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Alan Newman's reports appear in the KM every Friday

KENT CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE

There were 350 athletes in action in the latest Kent Cross Country League races at Sparrows Den on Saturday, writes Alan Newman. Sunshine and showers produced slippery conditions at one of the oldest venues in the county.

Senior Women

Nicole Taylor (under-20, Tonbridge) grabbed the opportunity presented by the absence of Bobby and Alex Clay (Invicta) to sweep into the overall lead with her first league win of the season.

The talented South of England steeplechase champion had only tree roots and puddles to negotiate on this switchback circuit at West Wickham.

Taylor dominated the race from the opening lap of the playing fields and extended her lead over two laps of woodland paths to 54 seconds at the line.

Mel Frazier (Gravesend) made her Kent League debut with an excellent second place ahead of W35 master Carole Penlington of host club Blackheath and Bromley Harriers. The higher age group winners were W45 Donna Mewis (Beckenham, 11th) and W55 Sue Cooper (Invicta, 57th).

Tonbridge took the team race with under-20 juniors Sian Driscoll (6th) and Chloe Bird (8th) supporting the race winner. Penlington led Blackheath to a well appreciated second place ahead of a resurgent Medway and Maidstone, headed by Louise Watson-Knight (9th). Tonbridge now hold a narrow lead over Invicta, Blackheath and Medway and Maidstone in the main team race.

The six-to-score category produced a win for Blackheath over Tonbridge and Medway and Maidstone. However, Tonbridge still have the overall lead from Medway and Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Harriers with one race left at Parkwood School, Swanley on February 7.

The under-70 men's race, held in conjunction with the women's event, resulted in a close race between M75 Eric Schofield (Tunbridge Wells Harriers) and M70 Vernon Thomas (Greenwich Tritons) with only 18 seconds between them. Schofield has the title in the bag after three race victories.

Young Athletes - Male

Blackheath and Bromley were home club winners of the under-13 boys' race through league leader Peter Guy (1st), Kier Lundy (4th) and Ben Gardiner (10th). Archie May (Dartford Harriers) and Cameron Macrae (Thanet) filled the podium. Bexley and Medway and Maidstone gave chase in the team race but Defending champions Blackheath are in pole position with one race to go.

The under-15's was a cracking race as Bede Pitcairn-Knowles (Tonbridge) carved out what appeared to be a winning lead, only to be overhauled in the finishing straight by Jacques Cunningham-Marsh (Medway & Maidstone). Overall leader Sam Crick (3rd) and James Stoney (8th) ensured Tonbridge scraped home first team from a much stronger Medway & Maidstone and Thanet Road Runners, although Tonbridge are still favourites for the trophy.

Alasdair Kinloch, Jamie Goodge, Stuart Brown and Chris Cohen were an impressive leading quartet for defending champions, Tonbridge, in the under-17's race. Jake Berry (5th) led M&M to third team on the day and overall behind Blackheath. Kinloch is unbeaten in three races and set to add the under-17 title to his under-15 trophy from last year.

With no senior men's race to test his talents, first match winner Abel Tsegay led Invicta East Kent to an unopposed team success in the under-20's race. Tsegay bolted into an immediate lead and built a cushion of 92 seconds over individual league leader, Joe O'Hara (Bexley). Dylan Rigby (3rd) and Ben Hall (9th) secured the win for Invicta.

Young Athletes - Female

With three in six, team champions Tonbridge consolidated their lead at the top of the under-13 girls' table. Maisy Rose (Dartford Harriers) was first past the winning post, followed by league leader Alex Millard (Invicta) and Lizzie Miller (Tonbridge). Beth Williams (Thanet) was next before Matilda Hall and Maria Bragin sealed victory for Tonbridge. The top ten were covered by 30 seconds in one of the closest races of the day.

Kathleen Faes (Tonbridge) has one hand on the under 15's trophy after her third successive race win. Holly Page and Chloe Sharp scored well for Dartford Harriers but it was the excellent packing of defending champion Naomi Kingston (4th), Yasmin Austridge (5th) and Millie Smith (6th) that brought Blackheath safely home. Trophy holders Blackheath now lead by five points from a tied Tonbridge and Dartford Harriers.

League leader Kelsey Fuss (Blackheath) had 30 seconds to spare in winning the under-17's race from Polly Pitcairn-Knowles (Tonbridge) and Charlotte Rhule (Blackheath). Sarah Hall (Invicta) was next home before Shannon Risky closed the scoring for champions-elect Blackheath.

Anna Myers maintained her 100% record in the under-20's race to lead Blackheath to success on the day and overall. Samantha Leighton (Blackheath) and Bonnie Maughey (Dartford Harriers) took the remaining rostrum places.

The Kent Young Athlete League concludes at Danson Park, Bexleyheath on November 29.

Alan Newman