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Alan Newman's reports appear in the KM every Friday

KENT CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE

International class competitors, spectators on a train and a spectacular hailstorm made for an interesting opening round of Kent Cross Country League races at Swanley Park on Saturday, writes Alan Newman.

World Championships representatives Bobby and Alex Clay added class to a senior women's race dominated by under-20 juniors and individual honours were evenly shared by four clubs in the eight young athletes' races.

Senior Men

A strong field of 182 finished the 10k senior men's race on a revised three lap circuit of Swanley Park that was necessary to avoid crossing the tracks of the mini-train that was carrying cheering spectators.

Tonbridge AC are defending the Kent Messenger men's cup and 12-to-score Duodec trophy and following an exceptional road relay season were the team to beat.

Quality under-20 juniors Max Nicholls and Chris Olley excelled in the muddy conditions for top points for Tonbridge ahead of defending champion, Tom Collins (Medway and Maidstone).

The 2010 county champion, Dean Lacy (Cambridge Harriers) and Sam Coombes (Dartford Harriers) completed the top five before George Duggan (under-20) and James Taylor sealed the team victory for Tonbridge.

The early leaders in the masters' categories are M40 Richard Newsome (South Kent Harriers), M50 Kevin Williams (Ashford) and M60 Alan Newman (Paddock Wood). The over-70s continue to compete with the women over a shorter course and Eric Schofield (Tonbridge Wells Harriers) was the winner.

Tonbridge dominated the team categories and were chased home by Cambridge Harriers, Blackheath and Bromley Harriers and Medway and Maidstone in both competitions.

Blackheath did finish their twelfth athlete ahead of Tonbridge in the Duodec race and there is a long season before the matter is decided in February but Tonbridge could well be out of sight after they host round two at Somerhill School on October 25.

Senior Women

Bobby and Alex Clay (Invicta East Kent) represented Britain in the World Championships in Bydgoszcz, Poland last year and their international class was clear as they stormed away from 105 runners in unexpected sunshine on a course that had just been soaked by a massive cloud burst.

Bobby, aged 17, finished 41 seconds ahead of her older sibling Alex (19), who was 44 seconds clear of the field led by the former Sussex Schools champion Nicole Taylor (U20, Tonbridge).

Lucy Reid added valuable points for Tonbridge ahead of Carole Penlington (Blackheath and Bromley Harriers) who was first W35 master and Beth Armstrong for Bexley.

Caroline Ford (Cambridge Harriers) and first W45 master Maria Heslop (Paddock Wood) finished next in close order ahead of defending champion Alice Heather-Hayes (W35 Tunbridge Wells Harriers) before another under-20 junior, Emily McKane, ensured the team win for Invicta East Kent.

Jenny Brown (W55, Ashford) and Jeanette Giles (W75, Istead & Ifield Harriers) are the higher age-group leaders after the first race.

Invicta East Kent enjoyed team success at three and six-to-score as the trophy holders, Medway and Maidstone, languished in fifth place on the day. Tonbridge, Blackheath and Tunbridge Wells Harriers were also ahead of the champions and just as in the men's race, Blackheath finished their scoring six before Invicta so could mount a challenge with home advantage to come at Sparrows Den on November 8.

Young Athletes - Male

Four different clubs provided the winners of the male young athletes' races. Trophy holders Blackheath and Bromley Harriers enjoyed a clean sweep in the under-13s through Rowan Fuss, Peter Guy and Joseph Gorgiadis. Invicta East Kent, Dartford Harriers, Tonbridge and Medway and Maidstone were separated by six points in the chase for runners-up honours.

Noah Armitage-Hookes (Cambridge Harriers), James Puxty (Tonbridge) and Henry James Cowie (Blackheath) mixed things up at the front of the under-15s before Christian Lee and Daniel Blades swept up the team win for the holders Tonbridge from Medway and Maidstone and Blackheath.

The under-17s and under-20s raced together and the lower age group saw complete domination by Tonbridge athletes Alasdair Kinloch, Jamie Goodge, Stuart Brown and Toby Ralph. Josh Barber (Blackheath) and Jake Berry (M&M) did their best to break the stranglehold but Tonbridge were convincing team winners from Blackheath, M&M and Dartford Harriers.

The under-20 men's race witnessed the biggest winning margin of 92 seconds by Eritrean athlete Abel Tsegay (Invicta), who is the South of England Junior 5000m champion. Joseph O'Hara (Bexley) and Sean Molloy (Tonbridge) could not be separated by the timekeepers but it was the Bexley man who was judged to have contained Britain's fourth ranked 800m runner on the line. Invicta were unopposed in the team results.

Young Athletes - Female

Individual wins also went to four different clubs in the female young athletes races at Swanley. Alex Millard (Invicta) and Maisy Rose (Dartford Harriers) were separated by one second in the under-13s. Matilda Hall (Tonbridge) was fourth but it was Morgan Squibb and Jessica Neal who set Blackheath on their way to team success over trophy holders Tonbridge and Invicta.

The under-15s were towed round by the pace of Kathleen Faes (Tonbridge) and Dartford Harriers' Chloe Sharp and Holly Page but it was Blackheath's team of Naomi Kingston, Yasmin Austridge and Millie Smith who added to their recent National road relay title with first team place in this league.

The under-17s and under-20s raced together in the worst of the weather with the 2014 English National and Inter-Counties under-15 champion Sabrina Sinha (Cambridge Harriers) moving up an age group to win the under-17s. Jessica Keene and Kelsey Fuss kept Sinha honest to the finish to establish the base for Blackheath's team win over defending champions Invicta and Medway and Maidstone.

The under-20s saw Blackheath romp to victory with Anna Myers, Janae Galley and Sonia Woolhouse at the sharp end. Only Bonnie Maugey (Dartford Harriers) was able to prevent a whitewash by finishing second overall.

Alan Newman