

Stratford AC's senior men's track and field team's season got off to a rather strange start as they finished seventh out of the eight teams competing in Midlands Division 2, their highest ever level after promotion last season, but they saw nothing at all to scare them for the rest of the campaign. The life of an athletics' team manager is never an easy one, but Paul Hawkins must have wondered what he had done to upset the gods as an horrendous catalogue of injuries, illnesses and unavailabilities completely ravaged the team. The spirit within the squad remained terrific though, with everyone pulling together to fill as many of the 34 individual slots as possible, and it was ironic that the club's debut at these heady heights saw scenes reminiscent of the happy days of Division 6 when shot putters hurdled and hurdlers shot putted!

Malcolm Bowyer will remember his afternoon at Yate for a while as he started off by not throwing in the shot, earning 0 points, and then, whilst he was unsuccessfully trying to persuade an over-zealous javelin official to allow him one throw before the steeplechase began, the gun went for the start of the race leaving him missing both events! Three gone and still no points. Much to everyone's disappointment Malcolm did manage to redeem the situation though, as he completed the 100m (14:8, 8B) and 400m (64:8, 8B) with no mishaps. Steve Marshall (6:57:7, 4A) was the abandoned 2000m steeplechaser, but he showed how much he has learnt about the event in 12 months by putting on a class show.

Joe Donaghue is a decathlete by trade and his versatility was a lifesaver for the club on a very warm day when filling events was the priority. After opening up with the pole vault (2:55m, 6A) and the 400m hurdles (70:9, 7A), Joe then picked up a stack of points as the B athlete in the long jump (5:14m, 4<sup>th</sup>), the triple jump (10:99m, 2<sup>nd</sup>) and the discus (24:89m, 2<sup>nd</sup>). Just to show off this versatility Joe had even walked the not inconsiderable distance from the train station to the track beforehand, and all this as he was struggling to breathe after a chest infection!

The ever-reliable Graham Black and James Chamberlain provided the backbone of the throws, with the former getting 5<sup>th</sup> A in the hammer with 25:59m, after starting with two no-throws, whilst the latter was the A athlete in the javelin (48:35, 2<sup>nd</sup>), shot (8:91m, 7<sup>th</sup>) and discus (24:90, 6<sup>th</sup>). This was a tremendous performance from James, especially on the javelin which saw his first serious throw since badly damaging his elbow at the end of last season. Chris Bartlett showed what a massive addition to the team he has become with some outstanding jumping to win an exciting triple jump (13:76m) on the last round, and come 2<sup>nd</sup> in the long jump (6:30m), with the added bonus of 2<sup>nd</sup> in the high jump (1:80m).

The backbone of the track on the other hand consisted of Rob Minton and Joe Brocklehurst, but to watch them run themselves into the ground on such a scorching afternoon was at times almost as painful as the competing. Rob warmed up with the 100m (13:0, 8<sup>th</sup> A), 200m (26:3, 8<sup>th</sup> A), 400m (55:2, 7<sup>th</sup> A), 400m hurdles (68:1, 6<sup>th</sup> B), 800m (2:07:4, 2B) and the high jump (1:55m, 4<sup>th</sup> B), while Joe eased himself into things with tremendous showings in the 800m (1:58:3, 1A) and the 1500m (4:20:4, 3A). After this little lot, and with the relays to come, the pair then had to team up for an extremely hot 5000m with no water station. The League Against Cruel Sports monitored the race, during which Rob (17:41:7, 7A) and Joe (death) displayed their varying levels of experience, for better or for worse, at this tough distance. Brennan Lively completed the track team by doing a sterling job in the 1500m, recording a time of 5:00:2 minutes to be placed 4<sup>th</sup> B and claim another invaluable 5 points.

An interesting collection of tired bodies then gathered trackside for the relays, but the 4x100m team (Rob, Joe B, Joe D and Chris) went off first and got a very creditable 6<sup>th</sup> place in a time of 47:8 seconds. A scratch 4x400m quartet of Rob – his ninth event – Brennan, Steve and Joe B ran their hearts out, but couldn't quite catch Kettering at the end and finished 8<sup>th</sup> in 4:02:2 minutes.

Despite the poor result the team once again demonstrated their tremendous battling qualities, and with a few more returnees there is no reason why they should not thrive at this level. For anyone out there with some spare cash, put it all on the team doing a whole lot better in the second fixture!

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The annual Stratford Fun Run takes place at 11 a.m. this Sunday morning at its traditional Recreation Ground venue. This relaxed event is ideal for all ages with a cost of £3 each or £6 per family, with further information available from Sarah Odell (01789 266569) or alternatively just turn up this Sunday by 10:30 a.m.