

NA Cross Country Championships Report Bill McGuirk 2008

RATHER than mud of late athletes faced a revamped Roundhay Park course which, in parts, was more like a bowling green, for the Northern Athletics 2008 Cross-Country Championships. Thanks to John Lunn and Keith Belcher and all and sundry from the members of the West Yorkshire clubs, a major championship returned to the popular venue after an absence of 10 years.

And for Gemma Miles and Dave Webb the conditions were instrumental in both athletes picking up their first senior titles, and in Webb's case, his first-ever individual medal after numerous times of trying. In both races Miles and Webb had to see off the challenge of



defending champions - Hatti Dean and Andi Jones - and they stamped their authority by pushing them off a podium place. Dean, running with the confidence that led her to 15th place in the World

Championships in Mombasa 10 months



ago, not surprisingly, cut out the early pace but it wasn't long before the warning signs came out when she was swamped by the chasing group of eventual medalists Miles, her Kendal team-mate Sarah Tunstall and Greater Manchester champion, Carly Needham (Rochdale). Also in contention were Victoria Wilkinson (Bingley), Susan Partridge (Leeds City) and Pauline Powell, of

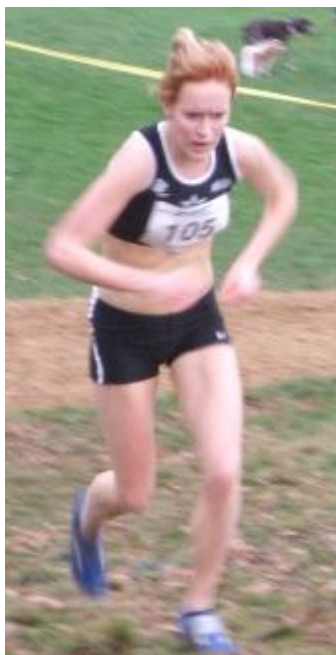
Blackburn. With the first circuit completed Dean, perhaps the exertions of competing in a tough race in Saville seven days previously starting to kick in, was back in fourth place which was the signal for Miles to take it on from the front. "I hadn't planned to take it on, it just sort of happened," said the eventual winner. "I've been runner-up twice before so I was hoping to make it a win this time round. "I knew I was in good shape - seventh in Gateshead, seventh in Liverpool and eighth in Edinburgh so far this winter - so it was a case of now that I'm in the front put my head down and be positive and make sure no one catches me." And no one did. Tunstall was the closest at the finish after calling on

all her hill and fell running experience to overtake Needham on the final hill to cross the line 21 seconds behind the winner. "I think the conditions suited me today," said Tunstall, who found the conditions totally different to her last outing in Belfast where she finished in 10th place behind Haley Yelling. "The hills and the wind were no problem. I'm really pleased because I was aiming for a top five so second is really good," added the Toro Under-23 representative. Needham finished a comfortable third with Dean, despite her disappointment, carrying on to the finish in fourth place. For all of the youngsters watching, Dean's determination to finish even though things were definitely not right, was a sight to behold. The Hallamshire athlete could well have dropped out but her resolve and perseverance got her through in the end which was a good thing especially for the rest of the team as they hung on by just one point from Bingley to win the team gold medals.

The senior men's 12k got off to a similar start as the women's with the defending champion taking it out from the gun. After the completion of the first of three large circuits, Jones looked as though he was unstoppable as he led by 20 metres. However, midway round the second lap with the big hill to be negotiated, the chasing pack pounced and within a matter of metres Jones was pushed back into fourthplace. And it was Webb, fourth last year, who proved the strongest by getting away on the last lap to win by seven seconds from Vernon with Lancashire a similar distance back in third. Webb, who competes for England in Belgium in two weeks time prior to a tilt at the National, said: "I was



happy to wait on the first lap and see who was up for it and when Andi began to come back to us I sensed then that I was in with a good chance. "There were still three of us together midway through the last lap but I managed to get away off the brow of the hill." Vernon's chances of victory slipped away when he was hit by a bout of stitch just as Webb made his decisive break though the Stockport



World Cross representative didn't decry Webb's success. "I'm a bit disappointed not to win today. I wanted to give Dave a harder race but I suffered badly with a stitch at a critical time in the race. "But all credit to Dave. He's in good form at the moment and he deserved his victory." Jones, who became a new dad nine days earlier, had no complaints about relinquishing his title saying there were three better lads on the day. "They were too good. I knew on the second lap that I was struggling a bit. I'm just pleased to finish fourth." Leeds City had no problems in retaining the team title for the sixth time in a row with the Yorkshire club's scoring six finishing in the top 20!

The curtain came down on a successful championship with the under-20 women's contest and it proved to be the most exciting climax of all with the timekeeper's unable to split the first two athletes home. However, the judges gave Gateshead's Mary Ferrier the verdict by inches from Rotherham's Rosie Edwards. Ferrier's victory follows her success in 2001

(U-13), 2003 (U-15) and 2004 (U-17). It was a nail-biting win for the North Eastern champion who was still six or so metres down on her rival with 20 metres to go the line. Edwards, who finished only fourth in the Yorkshire Championships, relegated champion and Rotherham team-mate Natalie Grant, into third place.

The day's programme opened with Blue Haywood (Lincoln Wellington) going one better than last year to win the under-17 Women's event with Lancaster and Morecambe's and Lancashire gold and silver medallists Hannah Bateson and Annika Jarman, second and third. In the under-17 men's championship, Jeremy Gilmour (Trafford) got away on the final hill 800 metres from the finish to leave Elswick's Philip Hurst in second place. Gilmour, second at Gateshead and fourth at Liverpool, came home eight seconds clear of the North Eastern champion, with Border's Tom Farrell taking the last podium place. Ellenbrough's Cumbria Schools' champion, Hannah Bethwaith, led the field home to win the under-13 girls event from Liverpool runner-up Bethany Jones (Leigh) with North Eastern and Durham Schools' champion Zoe Hewitson (Shildon) in third place.

Greater Manchester champion Jamie Crompton (Horwich RMI) won the under-15 boys race by five seconds from Michael Priestly (Gosforth) and C Hulse of Sale Harriers, Manchester. Yorkshire athletes dominated the under-15 girls championship with a repeat of the first two home. Victory went to Lauren Proctor (Wakefield) by just one second with Bingley's Holy Shreeve in second place. Calli Thackery (Hallamshire), who was fourth in the Yorkshire Champs, finished in third place. Fergus Roberts (Richmond and Zetland) was another Yorkshire champion to taste victory. Roberts was a comfortable winner of the under-13 boys event finishing 21 seconds ahead of UK Cross Challenge leader Callum Short (Bolton United) with Morpeth's North



Eastern champion, Adam Harrington, coming out of the chasing pack to snatch third place. Alistair Brownlee (Bingley) capped a fine day for Yorkshire athletes by winning the under-20 men's title. After main rival Ricky Stevenson (New Marske) dropped out while in contention midway through the contest, Brownlee went on to win by 36 seconds from Morpeth's Jonny Taylor and Jonathan Brownlee (Bradford GS).

Report by Bill McGuirk [Results on 2008 Results](#)

[Index](#)

Hill 60 at Roundhay Park, brought back memories for some of the athletes who had run here before