

Last Saturday night at the Civic Hall saw Stratford AC's annual awards evening and review of the last 12 months, with top international 400m runner Daniel Caines making a welcome return as guest of honour. A lot has happened since he attended the Leisure Centre function in 2000 – the club has kept growing ever since, both in terms of numbers and successes, while only months later Daniel returned from Lisbon with a World Indoor Championships gold medal to add to his collection.

Paul Bearman, chairman of the junior section, gave a summary of their year, starting off with another successful Sports Hall report – retention of the Warwickshire title winning all 5 matches, 15 individuals representing the county in the inter-regionals (winning an amazing 12 medals) and Andrew Pozzi missing out on the UK best All Rounder title at the NIA by a tenth of a second. Track and field saw a rare off-year; a respectable mid-table finish in the National Young Athletes league balanced out by relegation from division 1 of the Heart of England League after 14 years, but numerous medals at the Warwickshire schools and county championships, and 4 Stratford athletes helping Warwickshire win the annual U13 and U15 inter County match in Yorkshire showed that there is still plenty of talent there. Also Charlie Burn, Andrew Pozzi, Chris Bartlett, Amanda Evans and Will Barnett were selected for the Warwickshire team that competed in the English schools championships, Chris Bartlett was selected for the Triple Jump in both the U20 and U23 inter regional matches, and Amanda and Andrew then went on to compete for the county in the English Schools Combined Event Championships in Exeter. The highlight though was probably the excellent club championships that saw well over 100 competitors, joined for the first time by another 20 or so from the Welcombe Hills School, and the 70 helpers that day showed just how much support is given to the club. Finally Paul paid tribute to the remarkable efforts of Graham Collins, who made the unusual journey from seniors to juniors and is, after 28 years of selfless and cheerful service, stepping back from front-line action.

The awards began with a special bursary to Chris Bartlett for help with training costs before Zoe Chandler (Junior Star of Tomorrow), Emma Titcomb and Jemma Lane (joint Club Person), Andrew Pozzi (All Rounder), U11 females' team (XC), Isobel Burn (Most Improved 300m), Charlie Burn (Most Improved 400m), Bryn Stretton and Georgie Evans (Most Improved), Andrew Pozzi and Amanda Evans (Athletes of the Year) all gained their well deserved recognition.

Paul Hawkins, chairman of the club, started his senior overview of 2007 with a mention of July's floods, which have left them slightly nomadic, although December's return to Swan's Nest Lane is being cheerfully bridged with the help of NFUM's FISSC club. On the competitive side, last winter saw a much better XC season than the year before, with the men coming 2nd in Division 4 of the Birmingham League, whilst the women's squad improved again so much in the Midland Women's League that they only just missed out on the medals. On the road running front, where it all began many years ago, there were many fine individual performances, but probably the best way for the club to judge its progress is in the road relays at Sutton Park, and for the second consecutive year the men qualified for the National 12-Stage relays last spring. Also, for the first time, the juniors had representation at the autumn relays, and the U13 and U15 girls' and U15 boys' teams more than held their own. The Warwickshire Road Race League results point to another positive year, while the triathlon section had another active season with individual successes at sprint, olympic and half-ironman distance, due in no small part to Steve Kirk's enthusiasm. Pete Evans qualified for the World Sprint champs in Vancouver next year as did

Debbie Cooper, who had a year to remember in qualifying for two other major championships, but from a team view the highlight had to be the National Team Relays, where two mixed teams both had great fun and performed spectacularly against some much larger tri-specific clubs. Onto the track, and with the men starting life at their highest ever level in the Midlands League they could have probably done without having an ‘everything that could go wrong did’ season, but despite all of that they stayed up comfortably(ish) in the end. The women’s squad had a terrific season of real progress, and even finished by winning the final match of the season, so there is genuine optimism for next year, although with the possibility of the men’s and women’s leagues combining things are a little unclear in the short-term.

The winners of the senior awards went to: Rob Minton (Athlete of the Year), Kate Wright (Athlete of the Year and Grand Prix competition female), Joe Brocklehurst and Dawn Davies (XC), Helen Monk (Most Improved female), John Turner (Most Improved male and Club Personality), Debbie Cooper (Triathlete of the Year), Chris Claxton Memorial Trophy (Karen Holmes) and Emerson Mayes (Grand Prix competition male). The monthly Shakespeare competition winners were: women - Kate Wright (Div 1), Naomi Whittaker (Div 2) and Jane Mason (Div 3); men – Rob Minton (Div 1), Andy Cockerill (Div 2), John Turner (Div 3) and Dave Maundrell (Div 4).

With an interesting question and answer session from Daniel Caines, and all the proceeds of the evening going to the firefighters’ fund, the event was another successful and revealing look back at the last 12 months of this thriving club.