

This winter has once again seen Stratford AC's remarkable youngsters excel in the Warwickshire Sportshall League, and consequently they had a significant presence in the Warwickshire squad that participated in the regional finals recently. The West Midlands events were held at Worcester for the U13s and 15s, and Coventry for the U11s, and the challenge with these is always to try and get the better of the inevitably strong Birmingham teams. The younger age group managed to keep things relatively close to the city teams, with the girls third and the boys second, but although a clean sweep of seconds for all the U13 and U15 county teams reflected their great effort these age groups were actually totally dominated by a very talented Birmingham side who now go forward to the national finals.

Over at Coventry this highlight of the regional sportshall calendar saw a trio of both male and female Stratford athletes representing their county. Amongst the second-placed boys all three of the local competitors did tremendously well by picking up medals, with the highlight being a fantastic gold medal performance from Alex Eves in the speed bounce. Alex also did well in the standing triple jump, while Rory Dwyer's bronze in the standing long jump and Ben Taylor's equivalent in the speed bounce completed an impressive set of results from the club representatives.

The U11 girls' competition also saw a Stratford gold medal, as Bethany Stokes impressively unleashed the javelin further than anyone else and give Warwickshire vital points in the process. Bethany also came 5<sup>th</sup> in the speed bounce, 4<sup>th</sup>-placed Felicity Bee agonisingly missed out on a medal in the standing triple jump (as well as performing admirably in the ball throw) and Sophie Connor can be proud of her efforts in the vertical jump and ball throw. This all helped the county to third place behind winners Birmingham, and only one place adrift of a silver medal slot.

Meanwhile over at Worcester the older age groups were having similar success. The U13 categories were the only ones where the club had less than three representatives, but Jeniva Chambers and Molly White can be highly satisfied with their efforts in the girls' events. Jeniva gained an impressive bronze in the standing long jump and Molly White, who had competed that day in a schools XC, ran her heart out as ever in the 4-lap race, and also came 5<sup>th</sup> in the speed bounce. For the U13 boys Luke Beardsmore grabbed a fantastic silver in the speed bounce, and Jackson Goodrum got a bronze in the shot but if he hadn't fouled a massive last throw he would surely have walked away with gold! Alex Grant was close to medalling in both the 2-lap race and vertical jump, but Patrick Eves had a mixed meeting as he did well in the vertical jump but then got injured in the obstacle relay.

The oldest age category produced the highest number of Stratford medal winners as 5 of the U15s walked away with some bling – and this despite three of them feeling unwell! Eleanor Johnston was one of these, but still produced a fantastic series of performances to take gold in the standing long jump and 4<sup>th</sup> in the all-rounder standings courtesy of another 4<sup>th</sup> (2-lap) and 5<sup>th</sup> (shot). Another gold came from Anna O'Leary in the speed bounce (11<sup>th</sup> amongst the all-rounders), whilst another of those laid low – Isobel Burn – was rewarded for her efforts with a silver in the speed bounce, which helped her to 16<sup>th</sup> on the all-rounder rankings.

The U15 boys continued the success as Josh Buzzard gained a well-deserved silver in the standing long jump, with his 2-lap (5<sup>th</sup>) and speed bounce (10<sup>th</sup>) performances putting him as 11<sup>th</sup> in the all-rounder competition, in which George Gravestock came 9<sup>th</sup>. George was another feeling under the weather, but still showed a high-level of commitment as he grabbed a bronze in the speed bounce, as well as a 5<sup>th</sup> in the standing triple jump and 8<sup>th</sup> in the 4-lap race. Adriano Ritchie was team reserve, but guested in a couple of the individual events and would have actually come 2<sup>nd</sup> in the shot!

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One athlete who came through these remarkably successful junior ranks is Joe Brocklehurst, and he seems to be getting faster and faster with each passing year. Having recently broken the club's road running 10K record Joe has just smashed another one, this time over 5 miles, with an electric performance at the Alsager 5 in Cheshire. This flat and fast course always attracts quality runners from a wide area, and although the cold and windy conditions (and fairly shambolic start) will have slowed them down a little the fact that Joe 'only' came 17<sup>th</sup> with a time of 25:37 shows the high standard at the sharp end of the 1,200 field. It will be interesting to see how a lack of sleep affects his training and racing as he prepares for fatherhood! Claire Martin (Telford Harriers) won an enthralling three-way women's battle by 2 seconds, as she was timed at 27:29 for 55<sup>th</sup> place, while Phil Wicks (Belgrave Harriers) was a much clearer winner in the men's contest with 23:25.