

Stratford AC's annual presentation evening is probably the one occasion each year when the whole club comes together as one, and various reflections of the past year give an indication of just what a enormous range of activities the members get up to. The Civic Hall again hosted this celebration of all that is good about local sport and Paul Bearman, chairman of the junior section, started off his summary of the year with a grateful thank you to the small army of coaches, officials and helpers that do so much to ensure things go smoothly. The juniors had another fantastically strong year in Sportshall (indoor winter athletics), retaining their Warwickshire title and sending a dozen of these youngsters to represent the county at the Inter-Regionals, winning an amazing 12 medals between them and 6 of the U13 boys going onto the national finals. Two big highlights of the indoor season for the club were Imogen Green's 16th place (3rd in the Midlands) in her first national Combined Events Championships at Sheffield, and Conor Guest's fantastic shot putt performances in winning the Midlands and National titles on successive weekends.

The cold months also witnessed the junior cross-country squad continuing their meteoric rise under the tutelage of Paul Hawkins and Karen Taylor, with great progress in the West Midlands Young Athletes League as the group finished an excellent 11th. Individually Zoe Chandler, Nienke Verwer and Fergus Allison all shone especially brightly, with the former two winning the Junior Girls County Schools, and then being joined by Nienke, Lucy McDermott, Molly White, Becky Young and Jack McMullen at the English Schools XC Championships near Loughborough. Zoe and Nienke were also selected to run for Warwickshire at the prestigious Inter-Counties event at Nottingham.

Onto the outdoor season, and SAC athletes won numerous medals at the Warwickshire Schools and the Warwickshire County championships, as well as competing in the National Young Athletes League again, with thanks going to Michael Lane for organising that so efficiently. The U20s successfully joined forces in the National Junior League with Leamington, competing as Avon Spa, whilst a fantastic team effort from all the age groups saw the club win the Heart of England title in their first season back in the top flight. Six of the athletes (Adriano Ritchie, Amanda Evans, Imogen Green, Conor Guest, Lucy McDermott and Eleanor Johnston) represented Warwickshire in the English Schools National Track & Field Championships at Sheffield, and enormous pride can be taken in both their performances and the fact that the club provided 20% of the county squad. Combined events featured highly again in 2009, predominately because the essence of the younger side of the club is all based around trying a variety of disciplines until you're ready to specialise. A fine example of this is Andrew Pozzi - within 18 months he'd converted from CE to hurdles, and the success he's had since has been phenomenal. It's taken Andrew 7 years of hard graft developing his talent to get to this level, but this is just a stepping-stone to where he wants to be and the longer-term plan continues to be refined and developed.

Andrew was consequently presented with a Special Achievement Award, with the other main winners as follows: Junior Star of Tomorrow (Rory Dwyer), Junior XC (Fergus Allison and Zoe Chandler), Most Improved over 300m (Isobel Burn) and Most Improved over 400m (Adriano Ritchie), Best All-Rounder (Imogen Green), Most Improved Athletes (Conor Guest and Lucy McDermott) and Athletes of the Year (Conor Guest and Eleanor Johnston).

The chairman of the club, Paul Hawkins, was ably assisted this year in his review of the seniors by Tony Jackson (road), Steve Kirk (triathlon) and Sarah Bland (track & field), but is certainly still best placed to present the XC round-up! The men finished halfway up Division 2 of the Birmingham League (led home by Rob Minton in all 4 races), which was no mean effort after promotion and the unavailability of some of their top runners, whilst the women did fantastically well to finish 7th (6th veterans) against all of the clubs in the Midlands.

On the road running front - the staple diet of the seniors - all the indicators are positive, with membership numbers up (to around 140), improved results in the Midlands' road relays and an unprecedented number of club records and Personal Bests having been set during the year. Special mentions went to John Turner and Kate Wright, who have rewritten the club records in their particular age groups, and it can only be marvelled at the enormous array of fast and furious, or weird and wonderful, on- and off-road events that the Stratford seniors put themselves through all year round!

Track & field in 2009 proved to be just as enjoyable and just as frustrating as 2008! After missing out on promotion by the narrowest of margins the previous year, and with more of the talented juniors graduating up to the senior squad, there were high expectations at the start of the summer. An extremely strong division (5 of the Midlands League) was great entertainment for the neutrals and statisticians alike, but managers Paul Hawkins and Sarah Bland (who somehow also found time to set a number of field club records) had to work very hard just to get competitive teams out for the latter half of the season, and unfortunately things rather slipped away to leave them at the same level again for next year. It was very heartening to see how the

seniors and older juniors come together so well for these enjoyable meetings, as well as noting how many members will take themselves out of their comfort zones for the sake of the club cause.

Steve Kirk has done a tremendous job in the last few years in promoting and co-ordinating the enthusiastic band of triathletes within the club, and for a very small club (in tri terms) they certainly punch well above their weight. The National Club Relays again saw SAC finish as one of the top non-tri specific clubs in the country, despite the ever-increasing standard of competition, and Debbie Cooper, Emma Bexson, Dawn Davies and Pete Evans all qualifying for international representation at either triathlon or duathlon despite illness and injury taking their toll. The summer saw Wayne Vickers (Frankfurt), Steve Kirk and Keith Hawkes (both Barcelona) complete gruelling Ironman distance tri's, as well as impressive shorter events from fledgling triathletes such as Sarah Odell, Marianne Flint and Rob Minton.

The main senior awards went to: XC (Rob Minton and Sarah Bland), Triathlete of the Year (shared between Wayne Vickers and Steve Kirk), Grand Prix (Mark Francis and Kate Wright), Most Improved (Martin Todman and Debbie Crisp) and Athletes of the Year (Rob Minton and Sarah Bland). The monthly Shakespeare race competition winners were: Kate Wright (Div 1), Sarah Littell (2) and Debbie Crisp (3); Rob Minton (Div 1), Allan Coldicott (2), Phil Brennan (3) and Graham Watkins (4).