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Alan Newman's athletics reports appear in the Kent Messenger each Friday

KENT MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE, SWANLEY PARK

A minute silence to mark the passing of former Kent AA president Ian Smith, who died recently aged 78 and who spent over half his life as a top official, preceded the start of the senior men's race at the opening Kent cross country league match on Saturday, writes Alan Newman.

Following a spontaneous round of applause for the founder of the Kent league the race was underway on firm ground in Swanley Park. The early pace was shared between two former Kent champions, Mike Coleman of Medway and Maidstone and Dean Lacy of Cambridge Harriers.

League champion, Huw Evans of Tonbridge AC, has returned to his roots in Wales so opportunity knocks for ambitious cross country runners this winter.

Lacy proved the stronger athlete on this occasion as he powered away from Coleman for victory by 26 seconds. Jason Prickett of Invicta East Kent was the leading junior, finishing third in a field of 182 runners.

The top six was completed by Cedric Lassonde of new entrants Greenwich Tritons, Ben Cole of Tonbridge and Tom Collins of Medway and Maidstone. With Jack (7th) and Ben Tyler (9th) in close support the team winners were M&M from league champions Tonbridge and a rejuvenated Invicta East Kent. However, at 12-to-score it was Tonbridge AC who took an early lead in the defence of their title from rivals M&M and Blackheath and Bromley Harriers.

Leading masters were M40 Jonathan Armstrong (30th) of Bexley and M50 Garon Heslop (59th) of Ashford. The field included Commonwealth and World Trail Running Championship representative and international ultra runner, Julian Rendall (12th) of Tonbridge and M&M's latest signing, Marcus Cram (29th), the son of the former world 1500m, mile and 2000m record holder and leading athletics commentator, Steve Cram.

The remaining Kent Men's league fixtures are at Somerhill School, Tonbridge on October 29; Sparrows Den, West Wickham on December 3 and Parkwood School, Swanley on February 11.

KENT WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE, SWANLEY PARK

Grace Nicholls of Tonbridge AC displayed tactical prowess beyond her 19 years to inflict a rare defeat on defending champion, Deirdre McDermott of Tonbridge AC, in the opening Kent Women's cross country league race at Swanley on Saturday.

Nicholls and McDermott were separated by a second by the timekeepers at the finish and such was their pace that another junior athlete, Emily Hosker-Thornhill of Invicta East Kent, was almost a minute in arrears in third place.

Former champion, Helena Penfold of Medway and Maidstone, was a close fourth ahead of Bexley's Beth Armstrong and Clare Reeves. With Helen Wilson finishing eighth for Tonbridge AC the West Kent club took an early lead in the league table from Bexley AC and Folkestone Running Club.

Leading masters were W35 Jane Bradshaw (10th) and W45 Rosie Ferguson (32nd) of Blackheath and Bromley Harriers and the W60 British 10k champion, Sue James (W55, 50th) of Paddock Wood AC.

An innovation this year is to include the oldest category M70 men with the women's league race and the winner was Eric Schofield of Tunbridge Wells Harriers.

The remaining Kent women's and M70 league races are at Somerhill School, Tonbridge on October 29; Danson Park, Bexleyheath on November 12 and Parkwood School, Swanley on February 11.

KENT YOUNG ATHLETES CROSS COUNTRY LEAGUE, SWANLEY PARK

Tonbridge AC continued their dominance of the Kent young athletes cross country league at Swanley Park in the male races but the pack was shuffled in the female categories.

Tonbridge provided individual and team winners in the under-13, under-15 and under-17 races plus a clean sweep of the top three in the latter event but it was Invicta East Kent that pulled off a win in the under-20 men's team race.

Tom Kendrick made the perfect start to his under-13 title defence with a win from Alasdair Kinloch of Thanet and Scott Rowatt of Medway and Maidstone. Blackheath and Bromley and Medway and Maidstone were the closest teams.

League champion, George Duggan took the under-15 race from Jack Goss of Ashford AC and Joseph O'Hara of Bexley AC. Blackheath and Bromley and Bexley AC were the next teams to finish.

Charlie Joslin-Allen led the whitewash of podium places from his Tonbridge team mates Corey De'ath and Max Nicholls in the under-17 skirmish. Bexley AC and Medway and Maidstone chased in vain.

Greg Proctor of Blackheath and Bromley won the under-20 men's race from Warren Uden of Ashford and Sam Hudson of the winning Invicta squad.

The under-13 girls' race was won by Sabrina Sinah-Coe of Cambridge Harriers from a trio of Blackheath and Bromley athletes. Jessica Keen, Naomi Kineston and Georgina Taylor secured the early team honours for Blackheath from Tonbridge and Medway and Maidstone.

Under-15 league champion, Bobby Clay of Invicta, enjoyed a comfortable victory from Sian Driscoll of Tonbridge and Anna Weston of the leading Invicta team. Tonbridge and Blackheath and Bromley provided the nearest challenge. Defending champion, Nicole Taylor and Sophie Foreman led the under-17 race for team winners Tonbridge AC, with Amelia Jones of Ashford third. Blackheath and Bromley and Bexley AC were chasing shadows in this one.

The remaining Kent young athletes' league races are at Somerhill School, Tonbridge on October 29; Danson Park, Bexleyheath on November 12 and Sparrows Den, West Wickham on December 3.

Alan Newman