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

**KENT CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE FINAL, SWANLEY**

The Kent Cross Country League 2012/13 season concluded at Swanley on Saturday with the final races and prize giving for the senior and veteran men and women, writes Alan Newman.

League attendance has improved by 4% with 321 men and 177 women competing this winter. Paul Hills and his Dartford Harriers team provided a well marked course at Parkwood School that was surprisingly fast and dry, despite the steady rain that fell during the afternoon.

Adam Gilbert (Medway and Maidstone) and Tina Oldershaw (Paddock Wood) made history by becoming the first teenager and veteran athlete respectively to become individual league champions after the four race series.

Senior Men

Mike Skinner (Blackheath and Bromley Harriers) raced into an early lead and the 2008 and 2009 European Cross Country Championships representative finished with 52 seconds advantage over the 19-year-old league champion, Adam Gilbert (M&M).

Gilbert's progress this winter has been meteoric under the guidance of his coach Chris Newman. He won the junior title at Detling last month and a victory in this league at Tonbridge in October was backed up by a fourth and seventh place before clinching the league.

Tom Collins (M&M) has been the nearest challenger for overall honours and a fine third at Swanley secured second place overall. Collins was also vital in the team race as Medway and Maidstone won at four-to-score, both on the day and in the league, to halt the run of four straight wins by Tonbridge AC.

Defending league champion Dean Lacy (Cambridge Harriers) was fourth ahead of Ben Tyler (M&M) and Julian Rendall (Tonbridge). Mark Wilkins (12th ) banked the final points for Medway and Maidstone's team and Tom Cox (7th ), Dominic Brown (9th) and Daniel Bradley (11th) worked hard for Tonbridge AC to keep their rivals honest to the finish line.

Blackheath and Bromley were third at Swanley and overall with Alex Gibbins (10th) their next best behind the race winner. Donald Carter (Invicta, 8th) wore the only other club vest in the top ten.

M50 Graeme Saker (21st, Tonbridge) was the leading veteran but M40 Paul Hasler (33rd, Paddock Wood) had done enough to secure the masters' title.

Tonbridge were far too strong for the opposition in the 12-to-score team race and won the Duodec trophy comfortably from Blackheath and Bromley and Tunbridge Wells Harriers.

Eric Schofield won his fourth consecutive M70 race from his Tunbridge Wells team mate Bryon Taylor and this was the overall league position for over-70s.

### Senior Women

Tina Oldershaw (Paddock Wood) showed the opposition a clean pair of heels in the women's race to secure the league title at 45 years of age, although the race was much closer than the men's equivalent.

Nicole Taylor (Tonbridge) was the favourite before the start but was on duty for Sussex Schools at Bexhill in the postponed English Schools qualification race. This opened the door for Oldershaw who still had work to do as Francesca Green (B&B) was setting a furious pace on the first of two laps.

Maria Heslop (W45, PWAC) surged into the lead at the start of the final lap but Oldershaw proved strongest on the hills and emerged the victor by six seconds from the Kent bronze medallist. Green held on for third to lead Blackheath to team success on the day over M&M and Kent AC.

Cath Stibbs (W35, 4th) was Kent's leading scorer, three seconds ahead of Cas Wright (Kent University) and a close group including Clare Reeves (Bexley), W35 Jenny Fowler and Mary Edmonds (M&M), Amy Clements (Kent ) and Amber Reed (U20, B&B).

More than half of the top twenty finishers were master athletes so it was no surprise that so many over-35s were represented in the overall league table.

Oldershaw claimed the Cliff Temple Shield – first presented by the British Athletics Writers Association to Nicola Thompson (Dartford Harriers) in 1997 – as well as the Ron Hale veteran's trophy. Edmonds of M&M was second and under-20 junior Amber Reed (B&B) third overall.

Blackheath and Bromley's win at Swanley was enough to clinch the three-to-count league from Medway and Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Harriers. The six-to-score team race resulted in a tie between Tunbridge Wells Harriers and Blackheath and Bromley Harriers. This was resolved in favour of TWH due to their superior number of full team finishes.

**Alan Newman**