

Stratford AC's senior men made a marvellous start to the new track and field season as they came second in their Midlands Men League Division 3 fixture at Leamington. The structure of the team is really starting to take shape with some of the older athletes supporting a highly promising set of youngsters. The chairman of the junior side of the club, Paul Bearman, was there watching and would have been very proud that 10 of the 16-strong team came through his team's coaching structure. With Leamington being relegated last summer it was a nice short trip that these Stratford males had to take, although when they got there the persistent rain wasn't particularly conducive to quality performances.

The first few field events take place before the track events begin and a slow start in the hammer (Ben Shuker 6A 17:79m, Keith Hawkes 6B 11:76m) was followed by a better showing in the pole vault (Joe Donaghue 5A 2:40m, Neil Hawkins 4B 2:10m), and an excellent result in the high jump (Neil Hawkins 2A 1:70m, Chris Bartlett 1B 1:65m). Another win followed in the long jump (Chris Wright 1A 6:66m, Joe Brocklehurst 6B 4:64m) as Chris looked like he was going to get a PB every time he jumped, while a double in Stratford's favourite event, the triple jump (Chris Bartlett 1A 13:35m, Chris Wright 1B 12:64m), really started to put the club up amongst the leaders. Things had started well on the somewhat damp track also. Big points arrived in the 400m hurdles (Joe Donaghue 3A 61:7, Rob Minton 2B 65:7), the 800m flat (Joe Brocklehurst 3A 2:00:4, Dan Wright 3B 2:11:3), with a brave attacking policy from Joe Brocklehurst, and the bonus of excellent positions in one of the club's weaker track events, the 200m (Neil Hawkins 3A 23:7, Joe Brocklehurst 6B 25:3). A collection of solid performances, rather than a few spectacular wins, can often amass a surprising amount of points and this continued with the 400m (Neil Hawkins 3A 51:6, James Clark 5B 55:6), the 2000m steeplechase (Keith Hawkes 5A 7:23:2, Tony Jackson 4B 7:54:0) and the 110m hurdles (Mal Hawkins 3A 18:4, Keith Hawkes 3B 24:6).

With a couple of the club's throwers unavailable the rest of the field events were never likely to yield much success, but ended up nothing like a whitewash with Ben Shuker especially putting all his winter training to good use. The javelin (Mal Hawkins 4A 37:17m, Ben Shuker 4B 33:28m), the shot putt (Neil Hawkins 6A 9:15m, Henry Lowry 4B 7:09m) and the discus (Henry Lowry 8A 20:56m, Ben Shuker 4B 20:44m) all saw sterling performances from the Stratford representatives. The track events were coming to a climax at the same time and the three remaining events saw outstanding performances from the now very tired Joe Brocklehurst and Joe Donaghue, a bit of quality from Stefan Ellis, Malcolm Bowyer's long-awaited track debut and Rob Minton looking like the first ever Stratford athlete to be competitive at the sharp end of a 5K. The 1500m (Joe Brocklehurst 2A 4:16:3, Paul Hawkins 5B 5:19:9), the 100m (Stefan Ellis 4A 11:7, Joe Donaghue 4B 12:9) and the 5000m (Rob Minton 3A 16:39:1, Malcolm Bowyer 4B 18:15:0) all accrued vital points, and with Stratford in a battle with the home club for second place it was clear that the end of afternoon relays would be pivotal.

Despite Leamington finishing above Stratford by one place in both relays it wasn't enough for them to snatch the runners up spot. Stratford's two teams did the club proud, even smashing the club record for the 4x100m with 45:4 seconds in an extremely tight and exciting race, in which they eventually came second. The 4x400m squad recorded 3:37:4 minutes to claim fifth place, and in doing so cemented one of the best results in the

club's track and field history. The team's supporters and officials (Mike Wright, Paul Bearman, Paul Hawkins, Lisa Oakes, John Turner and Daphne Hawkins) also played a major part in this success, which will hopefully be repeated next month at Yate (Bristol), who were the winners of this first fixture of four.