

Rarely in sport, at whatever level, are you privileged to be a part of sporting history, but at the England Athletics Open Championships, held at the NIA in Birmingham, a large crowd were able to witness the fastest U17 men's 60m hurdles race ever seen in this country, and Stratford AC's Andrew Pozzi was one of the stars.

There was a pre-heat panic of a missing club vest, but after some debate he was allowed by the Track Referee to run in an unmarked vest, and a relieved Pozzi comfortably qualified for the final in a time of 8:08 seconds. The final took place 3 hours later and saw the best 8 hurdlers in the UK line-up, with the race also doubling up as the UK Championships. After 3 false starts this was reduced down to 7, but the fast maturing Pozzi admirably kept his focus and concentration and shot out of his blocks. Along with his 2 main rivals, Jack Meredith from Liverpool Harriers and Alex Nwenwu from Wolverhampton & Bilston, they remained neck and neck over the 5 barriers until Meredith just pulled ahead to win in 7:89 seconds, the fastest time in history by a UK U17 athlete. Pozzi, who ran a magnificent race, came home in the silver position in the 3rd fastest time ever in the UK in 7:94 seconds.

A stunned Pozzi said afterwards "I felt great going into the race, and although the false starts were annoying I didn't let them put me off and I just went for it. It's my first major medal at this level and I can't believe the time I ran. It will probably take a time to sink in what Jack and I did today, but it's a great feeling".

His nervous dad Nick and coach Paul Bearman sat anxiously watching in the stands, and Bearman said "It's the first time I've been that nervous for a while before a race because there was an air of anticipation that they would produce something special, and they didn't disappoint us". He added "It's worth mentioning that as a top multi-eventer Andrew trained on the previous Sunday over the hurdles, did shot on Monday, pole vault Tuesday, competed for Warwickshire schools on Wednesday (after a GCSE fitness assessment at school), and then rested for 2 days before competing! It's great to see him run such a fantastic race, and to see all the work that he's done over the last few months on his conditioning, speed and technical work come together." Andrew returned the following day to compete in the long jump and finished just outside the medals in 5th place on count back, with a best jump of 6:30m.

Several top overseas athletes competed with the best in the UK in the U20 triple jump, and although Chris Bartlett went into the competition with a nagging leg injury he blanked that out and, after a good consistent series of jumps, he went into the final round in 5th place. Being the first-class performer that he is, he produced an indoor pb jump of 14:38m in the last round to remain in 5th, and be placed as the 3rd best UK jumper.

As a first year in the U20 age group, Charlie Burn knew he had to up his game in the 400m and he duly qualified for semi finals after producing a seasons best of 50:42 seconds. In an extremely competitive semi-final he ran very well, before just running out of steam off the last bend to miss out on a place in the final.

The early part of the year sees a glut of various open and championship competitions at the NIA, and at the recent Midland Counties Indoor Championships 3 Stratford AC athletes ended up as medal winners. That man Andrew Pozzi was again right in the thick of things, producing excellent U17 gold, silver and bronze medal winning performances in the 60m (7:19 seconds), 60m hurdles (8:08) and the long jump (6:09m) respectively. Chris Bartlett again showed his class with a storming win in the

U20's triple jump, recording a best round of 13:78m, whilst Amanda Evans grabbed a terrific bronze in the U20 women's long jump with a best of 4:50m.

At the Birmingham Games, a non-championship time-trial event, there were some more impressive performances from the Stratford athletes, with a few familiar names popping up yet again! Andrew Pozzi won the U17 60m, registering a time (7:16) that ranked him fastest in the West Midlands and 7th in the UK, with Sam Mason-Brown taking 4th in 7:64 seconds. The latter then had a fine 200m to record a pb of 24:61 for 3rd place, whilst both featured heavily in the long jump with Pozzi 2nd on 6:30m and Mason-Brown peaking at 4:61m. Pozzi was also 2nd in the U17's 60m hurdles with 8:88 seconds, as was Charlie Burn in the U20's 400m when he notched 50:91, while Chris Bartlett triple-jumped an impressive 13:93m for 6th place in a highly competitive senior men's competition. From the girls' point of view there were a couple of stand out performances amongst the U15s, with a fine win for Georgie Evans (1:50m) as she cleared an indoor high-jump pb and a more than respectable 5th place for Isobel Burn (28:47) in the 200m.

Finally, at the third MCAA open meeting the highlights from a Stratford point of view were 2nd places for Georgie Evans (1:45m) in the U15 girls' high jump, Amanda Evans (10:36m) in the U20 women's triple jump and a new pb of 7:61 seconds for Sam Mason Brown in the U17 men's 60m.

Another Stratford AC junior, Edward Caswell, also showed his ability at a national level last week, when he came a memorable 10th out of 48 year 6 boys in the British Schools Biathlon Championships (which is swim followed by run).