bexley). Tonbridge added under-17 team success over Blackheath and Bexley to their tally with Chris Cohen (5th) and Miles Weatherseed (8th) completing the scoring. The league table mirrors the latest team results with Fuller going clear in the individual list.

Kalvin Fuss (Blackheath), Philip Huleatt (Beech Grove Academy) and league leader Sean Molloy (Tonbridge) formed a high quality podium in the under-20 race with Beech Grove Academy the only complete team to finish.

Millie Smith (Blackheath) led five Tonbridge athletes across the finish line in the under-13 girls' league race to increase her overall series lead. However, non-scoring guest Agnes McTighe from Switzerland was the fastest athlete. Kelsi Cornish, Vita De Munck and Eillen Crombie comprised the Tonbridge team that heads the table from defending champions Blackheath and Medway and Maidstone.

League leader Holly Page (Dartford Harriers) was three seconds clear in the under-15 race as five members of Blackheath tried in vain to close her down. Blackheath improved their chances of retaining the team title by finishing ahead of Tonbridge and Invicta through the efforts of Kelsey Fuss, Naomi Kingston and Yasmin Austridge.

The race of the day was between Niamh Bridson-Hubbard (Blackheath) and Natasha Sinha (Cambridge Harriers) in the under 17s, where one second was the margin in favour of the league leader from Blackheath. Amy Old (Invicta) was third to lead her team to success supported by Lilly Coward (5th) and Anna Weston (7th). Invicta continued their defence of the team title ahead of Blackheath and Tonbridge.

Bethony Frost (Blackheath), Cassie Benson (Dartford) and Genevieve Akinyi (Dartford) were the sole under-20 competitors with Frost taking the initiative in the tussle for the individual title. The team race in this category has already been declared null and void as the majority of junior women continue to run with their senior club mates.

The young athletes' league will be decided with matches at Beech Grove Academy, Nonington on November 9 and Sparrows Den, Hayes on November 30. Full results are at www.kcaa.org.uk

Alan Newman