

Stratford athlete Ryan James was selected to compete for England in an international match in Budapest last weekend against several other European nations, including Norway, Ireland and the hosts Hungary, and he did himself proud, finishing 3rd in both the long jump and the 100 metres. This was Ryan's first international competition as a senior, after competing for both the Great Britain and England as a junior, and this recognition has been the highlight of a year that has been hampered by a nigglng knee injury.

Ryan trains 5 times per week under the guidance of National Long Jump coach John Crotty, but still works with his regular training group at Stratford AC. He has been concentrating on his sprinting this season as he built the strength up in his knee, and recently reached the final of the England Athletics Championships 100 metres, which doubles as the UK Championships. Ryan finished 7th there amongst a top class field, with a new personal best time of 10:56 seconds.

After competing in the recent UK Athletics "Jumps Fest" in Birmingham, Ryan won the elite long jump competition with a PB of 7:53m, and both his sprinting and long jump form convinced the selectors to take him to Hungary. He was amongst a group of other aspiring athletes, all of whom were being given invaluable experience of competing in international events.

Ryan commented afterwards "It's been a good experience. In the 100m I had to run in lane 8, and with no one inside me it was difficult to have anyone to push myself against. My reactions out of the blocks were terrible, but the second half of the race was good, and the time of 10:69 seconds showed I'm running consistently well at this level." He also added "The long jump was tricky in the swirling wind which messed around my run up, but it was a good competition and my best jump of 7:28m, and the performance at the 'Jumps Fest' gave me confidence that my knee is OK now."

Ryan competes for Birchfield Harriers but he and he was quick to praise the support he gets from Stratford AC, local physiotherapist Henry Lowry and also Cannons Gym in Leamington, where he does his weights training.

Stratford Upon Avon AC athlete Chris Bartlett has moved up to the U20 age group in triple jump this season, but he has proved that he can mix it with the older athletes by putting on a series of top class performances. His recent run of success started with finishing 1st in the Midlands Championships with a jump of 14:16m, and then he finished agonisingly in 4th place in the England Athletics championships, recording a leap of 14:37m, just outside his PB. His win at the UK Athletics "Jumps Fest", with 14:26m also gave him his first prize money and a bottle of champagne; the trouble is though Chris is still too young to drink!

Chris has also been selected as captain of the Warwickshire schools team at the English Schools Championships in Birmingham, and he will be joined by Amanda Evans (triple jump), Charlie Burn (400m) and Andrew Pozzi and Will Barnett in the long jump. The latter four were also due to join other Stratford AC athletes Emma Titcomb, Imogen Green, Iesha Martin, Seb Croft, Bryn Stretton, Georgie Evans, Isobel Burn and Portia Conn in the Warwickshire schools team at an inter-county match in flood hit Barnsley. Unfortunately with the track under water the athletes would have needed flippers rather than spikes and disappointingly the match had to be called off, but it still shouldn't undermine the achievement of the athletes producing the performances that earned selection in the first place.

Stratford AC's Steve Marshall recently lowered the club's senior men's track mile record at a London Inter-Club Challenge meeting at Parliament Hill. The Claverdon athlete finished an excellent third in a high-class field, just failing to catch the second-placed Belgrave runner, but did manage to record an excellent time of 4 minutes 47:11.

The Malvern Half Marathon took place last week and produced some great times for the four Stratford runners competing – although this may have had something to do with the course bypassing Upton-on-Severn because of flooding! The now 12-mile race started and finished at the Three Counties Showground, and a morning of warm sun and torrential showers saw difficult conditions for the field of 499 finishers.

The Stratford quartet will actually be disappointed about the change of distance since they were all going well on a surprisingly flat course, given the area, and would have liked to have posted some quick half-marathon times. Mark Francis (1 hour 23:26 minutes, 30th) showed how he is really starting to get back in the groove with a very strong run, whilst the continually improving Emma Bexson (1:34:05, 116th) summed up her great year with another fine run. Dave Maundrell (1:43:14, 221st) is another to have a spectacular 2007, and with Sue Taylor (2:19:33, 481st) battling right to the end the four local runners can be proud of their efforts under difficult circumstances. The challenge now is for them to repeat their same times next year!