

## **Stephen Simmons wins gold again**

Following on from his English School's Octathlon triumph in 2109, Bedford and County Athlete, Stephen Simmons, representing Bedford School and Bedfordshire and Luton Schools Athletics, won gold again at the ESAA Decathlon Championships held at Bedford last weekend, but not without a titanic battle with his two main rivals, Patrick Morgan of Hereford and Worcester and Oliver Admit of Humberside.

Stephen made an unspectacular start with 11.65 seconds into a headwind in the 100m to rank 6<sup>th</sup> of the 35 starters. He improved to 2<sup>nd</sup> place after a near personal best of 6.68 metres in the long jump. He then consolidated 2<sup>nd</sup> place with a big personal best of 12.23m in the shot and equalling his lifetime best with 1.80m in the High Jump. Despite recording 52.03 seconds (again close to his best ever) he finished 5<sup>th</sup> fastest in the 400m, dropping back to 3<sup>rd</sup> place overnight. With a strong second day to come, there was still much to play for.

Stephen opened the second day with an excellent 14.60 seconds in the 110M hurdles only five one-hundredths behind the winner, moving 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 Admit, but still well in the lead. Patrick Morgan stepped up into the frame and 2<sup>nd</sup> place overall with an outstanding 54.50m to claw back some 160 points on Stephen who himself threw a near person best of 43.15m to keep himself 200 points ahead of Morgan and 262 ahead of Admit

With just the 1500m the lead might have appeared unassailable, but this was far from the case. Both of his rivals 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 Admit.

Whilst Morgan set off at a suicidal pace passing 400m in 61 seconds (3 minutes 46 for 1500m). Despite being several metres behind the last man in the field even after the first 100m, Stephen kept a cool nerve and stuck to the pre agreed race plan of 5 minute pace. At one point, Morgan was 200m ahead, but paid the price for his early pace and faded to run 4 minutes 32 seconds; Admit came through to win in 4 min 27; and Stephen emptied the tank in running 5 minute 02.36 seconds.

No-one knew whether it would be enough until the final result was announced. Stephen set a new club U20 record of 6710 points with Morgan only 21 points behind for the silver; and Admit a further 27 points back for the bronze medal.

It had been a titanic battle, but it was a championship worth winning and a performance to be proud of.