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Messenger Group**

Alan Newman's reports appear in the KM every Friday

KENT MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE FINAL

Tom Collins (Medway and Maidstone) appeared determined to repeat his first Kent Men's cross country league race win achieved a year ago at Swanley, when he dashed into an early lead at the equivalent event on Saturday, writes Alan Newman.

The final action of the 2011-12 winter campaign attracted 138 athletes to this twisting and technical circuit around the grounds of Parkwood School. Collins' lead was short lived, however, as the 2010 Kent champion Dean Lacy of Cambridge Harriers used his experience to carve out a winning lead on the snow covered course.

Host club Dartford Harriers did well to provide a safe but challenging venue for the deciding fixture and defending champions, Tonbridge AC, took full advantage to secure the Kent Messenger Cup for the fourth successive season.

As Lacy maintained a rare 100% record to win the individual trophy it was the junior international Robbie Farnham-Rose (Tonbridge AC) who led the chase, 13 seconds in arrears. Collins held his form in third place on the day and overall in the league.

Behind the top three there was a sea of white vests of Tonbridge athletes, headed by Ben Cole whose fourth place earned him second overall award. Cole was followed by under-20 Tom Cox, Dan Bradley, Julian Rendall and U20s Ryan Driscoll and Luca Russo. Ben Tyler (Medway and Maidstone) completed the top ten as his team battled in vain to regain the league title.

James Hogg (19th) and Andrejs Safars (24th) filled the scoring team places for M&M and Alex Gibbons (11th) made a useful start for Blackheath and Bromley Harriers but with four in the top six and a dozen inside thirty-one places, Tonbridge were home and dry at both four and twelve to score.

Richard Tomlinson salvaged some pride for M&M AC by winning the M40 masters' league trophy from Jonathan Armstrong (Bexley AC) and Gavin Kitchingham (Orpington Roadrunners). The best of the higher age groups overall were M50 Malcolm Martin (Paddock Wood) and M60 Graham Eke (Folkestone Running Club).

In the separate league for M70 men, held over shorter distances with the women's races, there was a clean sweep for Tunbridge Wells Harriers' Eric Schofield, John Johnson and Bryon Taylor.

Kent Messenger Cup: 1 Tonbridge 61, 2 Medway and Maidstone 60, 3 Invicta East Kent 54, 4 Blackheath and Bromley Harriers 53, 5 Tunbridge Wells Harriers 37, 6 Dartford Harriers 34.
Duodec Cup: 1 Tonbridge 19, 2 Medway and Maidstone 15, 3 Blackheath and Bromley Harriers 11, 4 Tunbridge Wells Harriers 8, 5 Dartford Roadrunners 5, 6 Beckenham Running Club 3.
Individuals: 1 Dean Lacy (Camb H) 4, 2 Ben Cole (Ton) 17, 3 Tom Collins (M&M) 20. M40 Richard Tomlinson (M&M). M50 Malcolm Martin (PW). M60 Graham Eke (Folk). M70 Eric Schofield (TWH).

KENT WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE FINAL

Grace Nicholls (Tonbridge AC) swept aside all challengers, as she had done in the opening race at nearby New Barn Park in October, to win the final Kent Women's cross country league race at Parkwood School, Swanley.

The 20-year-old Kent senior champion finished 19 seconds clear of the industrious Elaine Murty (Blackheath and Bromley Harriers), who finished just ahead of defending league champion Deirdre McDermott (Tonbridge), whose own fortunes slipped away when she fell on a tricky turn in the woods.

In a thrilling encounter the top three teams were separated by three points in this final race. Medway and Maidstone won with Helena Penfold fifth, Jenny Harnett seventh and Bernie Harrop in eleventh place.

Tonbridge were one point behind and had W45 Pippa Blackstone (20th) to thank for ensuring overall success in the battle for the league title.

Blackheath and Bromley were third on the day with W35 Jane Bradshaw (8th) and W45 Rosie Ferguson (16th) in support of Murty for second place overall with Medway and Maidstone's strong finish to the season resulting in third.

McDermott easily retained her hold on the Cliff Temple Memorial Trophy for the fourth time from 2008 champion, Penfold and the masters' league winner, Bradshaw, who claimed the Ron Hale Trophy.

Cara Oliver (Dartford Harriers) and Pru Clements (Tunbridge Wells Harriers) were the W35 runners-up award winners. The best W45 was Ferguson and the leading W55 was Sue James (Paddock Wood), as fourteen masters were placed in the top twenty overall.

Kent Women's League Trophy: 1 Tonbridge 50, 2 Blackheath and Bromley Harriers 47, 3 Medway and Maidstone 39, 4 Tunbridge Wells Harriers 37, 5 Dartford Harriers 33, 6 Bexley 30.

Individuals: 1 Deirdre McDermott (Ton) 7, 2 Helena Penfold (M&M) 17, 3 Jane Bradshaw (W35, B&B) 37. W45 Rosie Ferguson (B&B). W55 Sue James (PW).

Alan Newman