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Alan Newman's reports appear in the KM every Friday

KENT CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE FINAL, SWANLEY

There was a different feel to the final match in the Kent Cross Country League 2014/15 at Swanley Park on Saturday, writes Alan Newman. Due to the loss of the previous fixture through a waterlogged course at Danson Park the young athletes had their postponed final races together with the senior men and women to turn the clock back to the original arrangements for this event.

There were 298 men and 169 women competing this winter, which is down 7% on last season. However, despite the best attempts by officials there was one less race for the men and the league was decided over three races only.

Tom Collins (Medway and Maidstone) retained his Kent League senior men's title and Emily McKane (Invicta East Kent) is the new name on the superb Cliff Temple Memorial Trophy for the senior women's champion.

Senior Men

Defending champion Tom Collins (M&M) set off in determined fashion to lead on the first of three laps with Scott Overall (Blackheath and Bromley Harriers) and under-20 junior Abel Tsegay (Invicta East Kent) for company.

Collins knew that Overall and Tsegay could not threaten his individual league ambitions so was unconcerned as Blackheath's 2009 UK 5000m champion suddenly accelerated into a winning lead with one lap still to run.

Overall prised 15 seconds out of Tsegay to win in his only appearance this season in 30min54sec. Tsegay has joined the seniors twice and would have been the likely winner with a third outing but has been mixing his racing with his junior age-group peers this winter resulting in the Southern title last month.

Phil Sesseman (Blackheath) slipped past a tired but happy Collins for third place and Tonbridge duo George Duggan (under-20) and Tom Cox filled the top six. Sam Coombes (Dartford Harriers), Rob Jackaman (Cambridge Harriers), Tim Corby (Invicta) and Ben Tyler (M&M) then kept their club's hopes alive by completing the top ten.

Dan Bradley (11th) and Dan Watt (12th) were crucial in Tonbridge's winning team score on the day over Blackheath and M&M as that was just enough to make them winners of the Kent Messenger Cup at four-to-score. Tonbridge doubled their rewards with success at 12-to-score over Blackheath and M&M on the day and overall.

The leading masters at Swanley were M45 Richard Tomlinson (M&M, 20th), M50 Andy Howey (Tunbridge Wells Harriers, 27th) and M60 John Harley (Tonbridge, 90th). Despite his victory in the final race, Tomlinson was beaten by Richard Newsome (South Kent Harriers) on cumulative time over three races after a draw on points for the over-40 trophy. Howey (M50) and Graham Eke (M60) took the older categories without such calculations being required.

There were five septuagenarians competing this winter and the M70 league champion was Eric Schofield (Tunbridge Wells Harriers) from last season's victor Bryon "Spud" Taylor (TWH).

Senior Women

Defending champion Alice Heather-Hayes (W35, TWH) had to work hard to assert her authority in the 5.5k women's race but a slim advantage of five seconds after one lap became fifteen seconds at the finish in 21min35sec. Heather-Hayes had missed one of the four races so the individual trophy was due new ownership and it was last season's runner-up Emily McKane (U20, Invicta) who stepped up to accept the award from the 1996 AAA 10,000m champion, Louise Watson-Knight (M&M).

McKane did all the chasing at Swanley and was duly rewarded after a fine second season with the seniors. Carole Penlington (W35, Blackheath) was 30 seconds down in third place. Nicola Susans (Larkfield) and M&M's Watson-Knight and Jenny Fowler completed the leader board with Paddock Wood's Sarah Shephard two seconds behind with a breakthrough run for seventh.

Blackheath edged M&M's team on the day after a tie-break was required at three to score. Sara Elmqvist's (13th) advantage of three seconds over M&M's Stephanie Hearn (14th) made the difference yet it was not quite enough for the team title as Tonbridge held on for overall victory by a point despite slipping to sixth at Swanley – their lowest of the season. Tunbridge Wells Harriers took the six-to-score league after another consistent winter.

The masters' awards were hard fought after W45 Helen Wheeler (South Kent Harriers, 8th), W60 Sue James (Paddock Wood, 48th) and W75 Jeanette Giles (Istead & Ifield Harriers, 67th) led the higher age groups in the final race. Watson-Knight (W35), Donna Mewis (Beckenham, W45), James (W55) and Giles (W65) were the overall category winners.

Young Athletes

The Kent Young Athletes cross-country league concluded much later than intended with the final set of races at Swanley Park on Saturday. A total of 411 runners scored points, marginally down on the previous season's 424 despite the disrupted fixture list.

The Doris Lucas Award for male teams went to Tonbridge AC and Blackheath and Bromley Harriers dominated the female team results to secure the Royal Bank of Scotland Salver. Dartford Harriers won the Neil Smith Trophy for the most improved club overall.

Blackheath's Rowan Fuss took the final under-13 boys' race from team-mate and league champion, Peter Guy and Ted Higgins (Bexley). Guy was joined by Archie May (Dartford Harriers) and Bashiri Ryan (Medway & Maidstone) on the podium as Blackheath, Tonbridge and Bexley claimed the team medals.

James Puxty led a Tonbridge top three in the under-15 race, closely followed by overall winner Sam Crick and Christian Lee. Tonbridge retained their team trophy ahead of M&M who had Jacques Cunningham-Marsh and Jacob Coward in overall silver and bronze.

Tonbridge also defended their under-17 team award from M&M and Blackheath as last season's under-15 champion, Alasdair Kinloch, won the final race and the league title in his new age-group. Kinloch was followed home by team-mate Jamie Goodge and Jake Berry (M&M) on the day and joined by Stuart Brown (Tonbridge) and Berry at the individual presentations.

No clubs qualified for awards at under-20 level as Joseph O'Hara (Bexley) won his first league race of the winter and the overall title. Alex Cameron (Dartford Harriers) was runner-up on the day and overall.

Beth Williams (Thanet Roadrunners) finished ahead of the under-13 girls' champion, Alex Millard (Invicta East Kent) at the fourth attempt of this campaign. Maisy Rose (Dartford Harriers) was third at Swanley but overall bronze went to the consistent Matilda Hall (Tonbridge). Blackheath claimed their first of four team titles in female age-groups by one league point from holders Tonbridge.

Kathleen Faes (Tonbridge) enjoyed the biggest winning margin of the day with 48 seconds in hand as she claimed the under-15 league title with a 100% record in the competition. Yasmin Austridge (Blackheath) and Lola Wheeler (M&M) were the closest opposition at Swanley but it was Millie Smith (Blackheath) who stepped up for bronze overall behind Faes and Austridge. Blackheath retained their team award from Tonbridge and Dartford Harriers.

Alice Ralph led Tonbridge to an unexpected victory in the under-17 race but it was not enough to break the Blackheath stranglehold on overall team awards. League champion Kelsey Fuss (Blackheath) was the runner-up at Swanley and accompanied by Polly Pitcairn-Knowles (Tonbridge) and Charlotte Rhule (Blackheath) for medals at the prize-giving. Defending champions Invicta East Kent were third this time behind Blackheath and Tonbridge.

Blackheath were unopposed at under-20 level as Anna Myers completed her fourth consecutive win ahead of team-mate Samantha Leighton. Dartford Harriers' Bonnie Maughey was third in the final race and second overall.

Full results at www.kcaa.org.uk

Alan Newman