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

**KENT CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE, TONBRIDGE**

It was all about the hills in the second round of races in the Kent Cross Country League at Tonbridge on Saturday, writes Alan Newman.

The Schools at Somerhill provided an excellent venue; strength up and speed down the many hills played a part in the results and Dartford Harriers' cross-country team manager Paul Hills (M60, 178th) was competing in his 100th league race, spanning six decades of competition.

Senior Men

The senior men faced an extended three-lap, 10k course with extra gradients for good measure. The 2012 champion Dean Lacy (Cambridge Harriers) set off in determined fashion, with Blackheath and Bromley Harrier's 2008 and 2009 European Championships GB team member Mike Skinner for company.

The tough climb near the start and finish saw Blackheath's versatile Alex Littlewood emerge as the likely winner, with his 4min6sec mile pace most evident on the descents. However, Invicta East Kent's 18-year-old prospect Abel Tsegay had other ideas as he briefly took the lead going into the final circuit.

Littlewood's strength prevailed by 18 seconds as the Eritrean athlete Tsegay was easily the best under-20 junior to challenge the seniors. Lacy and Skinner were followed by the host club's Max Nicholls (U20, Tonbridge) and defending league champion Tom Collins (Medway and Maidstone).

The leading age-group athletes at Tonbridge were M40 Richard Newsome (South Kent Harriers, 22nd), M50 Graeme Saker (Tonbridge, 31st) and M60 Ian Marshall (Cambridge Harriers, 161st) as 179 athletes finished the course.

Tonbridge might have hoped to extend their overall lead with home advantage and four athletes in the top sixteen but Blackheath and Cambridge Harriers both defeated the hosts to leave three clubs tied at the top of the table with Medway and Maidstone the nearest opposition.

Blackheath, Tonbridge and M&M were the leading teams at 12-to-score and Blackheath and Tonbridge share the overall lead. Cambridge Harriers and M&M are joint third with two races remaining. The league will be decided at Danson Park, Bexleyheath on November 29 and Parkwood School, Swanley on February 7, 2015.

## Senior Women

One hundred women set off for two laps racing on springy turf in the grounds of Somerhill School but it was Clay that soon emerged on top as siblings Bobby and Alex Clay of Invicta East Kent took full command.

In an exact reprise of the first race of the season at Swanley it was Bobby who built a winning lead of 41 seconds over Alex, who was 42 seconds clear of the main field.

Tonbridge made a promising start with Nicole Taylor (U20, 3rd) and Lucy Reid (4th) repeating their first round results before Amy Old (5th) wrapped up the team victory for the exclusively under-20 Invicta squad.

League champion Alice Heather-Hayes (Tonbridge Wells Harriers) was first W35 master in sixth place ahead of the W45 leader Maria Heslop (Paddock Wood). First over-55 finisher was Paddock Wood's Sue James (W60, 71st) and Jeanette Giles (W75, Istead & Ifield Harriers) is heading for a successful defence of her over-65 award.

Invicta and Tonbridge were the predictable leaders in the team categories but Paddock Wood surprised many with third place on the day ahead of Medway and Maidstone at three-to-score, although M&M did improve to third with their stronger six-to-score squad.

The women's league concludes with races at Sparrows Den, West Wickham on November 8 and Parkwood School, Swanley on February 7.

## Young Athletes - Male

Blackheath and Bromley Harriers took the under-13 boys' team through Rowan Fuss (1st), Peter Guy (3rd) and Joseph Gorgiadis (5th). James Kingston (Tonbridge, 2nd) provided the strongest resistance to B&B's dominance. Tonbridge were the second team and Invicta East Kent third.

Tonbridge won the under-15s with James Puxty reversing his first match defeat by Noah Armitage-Hookes (Cambridge Harriers). Daniel Blades (3rd) and Christian Lee (4th) secured the table topping victory for Tonbridge AC. Medway and Maidstone and Cambridge Harriers were closest on the day.

The under-17s race saw last year's under-15 champion Alasdair Kinloch and Chris Cohen out in front for Tonbridge, with Jake Berry chasing for Medway and Maidstone. Tonbridge are edging away from Blackheath and Bromley and an improving M&M in the team table.

With first match under-20 winner Abel Tsegay running against the senior men, Charlie Joslin-Allen and George Duggan enjoyed leading Tonbridge to a third team win on home soil. Joseph O'Hara (Bexley) completed the podium places as Tonbridge and Invicta lead the team table.

## Young Athletes - Female

Alex Millard (Invicta), Beth Williams (Thanet) and Matilda Hall (Tonbridge) brought a variety of club colours to the fore in the under-13 girls' race. Tonbridge, Blackheath and Thanet were the leading teams and the league table is jointly led by Blackheath and Tonbridge at the halfway stage. Kathleen Faes (Tonbridge) is the athlete to beat in the under-15s after a second successive win. Naomi Kingston (Blackheath) and Holly Page (Dartford Harriers) were the runners-up as Blackheath move further ahead of Tonbridge and Dartford in the team standings.

Kelsey Fuss improved two places to win the under-17s race from Blackheath team mate Jessica Keene and Polly Pitcairn-Knowles of the Tonbridge club. Blackheath are building a lead in the team race from Invicta and Tonbridge.

Blackheath also claimed an unopposed victory at under-20 level through Anna Myers (1st), Samantha Leighton (2nd) and Emma Rowland (5th). Bonnie Maugey (Dartford Harriers) was third and holds second overall to Myers.

The Kent Young Athlete League continues with races at West Wickham on November 8 and Bexleyheath on November 29.

**Alan Newman**