SOPHIE SHINES IN THE LEIGH SUNSHINE

ONCE again it was one of the nation’s talented youngsters who stole the limelight on the second day of the quickly-rearranged Northern Athletics Start Fitness Under-20/Senior Track and Field Championships held at the impressive Leigh Sports Village.

In late afternoon on the opening day of the championships, the under-20 women’s 100 metres was the only record to fall when Gateshead’s Joy Eze set new figures of 11.61secs, a time which dipped under Preston’s Donna Hoggarth’s long-standing 11.65s set way back in 1992, the year she contested the World Junior Championships in Seoul.

Turn the clock forward 24 hours and it was now the turn of fellow England Junior international and friendly rival of Eze, Sophie Walton (Horwich) to rewrite the under-20 200 metres record book and go top of the current Po10 rankings.

After a comfortable heat victory in 24.54s, Walton ran quicker than ever before in the final to stop the clock at an incredible 23.59s which shaved one-hundredth-of-a-second off Lincoln Wellington’s Georgia Adam’s 2017 record of 24.00s.

Sale’s Osarumen Odemwengie finished runner-up behind Walton and was rewarded with a pb of 24.70s while Middlesbrough AC’s Charlotte Kelsey completed the podium places in 24.82s

Another under-20 speed merchant who had a highly-successful championships was Sheffield and Dearne’s Louie Hinchcliffe. On the opening day Hinchcliffe won the 100m in 10.83s running into a negative wind reading after earlier in the day recording a pb of 10.61s to win his heat. In those heats six of the 11 competitors posted new pbs with Demilade Ologbon (Liverpool), the eventual silver medallist, the quickest of them all with 11.05s

On day two the Yorkshireman continued where he left off from the previous day to win his heat (21.83s) and final of the 200m (21.62s) despite, once again, running into a slight head wind. Hallamshire’s Joel Vernon claimed the silver medal (22.08s) after posting a pb of 22.04s in the heats while third-placed Ben To (Bolton) also produced a pb of 22.21s to complete the podium places.

Once again the one-lap hurdle races opened the day’s proceedings and the under-20 men’s race especially showed that championships can produce good times with all five of those who faced the starter producing new pbs. Victory went to Liverpool’s Ethan Flaherty in a time of 53.43s, a time which moves him into joint second place in the Po10 listings. Kingston upon Hull’s Oliver Adnitt finished in silver medal position in 54.48s with Ben Verbickas (Crewe and Nantwich) finishing third in 56.00s. There was also a new pb for Gateshead’s Mia Liddell who claimed gold in the under-20 women’s event.

The winner of the senior women’s 200m, Ellie Booker (Rotherham) was also at her best in setting a new pb of 23.98s to top the podium in holding off the challenge of Gateshead duo Jasmine Moss (24.34s, sb) and Beth Pringle (24.66s, pb).

Another athlete celebrating victory with a new pb was Hallamshire’s Laura Trask who won the senior women’s 5,000m in 18:36.52.

Turning to field action, the under-20 men’s high jump event was a triumph for the coaches at Liverpool Pembroke and Sefton Harriers as the top two podium places went to their athletes as they set new pbs. Sandy Clarkson, with a clearance of 1:94m, claimed the gold medal with team-mate Jamie Hopkin claiming silver with a height of 1:91m. Southport Waterloo’s Sam Coupland, with a season’s best of 1:80m, finished in third place though Jacob Thompson (Stockport T&F) also cleared the same height.

City of York’s 2019 England under-20 long jump champion, Lucy Hadaway, who is also a talented multi-eventer, added 10cm to her previous best distance to land the Northern senior women’s title to her long list of successes with a mark in the sand at 6:40m.

\*THANKS go to all the officials, the first aid team and everyone at Leigh Harriers, especially the tea ladies for without them the championships could not go ahead.