

## English National Cross Country Championship Report 24 February 2013

The 2013 English national cross country championships returned to Herrington Park Sunderland for the first time since 2007. Despite the snow and the course turning into one of the muddiest in living memory, the local organising committee pulled out all the stops to provide a fitting venue for this prestigious event.

The highlight of the afternoon from a Northern perspective was the senior men championship. Reigning champion Keith Gerrard, a Manxman living and training in the south with his adopted club Newham & Essex held off Northern champion Steve Vernon (Stockport Harriers) to come home with a 3 second victory margin. It was yet another thrilling race between these two with Gerrard leading most of the way but it was Vernon who had the advantage on the final hill, only for Gerrard once again to find something extra in the final run in to hold on to his title but it was a mighty close thing. So for the record these two athletes have



finished one and two in the national in two consecutive years now, they also finished one and two in the junior national in 2005!

Although disappointed not to have won the national Steve can take heart from his record 5th senior North title won at Knowsley last month and his impressive national record which now reads; winner 2011, runner up 2013, 2012 and 2009, third place in 2010, 2008 and 2006.

The big question amongst the spectators was who was going to lift the team title? After their strong showing in the Northern Leeds City the reigning national title holders once again looked the team to beat. Morpeth H & AC felt they had the athletes to challenge the Yorkshire club this time and had clearly done their homework knowing to win titles at this level need to turn your best runners out with good backup. As the race unfolded it was impossible to tell who had the upper hand between Leeds and Morpeth, James Wilkinson was first home for Leeds in 7th place closely followed by Jonny Taylor of Morpeth just one place and one second behind. As the middle order counters streamed in it still looked too close to call until it was finally settled by Ryan Stephenson closing Morpeth in 52nd place. Leeds City AC last man Mike Burrett closed just 6 places and 11 seconds behind him. Tipton who led the Midland challenge also packed well and although they closed their last runner in 50th ahead of Morpeth and Leeds it was not enough to beat the big two from the North.

When the dust (or should I say mud in this case) had settled Morpeth had a 16 point victory margin (153 points to Leeds 169 and Tipton on 195) which was enough to secure their first senior men's team title. It was fitting that after so many years of turning out good cross country and road relays teams that they should lift their first senior men's national cross country title so close to home. To hammer home the importance of good team packing Morpeth also lifted the nine to score title with 382 points to Leeds City 423. Morpeth received their medals from the proudest man at Herrington Park no less than the President of Morpeth Jim Alder it was a day to remember.

Titles and medals are always difficult to win at this level and so it proved in the other events with it being lean pickings for Northern clubs and athletes. Adam Howard (Oldham & Royton H & AC) lifted the under 17s men crown with Joe Steward (East Cheshire Harriers & Tameside AC) collecting the silver medal. Daniel Evans (Warrington AC) captured the under 15s boys title, while City of York AC collected a team silver in the under 13s boys.

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Sonia Samuels Sale Harriers Manchester put in a big effort in the senior women's race and picked up the silver for her efforts. Expectations of team medals for Northern clubs never materialised with Hallamshire Harriers finishing 4th. Jenny Walsh (Spenborough & District AC) was another athlete who had to settle for silver this time in the junior women event with Vale Royal AC just picking up a team bronze.

Annabel Mason (Wakefield District H & AC) was the only individual Northern female athlete to claim a title at Sunderland with her impressive victory in the under 17s women championship. In what was always going to be a tight race she held off the strong Southern challenge from Grace Baker and Alice Clay to come home with a 5 second victory margin.

The North had high hopes in the under 15s girls but despite finishing three athletes in the top five we only collected one medal through Harriet Knowles-Jone (Warrington AC) who picked up the silver. Warrington missed out on medals by 4 points in the team race. Amelia Lancaster (City Sheffield AC) was another who also picked up an individual silver in the under 13s, Sale Harriers Manchester picked up team silver a long way behind a very strong Herne Hill team. [Results](#)

*Top Steve Vernon and Keith Gerrard lead the pack up the hill courtesy [Darkstar](#)*

*Middle James Wilkinson Leeds and Jonny Taylor Morpeth lead in their clubs at Sunderland, photo Hudson Stoker*



Adam Howard U/17 Champion

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*Morpeth National Cross Country Champions 2013 photo Hudson Stoker*