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**Alan Newman's reports appear in the KM every Friday**

**KENT CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE**

With pre-registration at record levels, more than 600 competitors in total and over 200 runners in the men's race and 100-plus in the women's event, the Kent Cross Country League started in fine form at the new venue of Stanhill Farm, Wilmington on Saturday, writes Alan Newman.

Senior Men

Tonbridge AC deployed half their winning National Road Relay squad from Birmingham the previous weekend and were immediately rewarded with team success at both four and twelve-to-score.

Junior international Chris Olley powered to his first Kent League victory over four testing laps of pastureland and pumpkin fields to start the defence of the Kent Messenger Cup and Duodec trophies that Tonbridge already hold. Ben Cole was 15 seconds behind the Imperial College student, who represented GB in the World Championships in China just over six months ago.

League champion Tom Collins could not have expected much better than his third place against such tough opposition and he looks set for another fine winter campaign.

The top six was completed by Robert Jackaman (Cambridge Harriers), Daniel Bradley (Tonbridge) and a flustered Michael Coleman (South Kent Harriers), who had been delayed by an accident on the motorway with several team members and did well to rise to such a lofty position after no warm-up.

Tom Cox (7th) completed the Tonbridge team that leads Cambridge Harriers and Medway & Maidstone in these early stages. Harriers had Chris Wyles (11th) prominent after learning his craft by winning the Kent Fitness League in 2013 and 2014.

M&M were not helped when the 2007 British Masters champion Barry Royden withdrew with a suspected stress fracture but were encouraged by the return from work assignment in Hong Kong of former talisman Adrian Lowther (13th).

The winning margin was huge at 12-to-score as nearly 600 points separated Tonbridge AC from their nearest rivals Blackheath & Bromley Harriers and Cambridge Harriers.

The initial leaders in the masters' categories are M40 Andrew Mercer (Tonbridge), M50 Graeme Saker (Tonbridge), M60 James Graham (Sevenoaks) and M70 Richard Seabrook (Beckenham).

The remaining men's races are at Somerhill School, Tonbridge on October 24; Sparrows Den, Hayes on November 7 and Foots Cray Meadow on February 13. With Tonbridge on home soil for the next match there could be very little team interest remaining before the month is out.

### Senior Women

Ashley Gibson (Tonbridge) won an intriguing women's race at Wilmington by eleven seconds from under-20 Niamh Bridson-Hubbard (Blackheath and Bromley Harriers), Nicole Taylor (Tonbridge) and Elaine Rayner (Blackheath).

With Tonbridge and Blackheath trading places at the front it was no surprise they dominated the team results with W40 Carole Penlington (6th) sealing the issue in favour of the black vests, with Amy Old (Invicta, 5th) also in the mix.

Blackheath were clear winners at both three and six-to-score from Tonbridge, who are the defending team champions. It was Paddock Wood AC that pulled out all the stops to finish third with three in fifteen led by the durable W45 Tina Oldershaw, who is hoping for another successful season on all surfaces.

Previous winners, Medway & Maidstone, finished fourth with Kent County President, Louise Knight (W40, 9th), still in top form to lead the team home. The M&M strength in depth told at six-to-score with third place overall.

Claire Day (Paddock Wood, 15th) was the first W35 master and team-mate Oldershaw leads the W45 table. Vicky Talbot-Rosner (Invicta) is the W55 leader and Jeanette Giles (W75 Istead & Ifield) heads the W65 category.

The league will be decided with matches at Tonbridge on October 24; Danson Park, Bexleyheath on November 29 and Foots Cray Meadow on February 13.

### Young Athletes - Male

Tonbridge AC won the younger age-group team events at Wilmington but Medway & Maidstone enjoyed victory at under-20 level as the individual honours were shared between these two clubs and Blackheath & Bromley.

Rowan Fuss started Blackheath's defence of their under-13 trophy with a dominant gun to tape performance. Bashiri Ryan (M&M) was the runner-up as Fin Croll, Fraser Gordon and Matthew Taylor finished together, ensuring team success by five points for Tonbridge from Blackheath and M&M.

Tonbridge made the perfect start in defence of their under-15 title as Quinn Austin (M&M) took the individual plaudits from James Stoney (Tonbridge) and Archie May (Dartford Harriers). Tonbridge were well clear in the team scores but just two points separated Blackheath and M&M in the next two positions.

There would have been a major upset had trophy holders Tonbridge not won the under-17 team race and Alasdair Kinloch duly led his National Road Relay winning trio to success. However, it was not a complete whitewash for the black hoop vests as Jake Berry (M&M) was second home to lead his team to second ahead of Blackheath. James Puxty and Jamie Goodge then secured the team victory for Tonbridge.

Ben Murphy (Tonbridge) won the simultaneously held under-20 race from Cameron Payas (M&M) and Jamie Atkins (Dartford Harriers) but it was M&M that took the team race by a single point from the normally rock solid Tonbridge contingent.

### Young Athletes - Female

Four different clubs provided individual winners in the female young athletes' races at Wilmington but Blackheath and Bromley Harriers enjoyed the lioness's share of team successes.

Ellie Dolby (Blackheath) won the opening under-13 race from Maisy Rose (Dartford Harriers) and Katie Goodge (Tonbridge). Holders Blackheath were comfortable team winners ahead of a good scrap between Tonbridge and Medway Tri Club.

Defending champion Kathleen Faes (Tonbridge) - unbeaten in the league last winter - went over 200m clear of the under-15 field as Blackheath's Millie Smith started well for the trophy holders. Elizabeth Miller finished next for Tonbridge to set up a win for the West Kent club from Blackheath and Invicta East Kent.

The under-17s and under-20s raced together with the younger age-group taking the top ten places. Dartford Harriers' Holly Page and Chloe Sharp were in charge at the front ahead of a quartet of Blackheath athletes led by Jessica Keene. Blackheath began their defence of the team award in determined fashion narrowly followed by Dartford Harriers, with Tonbridge a distant third.

There was no team competition in the poorly supported under-20 race as six qualified competitors opted to support their clubs in the senior race. Natasha Sinha (Cambridge Harriers), Bonnie Maugey (Dartford Harriers) and Charlotte Rhule (Blackheath) were the only finishers.

The young athletes' league concludes with events at Tonbridge on October 24; Sparrows Den, Hayes on November 7 and Danson Park, Bexleyheath on November 29.

Full results at [www.kcaa.org.uk](http://www.kcaa.org.uk)

**Alan Newman**