

Saturday evening at the Civic Hall saw a night of a thousand stars, or at least a couple of hundred, as Stratford Athletics Club held their annual review and awards evening. Paul Bearman and Paul Hawkins presented their highlights of another positive year from the junior and senior viewpoints respectively, although it's becoming more noticeable each year that as many of the juniors move through into the senior side the distinction is getting more and more blurred.

On the juniors' side the first things noted were the emergence of strong group of young cross-country runners for probably the first time in the club's history, and the fine achievement in winning the Warwickshire Sportshall League for the 4th year in succession. A record 20 Stratford athletes then went on to compete for the county, with the U15 boys going onto the NIA for the National Sportshall Finals and Jack Harrison becoming the second athlete from the club in successive years to have the great distinction of being crowned UK All Round Champion. Track and field didn't see the section's best ever year, finishing mid-table in the National Young Athletes' and Heart of England Leagues, but there were still some outstanding individual successes. A record haul of medals at the county championships, Chris Bartlett winning triple jump bronzes at both the English Schools and AAAs, and Chris and Amanda Evans representing the West Midlands in the inaugural UK Schools Games in Glasgow, with Chris winning a magnificent gold, wasn't too bad for an 'average' year! Stratford won West Midlands Junior Club of the Year, and is on a shortlist of 3 for the forthcoming UK equivalent, which puts into context just how much enthusiasm is put into the club by all the athletes, coaches, officials and parents. The junior awards winners were: Club Person of the Year – Jemma Lane, Star of Tomorrow – Anna O'Leary, All Rounder – shared by Jack Harrison and Andrew Pozzi, Cross Country – Zoe Chandler and Jonty Wilson, Most Improved Girl over 300m – Emma Stubbs, Most Improved Boy over 400m – Charlie Burn, Most Improved – Katie Taylor and Dan Wright, Athletes of the Year - Amanda Evans and Chris Bartlett.

For the seniors it was very much the same story – a mixed bag on the competition side allied to some outstanding individual performances. Last winter's Birmingham League relegation in the cross-country was the low point, but hopes are high for promotion this season, while the ladies' team continued to improve in the Midland Women's League and put the men to shame. The men did excel in the road relays though, qualifying for the National 12-stage event in Birmingham for the first time ever, setting high standards for 2007. The Triathlon section of the club had a very successful year under Steve Kirk's enthusiastic leadership, seeing many good individual performances, especially from Debbie Cooper, Pete Evans and Wayne Vickers, with Wayne's formidable Ironman debut standing out above all else. The club's debut in the BTA Team Relays in Nottingham saw the ladies finish 17th in their race, while the men struggled against strong competition to finish 79th but will be back next year for revenge! The undoubted highlight of the senior's year was the men's track & field team being promoted as champions of Division 3 in the Midlands League, having been in Division 6 not too many years ago. With 13 athletes having come through the junior ranks there was a great mixture of young and not quite so young athletes, and it ranks as one of the top team performances ever by the club. The fledgling women's team had more of a consolidating season, but will greatly benefit in the future as the junior women start to graduate through. The senior awards winners were: Grand Prix – Kate Wright and Mark Francis, Christine Claxton Memorial Trophy – Karen Holmes, Triathlon – Wayne Vickers, Cross Country – Yvonne

Caswell and Rob Minton, Most Improved – Jane Mason and Steve Donnelly, Personality of the Year – Wayne Vickers, Athletes of the Year – Kate Wright and Neil Hawkins. The Shakespeare Competition winners were: Div 1 – Kate Wright and Neil Hawkins, Div 2 – Dawn Davies and Malcolm Bowyer, Div 3 – Sarah Bland and Steve Kirk, Div 4 – Jane Mason and Geoff Hillman, Div 5 – Annabel Richardson and Michael Oliver.

In another notable milestone for the club Stratford AC's Roger Wilson will make his international debut this Saturday afternoon when he competes for England in the British & Irish Veterans' Cross Country International at Falkirk in Scotland. This completes a long, and sometimes difficult, journey since the 65-year old has been trying for 25 years to gain an England vest and almost lost his chance when his timing microchip failed to register in the main selection event. The Swansea Bay 10K saw over 2000 runners competing, and it took numerous phone calls and witnesses to persuade the selectors that Roger really had run the race and finished as 2nd O65. With a painful foot and a slight groin strain Roger is having to take things easy in the build up to the 6K event, but after all the hard work to get there it is unlikely that the ex-racing cyclist will let anything stop him from being on that start line. Roger and wife Sue have joined Stratford AC this year, having moved to the area after retirement to be nearer their daughters, and following on from 25 years with Sunderland Harriers where he still holds 14 club records.