

Combined Events is a very tough part of athletics and takes skill, talent, commitment and sheer bloody mindedness to succeed, and the 4 Stratford athletes competing for Warwickshire Schools in the recent ESAA national championships have all those attributes in spades. This gathering of the cream of the country's young multi-discipline talent took place at Bedford, and while the standard is understandably very high our gifted quartet were rewarded for consistently producing their best with a set of results that they can all be proud of.

The only Stratford male at the event was Adriano Ritchie, and he was competing in the Junior Boys' Pentathlon, which consists of the 80m hurdles, shot, long jump, high jump and finally the 800m. All of this takes place during one day, unlike the heptathlons which have a 4 / 3 split over 2 days, and Adriano was taking part on the opening day (Saturday). He started off steadily in the hurdles (13:55), but after fine showings in the shot (11:37m) and long jump (5:62m) he rocketed up that 34-strong field. Adriano then proceeded to slip a little after the high jump (1:45m) before finishing on a massive positive with an outstanding 2:11:68 800m, where he ran to the pre-race plan and streaked away to record one of the fastest runs of the day. This run moved him up into a fantastic 14th place, and a points total of 2,548, and was the highlight of a superbly consistent display.

The next day was the turn of the Junior Girls, with the 75m hurdles reflecting the shorter stride patterns, and with it the appearance of Eleanor Johnston. Unfortunately she fell heavily and badly injured herself on the last of said hurdles (13:9), but Eleanor still struggled to her feet and wasn't the slowest to finish. Despite this disasterous start, and now severely hampered for the rest of the competition, she kept going brilliantly to actually record a new club age record of 2,473 points. After the shot (7:44m) Eleanor was in 36th place, but she then continually picked up places during impressive high jump (1:48m) and long jump (4:73m) competitions. An extremely consistent set of splits were rounded off in the 800m (2:43:35), which gave her a grand total of 2,473 points, enough for 29th place and second counter for the Warwickshire team who came a creditable 7th.

Imogen Green produced a number of big performances when it really mattered to finish in an excellent 11th place out of a field of 38 in the Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon (80m hurdles, HJ, shot, 200m, LJ, javelin, 800m). Personal bests in three individual events, as well as the overall combined points total, saw the budding star come out well on top against many of her national rivals. The first day saw PB's in the hurdles (12:48) and 200m (26:84), and combined with a decent shot (8:40m) it would have been a perfect day had it not been for a slightly disappointing high jump (1:48m). After finishing the first day in 18th place Imogen opened up shop on day 2 with a memorable PB in the long jump (5:17m), and then her usual terrific javelin (31:42m) pulled her up to the giddy heights of 9th before easing back to 11th after the closing 800m (2:38:14). A new overall PB and club record of 4,190 points capped a fine weekend for this talented all-round athlete.

For the eldest age group at these championships, the Senior Girls, the heptathlon is the same as for the Intermediates except they start with a high hurdles of 100m rather than 80m, and Stratford's Amanda Evans proudly finished as third counter for a very strong Warwickshire team that grabbed the silver medal slot (behind the winners Sussex). On a warm weekend where conditions were conducive to performing well, Amanda did just that as she was placed 17th out of the 30 competitors. On the Saturday, a good start in the hurdles (17:18) and high jump (1:45m) put her well up the rankings in 15th place, although by the end of the day she was a few places lower following the shot (7:94m) and 200m (28:16). Consistent jumping (LJ 4:43m), throwing (javelin 25:05m) and running (800m 2:54:13) on the Sunday eventually meant an accumulated points total of 3,371 and a big part in this success of the county team. On a weekend when Amanda should have been on her way to university in Leeds, she typically stuck to her task and produced a steady performance across all disciplines, finishing a place higher than last year with another club record and PB.

The Watkins and Turner families were out in force again last week for the 19th running of the Daventry 6-miler, the last race in the Northamptonshire Road Race League. The event centres around the Ford Sports and Social Club and is a one-lap urban / rural undulating course, although the word 'hilly' does seem to crop up a lot! After going both under and over the A45, the 104 runners make their way out towards Staverton before looping back round to face a half-mile uphill sprint to the finish. The somewhat casual start, which

rather took everyone by surprise, took place in cool conditions with the sun trying to break through, and once it did do the second-half of the race took place under very warm sunshine.

First back for Stratford AC was John Turner in a pretty respectable 41:43 (compared to 40:41 in 2003, although a slightly different course then), and this put the old fox up into 33rd place, although he was pushed back into a rare 2nd slot in the O60's stakes by Bob Statham (Cov Godiva). Luke Watkins (45:56) was next back in 57th place, and he is finding it harder and harder these days to hold off his rapidly improving dad Graham (46:17) who was 58th. A fairly tired Andy Turner wrapped things up for the club in 74th with a time of 49:18, whilst the men's winner was Matt Almond (Cov Godiva) in 30:37 and the winning lady was Sally Baker (Rugby & Northampton) in 37:44.