

Northern Cross Country Champs 2010

REPEAT performance by Steve Vernon in Northern Athletics' Cross-Country Championships at Blackburn, while Hatti Dean lifts the senior women's title again after three year interlude

THE shroud of mist covering the Witton Park venue hid a remarkable performance by Stockport's Steve Vernon as he charged his way to an impressive third senior championship victory.



The unassuming 29-year-old, who bypassed the opportunity to run for England in Antrim in favour of defending his title over a well-drained 11.5km course stamped his authority on proceedings right from the word go.

There was only going to be one winner after Vernon assumed control before the completion of the first kilometre despite facing among his main rivals past winner Andy Jones (2006/2007) and former English National champion, Peter Riley, who at Parliament Hill won in 2006.

Tracking Vernon, albeit a considerable distance adrift came Salford's Jones with Bolton's Tom Lancashire, bronze medallist in 2008, a similar distance back in third place.



Behind the leading trio an interesting battle unfolded between Riley and home-based Ben Fish who was given huge support by the Blackburn spectators.

There was no change in the top three placings though the gaps widened as the race reached it's final conclusion.

Vernon, as he did on Merseyside 12 months earlier drove on harder on the final circuit to eventually come home with a 39-seconds advantage to lift the gold medal with Jones, a true supporter of Northern Athletics Championships, crossing the line in second place 35-seconds ahead of bronze medallist Lancashire. Leigh's Riley showed glimpses of former glory when he pulled clear of Fish in the closing stages to finish in fourth place.

Vernon, who won his first Northern title in 2004 and repeated that success in St Helen's last year, was cock-a-hoop after his victory saying, with a huge smile on his face: "That one gave me the most satisfaction.

"I gave Antrim a miss as I was determined to put in a good performance here on a true cross-country course.

"Naturally, I'm delighted to have run so well which puts me in the right frame of mind for my next, and main, target for the winter.

"That's the National! After finishing second last year (Parliament Hill) and third the year before (Alton Towers) I want to win the National.

"My coach and I have decided that I won't be racing any more until Leeds at the end of next month. It will be a case of hard training over the coming weeks in the build up to the National.

"Then it's the Trials for the Worlds but at the moment everything is focused on the National." Leeds City were once again comfortable winners of the team trophy led home by seventh-placed Alan Buckley though there was some confusion at the presentation over how many

times the Yorkshire outfit had been successful.

After the man on the mic had announced that it was Leeds' seventh successive victory an almighty roar from the six counters - Buckley, a muddy Darren Bilton (14th), Martin Hilton (17th), Adam Osborne (26th), Mike Burrett (29th) and Chris Burchall (34th) - voiced in harmony that it was their eighth success.

However, it will be left to officials to sort that out as the listings in the race programme clearly states that their first victory came in 2004!

The junior men's race was won by James Wilkinson who was untroubled in producing the day's biggest favourite tag.

The European Cross-Country Championship bronze medallist, who finished fourth as a first-year junior when the championships were held in Leeds in 2008, bided his time before pulling away to win by 21 seconds from current Yorkshire champion, Andrew Hayes with Karl Billington, winner of the Lancashire Championship on the same course two weeks earlier, a further four seconds back in third place.

Wilkinson led Leeds City to another comfortable team victory though, disappointingly, only three clubs closed in.

The under-17 men's contest produced the closest finish of the day with last year's runner-up Sam Atkin (Lincoln Wellington) having to pull out all the stops to go one better this time round to hold off the challenge of Junior Great North Run winner Ben Connor (Derby AC) with just two seconds separating the pair at the line.

North Eastern Counties champion Michael Priestley came through from 10th place on the opening lap to finish third just three seconds behind Connor.

Merseysider Nick Jones improved from his 11th place in last year's championships to take gold this time round in the under-15 boys event.

The Wirral AC athlete relegated Liverpool McCain Cross Challenge winner James Lamswood into second place by a 10-second margin with Adam Sixsmith (Trafford) just a few strides back in third.

North Eastern Counties champion Ben Spencer (Middlesbrough AC (Mandale)) carried on the good form to win the under-13 championship by four seconds from the previous week's Cardiff McCain Cross Challenge winner, Jack Crabtree of East Cheshire and Tameside AC with lightly-raced Mathew Sheen (Vale Royal) sprinting in to finish in third place.



SIX days after her triumph in Cardiff, Hatti Dean strode to a confident victory to win her second Northern Athletics senior women's title three years after her first success.

The Hallamshire Harrier's victory ran to a similar path to Vernon's as she took an early lead and was never headed after that to cross the line well clear of her 300 rivals. Dean is coming into top form at the right time after her disappointing 22nd place in the European Trials in Liverpool in November.

Two wins in a row against top-class opposition is just the results the 27-year-old needs before defending her National title.

Bingley's Victoria Wilkinson followed Dean home 26 seconds later with Leeds City's Scottish Commonwealth marathon representative holding off Trafford's Kirsty Milner for third place.

Dean led Hallamshire to a clear team victory ahead of Sale and Leeds City.

Natalie Grant has a gold medal to add to the bronze she won in 2008 after getting the better of Hannah Bateson to win the under-20 women's championship.

Grant, who also finished sixth last year, is also the holder of the Yorkshire crown. The Rotherham Harrier won the 6km contest in 23min 51secs, with Lancaster and Morecambe's Bateson four seconds behind.

Vale Royal's Rebecca Craigie, having her first cross-country race of the winter, produced a bronze-medal performance in 24:11.

As in the male age group at under-20, only three teams closed in with victory going to Vale Royal from Lincoln Wellington and Kingston upon Hull.

The under-17 women's championship went to last year's runner-up Georgia Taylor-Brown. The East Cheshire and Tameside athlete won the opening event on the programme by 13 seconds from Leigh's prolific racer Laura Riches who is equally at home on the fells and the track.



Spensorough's Jenny Walsh finished a comfortable third.

Vale Royal celebrated another team success.

City of York's Katy Wood, winner in the North East at Gateshead and the Junior Great North Run, won the under-15 girls race by seven seconds, finishing ahead of Scarborough's Rebecca Mills with Natalia Hackett (Hallamshire), a close-up third.

Kingston upon Hull denied Vale Royal another team victory as good packing by Liverpool led to the bronze medals on count back from Hallamshire.

East Cheshire and Tameside's Bethany Donnelly caught long-time leader Lydia Turner (Birtley) to win the under-13 girls championship.

To most observers it was a surprise result as Turner had won in Cardiff six days earlier with Donnelly finishing in 17th position.

Donnelly timed her run to perfection after it looked as the North East champion was going to take first place for the second time.

Blackburn's Elizabeth Greenwood finished in third place.

* A highly-successful championship once again with huge thanks going to Blackburn Harriers; Bronwen Earnshaw - Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council; StartFitness and, of course, all the hard-working Northern Endurance Officials who were at their posts for the best part of six hours!

Report Bill McGuirk Photos, [Mick Hall](#). [Dave Greenwood](#), [Adam Kerfoot-Roberts](#) and Ken Smith



Salford men made a big effort but had to settle for silver team medals



Silver for Sale women as well