

Bedfordshire and Luton Schools Athletic Association

Chairman's Annual Report

November 2021

Cross country destroyed, but eventual success on the track

Covid -19 cast its dark and deadly shadow over much of schools athletics in 2020, with the Cross country season completely destroyed along with all inter school in county activity, the County Pentathlons, the County Track and Field Championships and both ESAA School Cup competitions (Cross Country and Track & Field).

Thanks to the ingenuity and hard work of the national organisers, the English Schools Track and Field Championships was staged in Manchester in a much reduced format, whilst the Combined Events Regional and National Finals with their small numbers and later dates were able to go ahead virtually unscathed and we were able to enjoy success in both these events.

Although we are by no means completely clear of the virus we are now hopeful that 2022 will be a normal year with a full range of activities, on local, county and national levels.

The challenge for us all, and particularly for those in schools, is to resurrect athletics on the school fields, the country and the track. Given the devastating effect Covid has had, we must all make a superhuman effort to put athletics back up where it should be.

Finances

Our finances remain in a healthy state. We more or less balance our current expenditure and income) with donations from ESAA for staging National Championships over the past few decade enabling us to build up some reserves.

Tony Elder – RIP

It is with sadness that I report the death, at the age of 86, of our Senior Vice President, Tony Elder. Tony moved to Houghton Regis Community College in 1973, first as Deputy Head and then as Head. He was an outstanding middle distance coach and had been an Essex Schools Team Manager. When I became T & F Team Manager, I immediately co-opted him into our management team. Between us we set up the selection and management organisation which we .have successfully used ever since. He became our Chairman a few years later. His wisdom and experience guided us then and still do. Although he moved to another headship in Sussex in 1986 (becoming a Sussex Team Manager and Chairman), his interest in Beds and Luton never waned, following, commenting on and supporting our exploits for the rest of his life.

Succession Planning

Whilst we are grateful to all those who organise our events and manage our teams, there are still too few of us. There have been several occasions in the past few years when we have been in danger of not sending teams to the English Schools Championships due to having insufficient Team Managers - a situation which has only been resolved by someone stepping in at the last moment.

This should not happen and there is an urgent need for new people to step up to the plate as some of us will not go on forever.

Please contact me if you feel that you might be able to contribute to the work of the association in any shape or form.

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Chairman*

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ESAA Track & Field 2021

An unusual, but successful, weekend

Athletes had little opportunity to stake a claim for a place in our team for the English Schools Championships. The club scene started late and there were few club competitions and no County AAA Championships before we had to select our team. Athletes who were not members of clubs did not even have the opportunity of District and County Schools Championships. In order to give all athletes at least one chance to compete, I encouraged the County AAA to hold its Open Meeting (normally held in early April, but cancelled this year) the week before our selection date. It was well attended by athletes from across the country who were desperate for competition, including many Bedfordshire club athletes and some non club athletes from schools including a large contingent from Harlington Upper School. Several athletes achieved performances which late deserved selection.

Due to the Covid restrictions the ESAA Championships were held over three days with a different age group on each day in order to limit the numbers attending and with no accommodation provided, there was no team element and it lacked the usual exciting atmosphere. Nevertheless it still took place, which was a credit to everyone involved in staging it.

Although we could nominate athletes, we could not guarantee their selection. Numbers in each event were limited to the top in England according to the Power of Ten Rankings. We did our best, but we felt only able to nominate 10 athletes within the criteria. Nine were actually invited by ESAA, but one was injured and Alex Alston withdrew on account of his selection by GB for the European u20 Championships to be held a week later, leaving us with just seven.

As you will see from the attached report, these seven acquitted themselves well with three bronze medals along with some excellent results by other members of the team.

Pippa Milton, Allen Adamson and Dennis Johnson were the team managers.

UK School Games and Schools International

Etienne Maughan (Bedford Girls School) excelled at the 80m Hurdles at both of these events placing 2nd in the School Games and winning the Schools international in a stunning time of 11.04 seconds placing her 2nd on the 2021 UK U17 rankings and 7th on the UK U17all time rankings. Meanwhile Gracie Wall (Samuel Whitbread) finished 2nd in the HJ at the UK School Games with a leap of 1.73M, placing her 3rd on the 2021 UK U17 rankings.

Combined Events:

Senior Boys ESAA Champion

With no county Pentathlons to guide us, individual athletes were selected to compete at the Regional CE Finals in Corby. These were selected on the basis of nominations from clubs (no school nominated anyone) and the likelihood of them achieving a minimum score. Five actually competed achieving creditable results, with Stephen Simmons (Bedford School) qualifying in the Senior Boys Decathlon for the National Finals held in Bedford in September. He excelled in a tight contest to win by just 20 points with a score of 6,710 points

Staging ESAA Events

We were due to stage both the ESAA Schools Cup Finals and the ESAA Combined Events Finals. The former fell victim to covid, but the latter, went ahead very successfully with many accolades from those attending. Unfortunately, I had almost no help from schools in organising this event. It is something in which more hands would make lighter work.

Thanks to everyone who has contributed to our activities

Obviously there was a lot less to do this year, but my thanks to Gav Fordham (secretary) and Allen Adamson and Pippa Milton (T & F Team Managers); and everyone else for standing by preparing for what never came.

I should also like to acknowledge all the work done in clubs both in terms of coaching and competition which prepares our athletes to compete at District, County and ESAA National Championships

Dennis Johnson
Chairman

Three bronze medals and two sixth places



Etienne Maughan Bronze
Inter Girls 80m Hurdles



Gracie Wall Bronze
Inter Girls High Jump



Stephen Simmons Bronze
Senior Boys 100m Hurdles

Three bronze medals, two sixth places and two lifetime best performances represented a good return for the tiny team of only seven Bedfordshire and Luton Athletes at the English Schools Athletics Championships held at Manchester's Sportscity stadium last weekend.

Covid restrictions resulted in only 16 athletes being invited to compete in each event, with the Beds & Luton team, down to just seven athletes after suffering two withdrawals - one through injury, whilst the other Alex Alston (BMS) kept his powder dry for the bigger stage of the European Junior Championships to be held in Tallin where he is racing this week.

Hurdlers took two of the bronze medals with Stephen Simmons (Bedford School) clocking a new personal best time of 14.35 seconds in a dramatic Senior Boys 110metres race full of thrills and spills. Despite hitting three of the barriers, a strong and determined finish secured the third place.

Etienne Maughan (Bedford Girls Schools) was no less impressive in the Inter Girls 80m version her time of 11.23seconds shaving another three hundredths off her recent Bedford Club record and only the same margin shy of second place. Etienne's race was notable for the winner, Mia McIntosh of Hertfordshire setting a new UK U17 record of 10.95 seconds.

Gracie Wall (Samuel Whitbread) gained the team's third bronze medal in the Inter Girls High jump. In her first competition since a serious ankle injury, Gracie was only a centimetre shy of her season's best with a clearance of 1.65metres, losing the silver medal on the count back rule, having suffered more failures at earlier heights.

With two places in each event up for grabs in the Schools International meeting (for Intermediates only) Etienne and Gracie have both been named as first reserves for the England Team.

Elsewhere Leonie Brunning (St Thomas More) took sixth place in the Senior Girls High Jump, whilst Zack Grinsted (Ashcroft) also placed sixth with 42.75 metres in the Inter Boys Discus.

For Goldington Academy students Jasmine Wilkins and Daniel Forbes-Harding, this was their first foray on the national stage. Both were close to their lifetime bests which had been set under more favourable conditions. Jasmine was 4th in the Inter Girls 100 metres "B" final, in a time of 12.35 seconds, whilst Daniel ran 23.03 seconds also for 4th in the Inter Boys 200 metres "B" Final.

Decathlon Gold for Stephen Simmons

Having just started at University, Stephen may have been understandably a little jaded at the start of the competition, and opened his account with an 11.65 second 100m into a headwind. This ranked him 6th of the 35 starters. He improved to 2nd place after a near personal best of 6.68 metres in the long jump. He then consolidated 2nd place with a big personal best of 12.23m in the shot and equalled his lifetime best with 1.80m in the High Jump. Despite recording 52.03 seconds (again close to his best ever) he finished 5th fastest in the 400m, dropping back to 3rd place overnight. With a strong second day to come, there was still much to play for.

Stephen opened day two with an excellent 14.60 seconds in the 110M hurdles - only five one-hundredths behind the winner. This moved him up to take the overall lead with 4329 points. He then launched a superb first throw in the discus – a lifetime best of 44.52m to win the event and extend his lead further. Another big personal best came in the Pole Vault where he cleared 3.90m, losing some ground to his rivals, but still well in the lead. Stephen threw a near personal best of 43.15m in the javelin to keep himself 200 points ahead of the chasing pack.

With just the 1500m, the lead might have appeared unassailable, but this was far from the case. Both his chief rivals - Patrick Morgan and Oliver Adnitt - had recorded times of 4 minutes 27 this year. With an expected time of 5 minutes this was Stephen's weakest event. With a difference of 204 points between running 4 min 27 and 5 minutes, it was clearly going to be a close run thing. He was going to need to finish within 150 metres of Morgan and 180 metres of Adnitt.

Despite being several metres behind the last man in the field after the first 100m, Stephen kept a cool nerve and stuck to the pre agreed race plan of 5 minute pace. At one point, Oliver Adnitt was 200m ahead, but slowed when fatigue caught up with him after a fast early pace. Although Adnitt equalled his personal best of 4 minutes 27 seconds in winning the race, Stephen emptied the tank finishing in just over 5 minutes 2 seconds.

With Patrick Morgan finishing third in the 1500m in 4:32, no-one knew whether Stephen would prevail until the final result was announced. When it was, Stephen had won the decathlon in a new club Under 20 record of 6710 points with Patrick Morgan only 21 points behind for the silver; and Oliver Adnitt a further 27 points back for the bronze medal. There was a shared lap of honour at the end for all the young decathletes, which illustrated the competition's spirit of camaraderie

