

North East Cross Country Championships Report 15 December 2011

Stevenson and Smith claim North East Titles



Rickey Stevenson may have missed out on place in the GB team for the European Cross-Country Championships but he showed his tremendous potential with a comfortable victory in the North Eastern Counties Championships in East Cramlington Nature Reserve. The New Marske athlete bounced back in fine style despite his dislike for the muddy terrain encountered which was a true test of stamina for the 300 who lined up on a bitterly cold day.

After a stint of altitude training in Kenya, Stevenson saw off the challenge of former Sunderland athletes Patrick - champion two years ago - and Jack Martin, to win by 18 seconds. The Teessider, who was winning his first NE senior cross-country title, was happy with his performance stating it was a solid run despite the tricky underfoot conditions.

The 23-year-old said: "I knew I was fit the Trials at Liverpool was a blip and a big disappointment but I was quite pleased with the way I ran today. "I set off quite steadily before easing to the front so when Patrick took it on I was quite happy to just sit in and take a ride before taking the lead with around 2k to go. "Twelve kilometres on the country is always going to be tough but I thought I handled things OK. "Even though you can't read into it too much what did please me more than ever is the fact that I've never been in this kind of shape at this time of year before so it shows I'm going in the right direction."

In Liverpool Stevenson finished in 17th place with Patrick Martin 16 places and 30 seconds back but, over a much stiffer test, while the placing's were the same, only 18 seconds separated the duo at the line. In the early stages, after Martin and Stevenson got away, Jack Martin, like his older brother now running for Stockport after moving on from Sunderland, was a lonely figure in third place as Stevenson's New Marske team-mate Andy Wiles, Morpeth's Matt Nicholson and Durham City duo Dan Garbutt and Michael Crawley gave chase. However, the leading pair showed no signs of cracking and the gaps began to widen even further the longer the contest unfolded. While Stevenson's victory made up in a small way for not lining up in Slovenia, Cramlington could well be the base for a strong winter leading into Olympic year. "I'll probably run Ribble Valley after Christmas and then tackle the short course race at the Great Edinburgh International - he won the event in 2010 - at the turn of the year," added Stevenson. Gateshead, with Marc Elliott their first scorer in eighth place, won from a depleted defending champions Morpeth while Durham City were delighted to finish just ahead of Tyne Bridge to pick up the bronze awards.

Just days after flying in from her America base Kirsty Legg had to settle for second place in defence of her North Eastern Counties cross-country title in Cramlington. The Teessider crossed the Atlantic after posting an impressive 3,000 metres time but over an extended eight kilometres she never challenged Rosie Smith who had finished runner-up 12 months previously. The cold and wet conditions certainly didn't suit the Middlesbrough/Mandale athlete after her exploits in the USA. However, she stuck to the task and though her main rival always looked the likely winner only 25 seconds separated the duo at the finish.

Once the 110-strong field settled down after the opening kilometre the leading contenders were already at the head of affairs. After completing two kilometres, Smith was leading with Morpeth's Ashley Gibson in close attendance and Legg 15 metres off the pace. Smith, who was not far away from making the trip to the European Championships after finishing 12th - eighth senior - in the trials in Liverpool, was being egged on by family and club colleagues and the pace eventually forced Gibson to give way leaving Legg to take up the chase. However, while conditions were anything but favourable, Legg managed to contain the advantage all the way to the line suggesting that there is more to come from the Teessider in the coming weeks. While not relishing the conditions, track specialist Gibson comfortably held on to bronze medal position with her Morpeth team-mate Jane Hodgson finishing a clear fourth and, with Sarah Wilkinson in sixth, it was an easy team victory for the Northumbrians over Durham City and Heaton.

There were also good turn outs in the junior races with numbers extremely encouraging for the future. The junior men's 8.2k contest saw 33 athletes face the starter and, after a race-long tussle with Lewis Hogg, last year's North of England under-17 champion, victory went to Shildon's Cameron Boyek by just two seconds.

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Hogg's Gateshead team-mate Calum Johnson picked up the bronze award and with seventh placed Lawrence McCourt closing in the three-to-score it was a comfortable team success for the Tynesiders.

Wayne Parker (New Marske) won the under-17 men's championship finishing 13 seconds clear of Gateshead's Barry Maskell with an under-the-weather Jonnie Nisbet (Morpeth) battling to hang on to third place. Gateshead, with Greg Chambers and Adam Barr finishing fifth and sixth respectively, were once again team winners though it was a pleasant surprise for South Shields to finish in second place.

Over 50 athletes lined up in the under-15 boys event and it produced the closest finish of the day. Thomas Coyne (Jarrow and Hebburn) and Morpeth's Phillip Winkler battled it out head-to-head all the way down the long finishing straight and it was the Northumbrian who got his head in front to prevail by just one second as Chester-le-Street's Thomas Goulding, five seconds adrift, holding off Liam Emmett (South Shields) to take third place by a matter of strides.

Gateshead's Markhum Lonsdale was an impressive winner of the under-13 boys event. Leading throughout, Lonsdale, unbeaten all winter in the North East, had 13 seconds in hand as Morpeth's Jacob Hopkins finishing strongly for second with Elswick's Ewan Cassidy filling the minor placing. John Allen, in fourth place, led Middlesbrough/Mandale to team gold with a two-point advantage over Morpeth with Elswick claiming bronze.

In the combined under-17/under-20 women's contest the first two home came from Shildon and they were both contesting the younger age group. Victory went to Amy Hetherington with team-mate Zoe Hewitson finishing runner-up while third across the line was Jarrow and Hebburn's Sarah McDonald who claimed the under-20 title. New Marske's Chloe Loreda, who crossed the line in fourth place, was awarded the under-17 bronze medal while Elswick's Phillipa Williams and Rachel Lundgren (Gosforth) claimed silver and bronze respectively in the under-20 section.

Birtley's Lydia Turner was a comfortable winner of the under-15 girls event finishing ahead of Middlesbrough/Mandale duo Phillipa Stone and Emma Wortley. Gemma Clark, in seventh place, backed up the silver and bronze medallists to give Middlesbrough/Mandale an easy team success over Gateshead and Birtley.

The biggest margin of victory came in the under-13 girls race with Kate Waugh taking the gold medal by 41 seconds. Elswick's Millie Cassidy finished in second place with Shildon's Lizzie Cramb holding off Darlington's Lucy Hunter by one second to win bronze. Jarrow and Hebburn, with Amelia Leslie (8th), Jodie Haswell (9th) and Jesica Leslie (10th) won the team race with 27 points the same as Darlington with the Jarrow trio taking the

gold medals on countback. Sedgefield were delighted with their bronze medals. [Results](#)



Report Bill McGuirk

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