

The penultimate West Midlands Young Athletes Cross Country meeting at Weddington saw a fantastic performance from all of the Stratford AC junior team, culminating in their best ever overall result. This outstanding effort also saw the club move up above Leamington to 15<sup>th</sup> place for the season in the very strong 19-club league; a position that just couldn't have been imagined 2 years ago. This was all achieved with 4 of the runners feeling under the weather, but a great attitude and team spirit saw them do a fine job for the team.

The U11 girls deserve a special mention as they came 3<sup>rd</sup> on the day, which just shows what can be achieved with a full team in an age group. There haven't been too many occasions over the years when Stratford have beaten the mighty Tipton Harriers, so take a bow girls! Although Zoe Chandler (9:29 minutes, 11<sup>th</sup>) was one of the unwell quartet she kept going really well, but was suffering badly by the end and lost 4 places in the last 50m. Clemie Holden (9:32, 13<sup>th</sup>), like Zoe, made a fine debut, Molly White (10:00, 26<sup>th</sup>) picked a good time to produce a season's best (previously 35<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup>), Ellen Scholes (10:54, 54<sup>th</sup>) was another satisfied debutant and Hannah Taylor (11:30, 67<sup>th</sup>) continued her consistent running. All 3 debutants got left at the start due to inexperience and had to work their way through the field, although they eventually coped well with the initial shock of the step up from having only done local school races before.

In the U13 girls Katie Taylor (14:34, 43<sup>rd</sup>) had a pretty good start this time and kept it going well for another best of season, whilst sprinter Georgia Evans' (15:55, 80<sup>th</sup>) first race of the winter provided her with some useful endurance training. The U15 girls' race saw Sarah Woollacott (18:40, 31<sup>st</sup>) making her first club XC appearance and did she did very well, keeping an even pace all the way and overtaking people on the 2<sup>nd</sup> lap – the state of Sarah at the finish was testament to her having given 100%!

On the boys side the U11's race looked like a scene from 'Casualty' from a Stratford point of view, with Mike Suren (9:46, 21<sup>st</sup>) feeling ill before the start and Oscar Powell (11:45, 50<sup>th</sup>) suffering with a heel injury! Given the circumstances both did very well even to finish and were struggling by the end. Sam Taylor (14:02, 45<sup>th</sup>) had a real return to form in the U13 boys' after illness and had a great battle with debutante Alex Gregg (14:05, 46<sup>th</sup>), which Sam won courtesy of a sprint finish.

In the U15 boys' race Stratford's final patient - Dan Wright (16:51, 30<sup>th</sup>) - was feeling rough at the start but worked hard and kept an even pace to finish in a very respectable slot. Troy Tomlinson (17:16, 41<sup>st</sup>) was under instructions to go hard at the start, in order to get a good position after his previous week's fine show at the county championships, and he certainly did that, being in the top 3 after 800m! Troy faded but at least he had the confidence to go for it, even managing a good finish, and was rewarded with a season's best position.

With the final meeting in Wolverhampton in early March team manager Paul Hawkins is hoping that a high turnout can keep this excellent momentum going.

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The Stourbridge Stagger is a 10-mile multi-terrain race over in the Black Country and every year provides a stern test for those who want to go off-road. The event starts and finishes in Stourbridge itself but then heads out into the countryside and this year

attracted 429 runners, including 4 from Stratford AC. An excellent run from Kate Wright (73:32 minutes) meant that she was 4<sup>th</sup> lady back into the town and put her into 47<sup>th</sup> place overall, up from 84<sup>th</sup> in 2005, followed back by Mark Francis (75:19) in 56<sup>th</sup> who couldn't quite stay with Kate. Whilst Mark's rise of 91 places in 12 months wasn't matched by Allan Coldicott (87:33) he still had a strong run to come 187<sup>th</sup>, with Sarah Odell (92:13) having a fairly average race by her current standards but reaching the 252<sup>nd</sup> slot. With all the recent dry weather the course was remarkably firm underfoot and free of mud, and this was reflected in the Stratford quartet's times which were 8, 11, 6 and 2 minutes respectively quicker than their 2005 equivalents.