

Bedfordshire and Luton Schools Athletic Association

**Bedfordshire & Luton Schools Team at English Schools Athletics Championships
Sportscity Manchester 9th & 10th July 2021**

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 a 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.

*Dennis Johnson
Chairman*

202 Spring Road
Kempston
BedfordMK42 8ND

Tel :01234 302858
Mobile :07973 691628
dennisjohnsonAntlworld.com

<http://sites.google.com/site/bedsandlutonsathletics/>

English Schools Gold for Stephen



Congratulations to Stephen Simmons, who won gold in the English Schools Decathlon Championships at Bedford on the weekend of 18th and 19th September. Stephen also broke the club's under 20 Decathlon record with a score of 6710 points.

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.

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