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

**KENT CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE, SOMERHILL SCHOOL, TONBRIDGE**

Senior Men

Fortune favours the brave in cross country and no-one was braver than 18-year-old Adam Gilbert (Medway and Maidstone), who led his team to success in the Kent Men's League at Tonbridge on Saturday, writes Alan Newman.

Gilbert secured his maiden victory on the muddy slopes of the notoriously tough Somerhill Schools circuit by attacking the hills with gusto to build a winning margin of 26 seconds after the four laps had been completed.

Local favourite Luca Russo (Tonbridge) and six-time Kent champion Mike Coleman (Medway and Maidstone) disputed the early lead until Gilbert raised his game just before halfway in this 10k race.

Gilbert had finished seventh in the first race of the season but so impressed his coach Chris Newman and a sizeable crowd with his form that he is now the early favourite to take the individual league title in the absence of the holder, Dean Lacy (Cambridge Harriers), who missed this race.

Coleman shook off the attentions of Russo to secure second place and he was joined by Tom Collins (4th) and Ben Tyler (6th) in the victorious team. Russo, who celebrates his 19th birthday a few days before the next race, was supported by Julian Rendall (5th), Ben Cole (7th) and Daniel Bradley (9th) in the Tonbridge team that finished second behind the current league leaders.

The top ten was completed by Alex Gibbins (Blackheath and Bromley, 8th) and Tonbridge junior Jamie Bryant (10th) as B&B was the best of the rest of the 17 competing teams. There were 182 finishers in another strong field.

The masters' individual league table is headed by Paddock Wood's M40 Paul Hasler (13th) but the most impressive age group run was achieved by double British M50 10k champion, Graeme Saker (17th) for the hosts Tonbridge, who now take a commanding lead in the Duodec 12-to-score category into the next league races at Danson Park, Bexleyheath on December 1 and Parkwood School, Swanley on February 9.

The M70 men ran with the senior women and the winner was league leader and defending champion, Eric Schofield (Tonbridge Wells Harriers).

## Senior Women

On a day when talented young athletes truly came of age, Nicole Taylor (Tonbridge) took her first senior Kent Women's League win on home soil.

The Tonbridge junior was narrowly beaten by top W45 veteran Clare Elms in the first match at Swanley but made sure of victory this time out with a classic gun to tape victory over 98 finishers.

The next three were all master athletes who finished in descending age group order. W45 Tina Oldershaw (Paddock Wood) fought off the determined W40 Nadene Weed (Maidstone Harriers) in a sprint finish.

W35 Alice Heather-Hayes (Tonbridge Wells) was fourth, followed by another Tonbridge junior Nicola Wilkinson and Mary Edmonds of Medway and Maidstone.

The top ten was completed by W40 Maria Heslop (Paddock Wood), Amber Reed (under-20) and Francesca Green of Blackheath and Bromley and W35 Jenny Fowler (Medway and Maidstone).

With such a mix of clubs in the fray the team positions were always going to be hotly contested. Tonbridge won thanks to Jess Owen (14th) from Medway and Maidstone with Louise Watson (11th) and Blackheath and Bromley, who needed Sarah Belaon (16th) to complete their scoring three.

Nicole Taylor now leads the league individual table from masters' leaders Tina Oldershaw and Maria Heslop, so another junior champion is a likely prospect.

The team positions are finely balanced with Blackheath and Bromley, Medway and Maidstone and Tonbridge tied at the top. In the six-to-score category B&B are clear leaders from Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells Harriers.

The deciding matches are at Beech Grove Academy, Nonington on November 10 and Parkwood School, Swanley on February 9.

## Young Athletes

Tonbridge AC turned home advantage into team success with victories in the three younger male age groups and the under-13 girls' races at Somerhill Schools. The other team winners were Beech Grove Academy in the under-20 men's race and Blackheath and Bromley Harriers in the girls' under-15 and under-17 women's races. There was an increased entry and 250 finishers.

Tom Kendrick and Charlie Crick were separated by the thickness of their Tonbridge vests in the under-13 boys' race. Noah Armitage-Hookes of Cambridge Harriers was third ahead of James Puxty, who secured the team win for Tonbridge from Cambridge Harriers and Blackheath and Bromley.

Chris Cohen, Alasdair Kinloch and Stuart Brown achieved maximum points for Tonbridge in the under-15 boys' race. Bailey Stickings led Blackheath and Bromley Harriers to second place ahead of Medway and Maidstone AC.

First race winner George Duggan maintained his 100% record in the under-17 race ahead of Tonbridge team mate Max Nicholls and Adam Wright (SFactor). With Hanro Roussow and James West next to finish another home team victory was assured from Bexley AC and Beech Grove Academy.

James Thompson ensured a whitewash of individual top places for Tonbridge by winning the under-20 men's race from Florian Groothoff of Beech Grove Academy and Andrew Robertson (Ashford AC). Beech Grove Academy was unopposed in the team race.

Holly Page (Dartford Harriers) added to her first race success with victory in the under-13 girls' race from Kathleen Faes (Tonbridge) and Naomi Kingston, who led Blackheath and Bromley Harriers to second team place between Tonbridge and Dartford Harriers. Eleanor Cohen (4th) and Kelsi Cornish (6th) completed the Tonbridge team score.

Jessica Keene and Georgina Taylor were in form for the winning Blackheath under-15 girls' team, with support from Niamh Bridson-Hubbard (4th) and Shannon Risky (5th). Kelsey Fuss (Thanet) broke the B&B stranglehold in third place. Medway and Maidstone and Tonbridge were the chasing teams.

Kate Curran (Blackheath) was well clear of Alice Wood and Sian Driscoll of Tonbridge in the under-17 women's race. The team score reflected the order of the athletes, with B&B winning from Tonbridge. Anna Myers (5th) and Lucy Sidey (6th) bagged the required points for B&B. Only two teams finished.

Megan Williams (Cambridge Harriers), Krystal Galley (B&B) and Kassia Soards (Cambridge Harriers) headed a small under-20 women's field. There were no complete teams finishing in this category.

The young athletes' league will be decided with matches at Beech Grove Academy, Nonington on November 10 and Danson Park, Bexleyheath on December 1.

**Alan Newman**