

CHAMPIONSHIPS BRING MUSIC TO YOUR EARS

DAY 1

WHILE the Spice Girls were warming up on the hallowed turf of the Premiership champions, the first of the two-day Start Fitness-supported Northern Athletics Championships Senior and Under-20 was in full swing.

In the adjacent Sportcity athletics stadium a record entry for the NA senior and under-20 got off to an early start with just a sprinkling of spectators to encourage the athletes.

However, those who stayed on to the end for the final event on the programme were treated to a superb exhibition of sprinting by Sale's Andrew Robertson, the current England Athletics 100m champion.

Robertson last won the Northern title back in 2011 (10.71s) and, after winning his heat in 10.45s this time round was the one to beat in the final.

Flanked by defending champion James Williams (Liverpool) and Sale team-mate Connor Wood, Robertson got off to a perfect start and was quickly into his stride with his seven rivals already chasing the minor placings.

Into a negative wind reading of -1.1 Richardson surged home in 10.41s, a time which equates to his fastest legal outing of the campaign.

Wood came through to take the silver medal in 10.64s while Williams added the bronze medal to his collection after recording 10.70.

There were season's best also for the medallists in the 400m with victory going to Sheffield and Dearne's Lee Thompson in 46.62s with team-mate and defending champion, Adam Walker-Khan finishing runner-up 47.77s with Reece Middleton (City of York) completing the podium placings with a new pb of 48.32s.

It was a masterful performance of one-lap running which slots Thompson, a World Indoor representative, up into fifth place in the current UK rankings.

Preston athletes supported the Championships in a big way and they were pleasantly rewarded with a clean sweep of medals in the senior men's 1500m.

Victory went to Matthew Wigelsworth in 3:52.87 who was followed home by Tiarnan Crocken (a new Pb of 3:54.00) and Daniel Bebbington (3:54.55).

Wigelsworth, who has a metric mile pb of 3:44.03, added the gold medal to the silver he won the previous year when he contested the 800m.

The medallists in the 5,000m were all rewarded with new pbs with victory going to Matthew Crehan (St Helens Sutton) in 14:51.54 who had warmed up for the contest by setting a new pb of 8:39.92 when winning the Merseyside County Championships 3,000m a couple of weeks earlier.

Preston's Andy Benson did his share at the front and finished runner-up in 14:53.33 while Houghton's Cameron Allan shaved a huge 26 seconds off his previous best to claim the bronze award in 14.54.12.

In the senior men's 110m hurdles victory went to Preston's Curtis Mitchell who recorded a new pb 14.78s though he had the help of a wind speed of +2.2.

Morpeth's Adam Pratt was rewarded for his front-running tactics by winning the 3,000m steeplechase in a new pb of 9:35.42 while Mohamed Abshir (Leeds City) finished runner-up for the second time but was also rewarded with a new pb of 9:36.77.

Amongst the field events 'masters' athletes led the way in the shot put contest with victory going to V40 Daniel Brunt (Sheffield and Dearne) with a best of 13:28m while V50 competitor John Nichols claimed silver with 13:16m.

Consistent Osian Jones (Liverpool) was the class act in the hammer competition, winning with 68:64m while Sale's Kevin Metzger came out on top in the triple jump with a best of 15:25m.

UNDER-20 MEN

IN A highly-charged 100m victory went to defending champion Joe Ferguson (Leeds City) with a season's-best of 10.57s while Trafford's Sagesse Nguie set a new pb of 10.64s to finish runner-up inches ahead of under-17 athlete Henry Nwoke (Liverpool) whose 10.66s was also a new pb. Leon Heath Stubbs (Preston) produced a pb of 48.67s to claim the 400m title finishing ahead of Sale's Thomas Baines and Matthew Waterfield (Morpeth), Baines recording 49.11s and Waterfield racing to a new pb of 49.39s.

Liverpool's Daniel Preston came out on top in the 1,500m with a 3:55.28 clocking with under-17 athlete Henry Johnson (Houghton) promoted to second place after the disqualification of a Vale Royal competitor. Johnson recorded 3:57.92, just one-hundredth-of-a-second outside his life-time best.

The under-20s ran with senior in the 5,000m and Warrington's Joe Buckley was rewarded with a new pb of 15:17.83 for his efforts.

All five athletes who faced the starter in the 110m hurdles were celebrating after producing new pbs. Victory went to West Cheshire's Ewan Bradley in 14.87s with defending champion Adam Coles (Kingston upon Hull) finishing runner-up in 15.04s with Edward Coles (Preston) completing the one-two-three in 15.18.

Jordan Jones set a new pb of 10:10.86 to win the 3,000m steeplechase which was contested in the senior championship.

In the long jump Scunthorpe's Archie Yeo came within two centimetres of equalling the 1987 long jump record of 7:47m set by Longwood's Paul Johnson.

Yeo's performance (7:45m) sees him way out on top of the under-17 Po10 rankings.

Gateshead's Joe Halpin, with 6:69m, finished in second place with Adam Coles (Kingston upon Hull) finishing in third place with a new pb of 6:40m.

Christopher Lamb (Wigan) retained his pole vault title with a new pb clearance of 4:71m while second-placed Ewan Bradley also delivered a life-time best of 4:25m. Under-17 athlete William Foot (Chesterfield) claimed the bronze medal after a clearance of 3:90m.

In a close discus competition it took a new pb of 42:91m by Wakefield's Aran Thomas to pocket the gold medal with Morpeth's Ruaridh Lang pushing him close with a best of 42:51m.

Luke Robinson (City of York) and Wakefield's Aran Thomas both produced new javelin pbs with the former, an under-17 competitor, throwing a superb 54:15m. Thomas, meanwhile, claimed the silver medal with a distance of 51:91m.

SENIOR WOMEN

AT A blustery Merseyside County Championships multi-talented Danielle McGifford (Wigan) recorded 11.76s to win the 100m with a +6.8 wind behind her - she also came out on top in the shot put and javelin that day.

However, it was surprisingly calm when she lined up the 100m final at Sportcity and she managed to run her fastest legal time to lift the gold medal with a time of 11.78s There were season's best for both Katy Wyper (Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde), last year's champion, and Kingston upon Hull's Megan Hoult who finished second and third in 11.96s and 12.20s respectively.

Wakefield's Rachel Crokken produced a superb pb of 55.15s to claim the 400m title while Trafford's Ella Barrett finished with a season's best of 55.34s to claim the silver medal with Louise Royston (Halifax), last year's champion, also setting a new pb of 56.09s to complete the podium placings. Manx athlete Rachael Franklin pulled out all the stops to retain her 1,500m title but she had to give way to the in form Leeds City athlete Claire Duck.

Duck, a former Northern XC champion, showed a good turn of speed to come home in 4:19.66 with Franklin following her across the line in second place in 4:20.50. Duck's Leeds City team-mate Jenny Walsh finished strongly to claim the bronze medal in 4:25.59.

Wigan's Danielle McGifford produced a season's best of 13.66s to retain her 100m hurdles title with City of York's Chelsea Walker finishing runner-up in 13.86s, which was also a season's best.

Rotherham's Amy Hodgson finished in third place in 13.93s. Meanwhile, in the triple jump, Trafford's Michelle Robbins-Hulse also produced a season's best of 12:19m to retain her title.

In the high jump Wakefield's Abby Ward and Wigan's Emily Borthwick headed the field with both athletes clearing 1:75m. However, it was the former who won the competition on countback while Birtley's Rebecca Pottinger was also awarded the bronze medal on countback after four athletes had a best of 1:55m.

Sophie Littlemore (Gateshead) was crowned shot put champion once again with a put of 13:50m but she was pushed back into second place in the competition by F20 competitor Sabrina Fortune (Deeside) who recorded a new pb of 13:70m. In the hammer competition, victory went to Rotherham's Holly Rodgers with a throw of 46:33m.

UNDER-20 WOMEN

THERE were seasons bests for Leonie Ashmeade (Wakefield) and defending champion Bolton's Hannah Kelly in the final of the 100 metres.

And, in a blanket finish, both athletes couldn't be separated on time but the photo finish gave Ashmeade the title with both girls being giving 11.79s.

It was also a near dead-heat for third place with Nicole Caygill (Jarrow and Hebburn) and Gateshead's Jazmine Moss giving the same time of 11.84s with Caygill being awarded the bronze medal.

New championship best performances were hard to come by on the opening day of the championships but one that did go was in the 400m.

Twelve months ago at the same venue Stockport's Natasha Harrison dipped under the old figures to set a new record of 55.03s. However, this time round she ran even quicker producing a time of 55.00s, a time inside the winning time of the senior women.

In the 1,500m, victory went to Sale's Stephanie Moss with a season's best of 4:33.44 while there were new pbs for Olivia Haveron (Harrogate), who finished second in 4:34.92 and for Holly Smith (Vale Royal) who finished in third place in 4:35.30.

Stockport's Abigail Pawlett, an under-17 competitor, produced a new pb of 14.39s to claim the 100m hurdles title and that was after she lined up in the long-jump competition earlier in the day.

Pawlett won the horizontal jump with a mark in the sand at 5:77m with Amy Lauren Rolfe (City of York) finishing second with 5:62m and Stockport's Grace Goodsell completing the medallists with 5:44m.

In the pole vault competition another under-17 athlete was in winning form. Sale's Sophie Ashurst cleared 3:80m to take gold while the silver medal went to Liverpool's Elizabeth Henshall with a new pb of 3:40m. Amy Haslam (Sale) also managed 3:40m to finish in third place.

The discus title went to Sale's Caitlin Emerson who managed 40:46m with Bordet's Abigail Thompson finishing runner-up (36:90m) and Megan Lockwood (Manx) receiving the bronze medal after a throw of 31:00m.

A season's best of 41:02m by Pendle's Zoe Kidney saw her top the podium for the javelin with Morpeth's Bobbi Griffiths finishing runner-up with 39:90m and Emily Lewis (Leigh), with a new pb of 31:73m, completing the medallists.

DAY 2

Another day dawned over Manchester and as the debris from the Spice Girls concert was cleared, officials and competitors began arriving for Day 2 of the Northern Championships.

SENIOR MEN

The track events opened with the 400m Hurdles, and whilst there were only three competitors in the race it was nonetheless hotly contested with the winner Andrew Desmond of Liverpool Harriers taking the title in 55.31 from (almost) veteran Northern champs competitor Tom Grantham of City of Sheffield and Matthew Harrison of Leeds City.

The 200m was one of the most eagerly anticipated events of the day with 100m gold medallist of the day before Andrew Robertson taking on his club colleague Connor Wood, defending champion James Williams and Hull's Andrew Morgan-Harrison. In the final it was Wood who triumphed with a fast 20.97 ahead of Robertson and Morgan-Harrison in what was a showcase for Northern sprinting.

Matthew Wigelsworth of Preston Harriers stamped his authority on the middle distances by adding the 800m title to the 1500m which he had won the previous day. Whilst his time of 1:52.55 was a couple of seconds outside his PB it was enough for the Liverpool University student to win an exciting tactical race ahead of Morpeth's James Young and his Preston clubmate Dan Bebbington who had taken the bronze in the 1500m.

On the field George Davies (City of York) and Sam Dean (Sale HM) slugged it out in the Javelin with Davies coming out on top ahead of the 2018 champion Dean. In 3rd place was a rejuvenated Matt Allison of Leeds City, a former Northern champion and currently the leading V45 thrower in the UK. God to see you back Matt!

The Long Jump was a particularly interesting affair as Joe Gray an F47 athlete from Gateshead Harriers not only took the title but set a new UK F47 best in the process by jumping a new PB of 6.07m. Joe now heads the UK long Jump rankings in his class.

The Pole Vault was won by Mark Johnson of Leeds City with a leap of 4.20m and Daniel Stanley of Blackpool took the silver.

U20 MEN

The 400 hurdles opened the U20 track and saw a great performance from Sale's Rory Keen who recorded a PB of 54.52 which lifted him into the UK top ten – surely good times are ahead for Rory, silver went to Callum Inman of Amber Valley and the 2018 champion Ben Schofield took the bronze.

As with the senior 200m, the U20 race was another classic with the first three only separated by 4 100ths. The 100m champion Joe Ferguson was just edged on the line by Oldham's Reality Osuoha with Sagesse Nguie (Trafford) a very close third. Osuoha recorded 21.27, Ferguson – 21.28 and Nguie 21.31. A great race with PB's for all three and placings of 3rd, 5th and 6th on the UK rankings.

The 800m gave more evidence of the strength of coach Andy Carter's Vale Royal endurance squad with a victory for Ben Lee in 1:54.14, ahead of Joe Wane (Leigh Harriers) and Shaun Gee of Sale.

1st year Under 20 Shaun Kerry of Kingston upon Hull followed up his bronze in the Senior Hammer by throwing 63.49 for gold in the U20 event. The promising young athlete is another protégé of coach (former Olympian and GB No. 1) Dave Smith and is currently lying third on the UK ranking lists. Shaun is definitely one to watch as he then went on to take silver in the Shot Put behind defending

Champion David Todd of City of York AC who improved on his 2018 winning throw recording a put of 14.76m

In the Triple Jump, Gateshead's Harrison Whitfield has an unusual competition. His first round jump of 13.28m was enough to take gold but unfortunately it was also his last in the competition as he fell awkwardly on his next jump dislocating his shoulder, and spent the rest of the competition laid in the sand under a blanket waiting for the ambulance to arrive and watching his fellow athletes fight it out in the adjacent pit.

We have heard that he has made a full recovery and wish him well for the rest of the season.

SENIOR WOMEN

City of York's leading UK U23 Chelsea Walker strode to victory in the 400mHu in 59.19 ahead of serial Northern medal winner, the evergreen Nisha Desai of Trafford and Preston's Sophie Warden.

The 200m final was an exciting race won by Katy Wyper of Blackpool, Wyre & Fylde AC with the 100m Champion from the day before Danielle McGifford in silver medal position and another evergreen athlete Amanda Shaw of Wakefield putting in a fine performance to finish third.

A well supported 5000m was won by Manx Harrier Rachael Franklin in 16:41.32 adding to her 1500m silver and making it a very worthwhile trip from the Isle of Man. Eleanor Bolton of Ribble Valley claimed second place ahead of Leeds' consistent Georgia Malir.

Leeds City claimed another medal in the 800m where 2018 champion Georgia Yearby finished a close second behind gold medallist Kirsty Fraser (2:09.33) of Preston Harriers

The Women's steeplechase was reduced to just two athletes following drop outs but the two dug deep with Vicki Cronin of Trafford taking the gold in 7:14.94 followed by Sunderland Harrier Jacqui Etherington with a well-deserved silver.

Honours in the Discus went to Leeds City again with Jemma Ibbetson throwing 47.69 to take first place with the silver going to Freya Dooner of Wigan and York's Sarah Parsons taking third place.

Sale Harrier Rosie Semenytsch led the Javelin field with a 46.33 throw with the 2018 champion Leah Hillman and Natasha Wilson filling second and third positions.

Previous Champion Claire Blunt of Kingston upon Hull took the Pole Vault title back from City of Sheffield & Dearne athlete Abi Roberts with a leap of 3.70m.

U20 WOMEN

The U20W 400Hu opened the days track events and the 2018 Champion Steph Driscoll of Liverpool Harriers ran a strong race to retain her title in a time of 62.13 with Middlesbrough's Jasmine Clark and Stockport's promising Emily Misantoni taking the minor places.

An close finish in the 800m resulted in Derby's Molly Hudson claiming the gold with Julia Hodder of Wirral and Harrogate Harrier Olivia Haveron in silver and bronze positions.

Wigan Harrier Tara Simpson-Sullivan established her authority in the Hammer event throwing 58.40 ahead of Zoe Price's 52.00m. Maria Schofield of York claimed the Bronze before also taking a silver in the Shot behind winner Rhea Southcott of Leeds City. Rhea, a promising heptathlete had also won Northern gold in the Combined Events Championships at Bedford the previous week and continued

adding to her medal haul by jumping 1.60 in the High Jump to finish third behind Hannah Moat's (Scunthorpe) 1.70 leap and Gabrielle O'Neal of Liverpool.

The Triple Jump was a success story for Stockport Harriers with Lucy Robinson finishing in front of her clubmate Megan Lasseter jumping 11.70 and 11.20 respectively. Wigan's Katie Shingler landed bronze with a leap of 11.05.

The clash with the County Schools Championships that have affected Under 20 entries to the Northern Championships was avoided this year after several protests were submitted to the UK fixture planners and the subsequent rise in entries and attendance by U20 athletes has been substantial with an almost 50% increase in entry numbers in the age group. This was reflected in the quality of the competition with bigger fields in almost all of the U20 events.

Overall we had a very successful weekend of competition, with the extension of the free entry opportunity for county champions to the U20 age group we received entries from many athletes who had not previously taken part in area championships. The affiliation scheme has also seen new athletes coming to championships with several clubs whose members had not previously been aware of their eligibility to enter Northern Championships now grasping the opportunity to compete at area level. It was a pleasure to welcome them to our Championships along with all our established clubs and athletes and we thank them all, new faces and old (ish) for providing such a great weekend of competition