

RECORDS TUMBLE FOR STARS FOR FUTURE ATHLETICS STARS by SUSAN JARDINE

THE future of athletics took to the boards of the English Institute of Sport in Sheffield as the Northern Athletics held its Indoor Championships for U15 and U13 in Sheffield. Just weeks after the Senior, U20s and U17s held centre stage it was time for the U15s and U13s to see if they could perform without fluffing their lines in the Steel city.

And once again it proved a day where the records tumbled and the books were re-written as three Championship Best Performances from yesteryear were well and truly shredded on a mild Sunday which brought in clubs from the North East, North West, the ridings of Yorkshire and Merseyside. There were athletes who departed with more than one gold medal, and one man left with a golden double after his exploits in the U15 high and long Jump.

Joshua Akintolu of Wakefield stood tall in the U15 boys high jump and confidently cleared the bar each time he was called to do so. Akintolu had North Shields Poly's Eli Adams for company and they fought it out for the title, Back in 1999 Chesterfield's Mark Bidwell had set the Championship Best Performance with a clearance of 1m 80. That record soon disappeared as not only Akintolu but Adams both equalled it. Normally if you equal a CBP you would seem to have a more than evens chance of winning the title but Akintolu was destined to go higher as Adams could not as he sailed over 1m 87 to clinch the gold medal. Adams would finish second and take the silver but was not to be the only visit to the podium for Akintolu as he returned for the long jump

It is very rare that you hear of a high and long jump double in competitive athletics - unless you count the multi events where of course it is possible to win both events but Joshua's confidence saw him sail over 6 metres for the first time in his career. To give you an idea of just how skilled an athlete Joshua is, a multi eventer in the U17s would normally post about 6m 50 in a long jump. Akintolu is an age group below this - so just imagine what the future holds for this talented athlete from West Yorkshire

Speaking of West Yorkshire athletes and Leeds City Grace Gode was in imperious form in the U13 60m. Grace strode through her heat in a time of 8.18 to break the Championship Best Performance record of Trezeguet Taylor that had been set in 2017. As if that was not enough she then broke it again in her semi final, reducing it to 8.16.. Grace, lined up in the final alongside Amy Johnstone of Carlisle Aspatria, and Sienna Lavine of Pontefract AC. It was all over at about 40m as Gode showed in front after a fairly even start and pulled away to win in a time of 8.20 from Johnstone who saw her hopes of a sprint double ended as she finished second, Johnstone who had won the 200m.

So two Championship Best performances, but we were not done as Logan Cowling of Scunthorpe Harriers demolished the CBP of Jack Halpin, setting new figures of 12m 88 in the U13 boys shot putt. Cowling in total control of the event, which he won by some four metres with his nearest challenger Harrison Downes from Leeds City finishing with the silver on 8.33

One of the best things about the U13 events is to see an athlete take to the track and show how they intend to compete by leading from the front. There is no better example than that of the 800m where Noah Penfold of North Shields Poly steamed to the front of the field and with only James McGrory of Southport Waterloo able to stay with him. Penfold, setting a fierce pace stormed through the first 600m with McGrory sticking with him, as they reached the final lap it was between the two of them with Charlie Porteous of Bingley Harriers hanging on to third place. Coming off the final bend McGrory attacked again and as they came to the line they crossed in a blanket finish. It was down to the photograph and seconds later came the news that Penfold had held on to win by 2/100ths of a second in a time of 2:17:17 to win the title in his first year of competition. The North

East has a good record in the middle distance events over the years, Steve Cram and David Sharpe to name but two and we have just seen another promising junior take their first steps in competitive athletics.

At around the same time as Noah was receiving his medal on the podium so the athletes in the U15 800m were being introduced and three athletes from Southport and Waterloo featured. They were Caleb Still, William Delamere and Eddy Clark. But any thoughts of a 1,2,3 for Southport Waterloo were swiftly dispelled as Hartlepool's Jack Ord emerged as a challenger. Ord put himself in the ideal position as he tracked Still and Delamere around the first 600m, and in so doing the challenge of Clark disappeared. As they approached the bell the question was would Ord have enough to outspurt Still and Delamere, or would Still and Delamere hold station. We soon had the answer as Still stayed strong in the final fifty metres to secure victory in a time of 2:08:61 from Delamere in second and Ord in third.

On a day where Middlesbrough and Sunderland clashed in a Tees Wear derby in football it seemed inevitable that we would have the same on the track. The U15 200m brought together Whitney Ofor of Middlesbrough Mandale and Celine Obinna-Alo of Sunderland. It is not a spoiler to give away the result of the football which ended in a draw. The chances of a draw in this were not great, and receded as Ofor led from out of the blocks as she cruised round the first corner with Celine chasing her. The Middlesbrough athlete looked confident as she approached the closing straight and maintained her focus to win the title in 25.14 with Obinna-Alo finishing with the silver. But while Whitney had Celine dancing to her tune in the 200m Celine's wait for a gold was not to go on as she was back on the boards for the 60m U15 final. Obinna Alo who had such a good season outdoors last year in the 100m was always going to be difficult to beat in the shorter sprint, but she to face the defending champion in Allyssia May of Bolton United harrier. Throw in fellow North Easterners in Olivia Spurr from Gateshead and Nieve Greenan of Hartlepool plus Neila Kamsi Chukwu of Sale and it was a competitive final. Obinna Alo though once she took the lead at the halfway stage was never headed and took the title in a time of 7.73 with May taking silver and Chukwu the bronze.

Speaking of Nieve Greenan she was also involved in a dramatic long jump as she had led the competition into the penultimate round before being deposed firstly by Talia Northcott from City of York with 5.14 and then Jorja Turner from Hallamshire on 5.06. Northcott would go on to take the gold, with Turner the silver but Greenan then saw Lauren Hewitt of Wigan & District match her 5.03. But Greenan would hang on to bronze by virtue of having a longer second jump.

There was more good news for Hartlepool Athletics Club as Grace Read set a personal best of 8.94 to take the title, some 20cm clear of Lily Keeler of Wakefield District with Sophie Low from Stockport who took the bronze. In the U15 event Bethany Pendlebury nailed a putt of 11.78. Pendlebury of Trafford seized the lead in the second round from Zuri Idemudia of Wirral AC who had posted a 10.75 in the first round. The was further agony for Lauren Hewitt, as after missing out on a medal in the long jump, she placed fourth again, this time with a putt of 9.82, while Carys Francis of City of York who took the bronze with 10.33

Trying to emulate the golden double of Joshua Akintolu earlier in the day Wakefield's Ethan Ford had already won gold in the U13 long jump with a 4m 36 - beating Karson Karl Booth of Hartlepool Athletics Club to the title by six centimetres. But Ethan was not done there, he had made the finals of both the 200m and 60m so the golden treble was on. As he lined up in the 200m final which also included Karson Karl Booth he looked to have finished second as Booth had crossed the line first in a time of 27.38 but after being spotted running out of his lane the Hartlepool athlete was disqualified and Ford had secured a golden double with a time of 28.71 with Henry Summers (Southport Waterloo) and Zac Hamilton (Derby) rounding out the top three. In fact they were the only three to complete the race as Thierry Kerr of Sale not able to finish

But there was to be no golden treble for Ethan as Karson was not to be denied a gold medal as some ten minutes later he was back for the 60m final. Imagine how difficult it was to come back out for a final so soon from being disqualified. They were away the first time of asking and it was Booth who took control at 30m and ran clear to take the title in a time of 8.21 from Daniel Austin (Bolton United) and Thomas Fenn (Kingston upon Hull) who grabbed silver and bronze. Ford finished in fifth. Just imagine what the future holds with Ford and Booth - in these three events - an intriguing summer is in prospect with the schools championships to name but one event that they could face each other again.

With that the competition came to a close. New names have made their first appearances and somehow I do not think we have heard the last of them. The indoor campaign continues with a stop in Gateshead for the NECAA indoor age group championships before Sheffield plays host for the Combined Events Championships in March

Susan Jardine is the presenter of Sportszone on Nova Radio North East which is broadcast Saturday 2pm-6pm - to listen it is www.novaradio.co.uk