

SOMERSET SCHOOLS' AA / SOMERSET COUNTY AA COMBINED EVENTS AND RACE WALKING CHAMPIONSHIPS

**Millfield School, Street
Saturday and Sunday 27 and 28 April 2013**

On Friday 15 February, information and entry forms were sent to 67 schools and colleges and the 4 major Track and Field clubs in Somerset, with a closing date of Friday 22 March so that the programme could be prepared during the Easter holidays. The details were also emailed to the schools and colleges (by Brian Baker) and to all the Somerset clubs (by David Cooke).

As usual, substitutions could be made after the entry date, and indeed, on the days of competition. Final details were sent to all competing schools, colleges, clubs and guests on Friday 12 April.

We enjoyed the usual excellent hospitality at Millfield, thanks to close liaison with Gary Jennings, excellent co-operation from the ground-staff and the generosity of the school. The track and the field event sites were in superb order, offering the athletes every chance to perform at their best. Grateful thanks must go to Millfield for such attention to detail.

The meeting continues to be popular and after a dip below 200 entries in 2012 (for the first time in almost a decade) it was good to see a total of 205 this year. We used to receive between 50 and 60 more entries though - the recent trend has been 175 entries in 2002, 192 in 2003, 218 in 2004, 235 in 2005, 224 in 2006, 254 in 2007, 259 in 2008, 268 in 2009, 203 in 2010, 240 in 2011 and 190 last year. One or two schools entered athletes for the first time, but, once again, thanks are due mainly to those loyal schools and clubs who support the meeting year after year, appreciating the value of the unique atmosphere generated for their athletes by Combined Events competition.

Since 2008 the quality of performance in the Senior age groups has been enhanced enormously with the acceptance of guest competitors (many of international standard) and this year the visiting athletes came from Cornwall, Swindon, South Wales, Berkshire, the Midlands and Northern Ireland. Dorset joined us once again, with 29 entries and interest continues to grow to our east with Wiltshire Schools' AA (and St Laurence School) making 26 entries. Therefore, the grand total was 289 and at least that number does compare favourably with recent years – 299 in 2009, 277 in 2010, 308 (a record) in 2011 and 268 last year. Notable amongst those guests was Morgan Lake (the UK record-holder in the Under-17 Women's Heptathlon) who was seeking a qualifying score of 5100 points for the World Youth Championships in Donetsk, Ukraine, in July. Her inclusion entailed sourcing 3.00kg shot and 500g javelins (the IAAF Youth implements) but Nick and Sally Higman proved (unsurprisingly) equal to the task. The additional work was well-worthwhile as Morgan scored a superb 5480 points.

With the Somerset County AA Track and Field Championships continuing to be a two-day meeting we did not need to incorporate any additional events this year, though Race Walks were offered for all age groups, attracting a total entry of seven from Brymore School.

The 2013 County Champions were:

Under -13 Boys' Quadrathlon (29 Somerset entries – 22 competitors)

Ollie Thorner (Huish Episcopi Academy) 664 points

Junior Boys' Pentathlon (37 - 21)

Sam Dove (Kingsmead School) 2117 points

Junior Boys' 3000m Race Walk (4 - 0)

Intermediate Boys' Octathlon (20 - 14)

Matthew Trickey (Westfield Academy) 4241 points

Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk (4 - 2)

Gareth Stockton (Brymore School) 32:06.41

Senior Boys' Decathlon (9 - 5)

Harry Hall (West Somerset College) 5209 points

Senior Men's Decathlon (3 - 3)

Ben Gibb (Yeovil Olympiads A.C.) 5974 points

Under -13 Girls' Quadrathlon (48 - 35)

Elena Sidman (Mendip AC) 666 points

Junior Girls' Pentathlon (44 - 28)

Anya Turner (Wellington School) 2627 points

Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon (7 - 3)

Ellen Barber (King's School) 3234 points

Senior Girls' Heptathlon (7 - 5)

Jordanne Morrish (Millfield School) 3800 points

Senior Women's Heptathlon (1 - 1)

Sara Geary (Yeovil Olympiads AC) 4242 points

A number of teachers, coaches and parents assisted our loyal band of officials and all worked incredibly hard throughout the entire week-end. Sally and Nick Higman (Referee and Technical Manager respectively) led the officials brilliantly, ensuring the meeting ran efficiently.

Computer scoring kept athletes, parents, teachers and coaches fully aware of totals and positions immediately after each event and thanks go to Brian Baker for that vital service. Fully automatic timing and photo-finish were in operation throughout the meeting, fascinating aspects of the week-end for the athletes, and another development which has enhanced the status of our Championship, thanks to the time and effort put in by David Cooke, Sam Cooke and Eleanor Brock. This is typical of the superb co-operation between the Somerset Schools' AA and the Somerset County AA.

Five or six of the top performers from the Under-13 Quadrathlons were notified of the Academy of Combined Events by way of an opportunity for structured winter coaching.

RICHARD BOWDEN

ESAA SOUTH-WEST REGIONAL COMBINED EVENTS AND RACE WALKING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Exeter Arena
Saturday and Sunday 22 and 23 June 2013

The organising county (Devon) and the venue (Exeter Arena) for the 2013 South-West Regional Combined Events and Race Walking Championships were decided at the 2011 South-West Schools' AA Annual General Meeting, with Christine Baden as the Local Organiser. Therefore, we were entirely confident that the meeting would be a roaring success thanks to Christine's enthusiasm and experience, together with the outstanding support she could rely upon from the Devon Schools' AA, Devon County AA and Exeter Harriers – in particular the assistance of Eileen Mander, Janet Phillips and Terry O'Brien. Initial information was sent to County Secretaries on Tuesday 30 April with a reply to Christine requested by Friday 31 May.

Although the superb Exeter Arena facilities are perfect for the South-West Regional Combined Events and Race Walking Championships, the meeting cannot run itself – considerable numbers of volunteers are vital to ensure its success. Thus, I should pay tribute to the work carried out by Pat Gillett (Somerset Schools' AA Officials' Secretary) and Sally Higman (Somerset County AA Officials' Secretary) together with their Devon counterparts (Eileen Mander and Janet Phillips) in the recruitment of officials so that events were well staffed. With Nick and Sally Higman on international duty at the European Team Championships in Gateshead, Rowena Ferrier became the Referee, with Bob Ivory as Technical Manager.

The electronic system for entries operated smoothly and certainly made seeding a relatively straightforward task, though, as I report every year, some counties persist in failing even to estimate personal best performances for some athletes, possibly disadvantaging them in their allocation to heats and pools. From the electronic entries, Brian Baker quickly organised the lists of competitors and their seeding so that this information could be given to Team Managers at the South-West Schools' AA Track and Field Championships a week prior to the meeting. This year the programmes were printed professionally, by Mailadoc Ltd of Bridgwater, which ensured a neater finish than that which could be achieved using school equipment.

Some years ago, entries were up around the 130 mark and after several years of slight decline – 117 in 1998, 121 in 1999, 114 in 2000 – an encouraging 126 entered in 2001 and 121 in 2002. There followed an alarming dip to a total of 93 in 2003 and 96 in 2004, so I was pleased to note that the decline had been arrested with 121 entries in 2005, 113 in 2006 and 116 in 2007. I was hopeful that the 2008 total of 109 was not about to herald the beginning of another downward trend but increases to 119 entries in 2009 and 118 in 2010 suggested healthier participation. The total entry of 120 in 2011 maintained our optimism but we fell back to 109 last year and I am dismayed to report that the 2013 total fell by a further ten to fewer than 100 entries (99) for the first time in almost a decade. That having been said, once again only the South-East Region with 139 entries (121 participants) topped our total. The remaining four Regions saw entries (and participants) of 90 (76) in the Midlands, 89 (70) in the North-East, 75 (65) in East Anglia and 66 (59) in the North-West. Entries by county and age group were:

	Junior Boys	Inter Boys	Senior Boys	Junior Girls	Inter Girls	Senior Girls
Avon	0	3	0	4	4	1
Channel Islands	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cornwall	4	0	0	3	0	1
Devon	4	2	0	4	4	0
Dorset	4	1	4	4	2	1
Gloucestershire	1	2	0	2	3	1
Somerset	4	4	4	4	4	3
Wiltshire	4	4	0	4	4	1
TOTALS	21	16	8	25	21	8

Inevitably, numbers actually competing did not quite match this entry with only 78 athletes taking part this year (compared with 103 in 2009, 102 in 2010, 99 in 2011 and 92 in 2012) so there is a pattern of steady decline in participation which gives serious cause for concern. However, standards at the head of most fields remain encouraging (especially in the Girls' age groups), with seven individuals and three teams achieving places in the South-West "All-Time Top-10" rankings. The highlight was a magnificent Championship Best Performance of 7050 points (just 150 points from the UKA European Junior Standard of 7200) in the Senior Boys' Decathlon by Nicholas Hunt (Dorset) who added well over 300 points to the previous best South-West score and now holds all three Boys' records. Also worthy of note is the fact that the top three Junior Girls (listed over-page) achieved National Standard scores with Isabel Wakefield (Devon) in fourth place, only 12 points adrift and Anya Turner (Somerset) in fifth, missing the National Standard (2850) by a mere 20 points. To emphasise the quality in the 2013 Junior Girls' age group, Power of 10 shows that six of the top twelve in the UK are from the South-West.

The new rule concerning individual qualification for the ESAA Championships saw the inclusion of the following South-West athletes: Jordan Smart (JB Cornwall), Dominic Allen (IB Devon), Georgia Doyle-Lay (JG Cornwall), Isabel Wakefield (JG Devon), Natalia Isherwood (JG Avon), Bethan Burley (JG Dorset) and Ellen Barber (IG Somerset). Under the old rule, Natalia, Isabel and Bethan would not have progressed to the Final and they finished 7, 12 and 19 respectively in Birmingham!

It was gratifying to see that athletes from all seven competing South-West counties qualified for the E.S.A.A. Championships in September in the following numbers (once all the Senior Boys and Senior Girls were invited): Somerset 14, Devon 11, Dorset 4, Wiltshire 4, Avon 3, Cornwall 3, Gloucestershire 3.

The leading results and the list of automatic qualifiers for the ESAA Championships were as follows:

Junior Boys' Pentathlon (Record - 3169)

1. Sam Talbot	(Devon)	3153
2. Sam Chinn*	(Somerset)	2402
3. Nathaniel Hatherley*	(Gloucestershire)	2338

Team Result (Record - 7816)

1. Devon	7210
2. Cornwall	6784
3. Somerset	6565
4. Wiltshire	6094
5. Dorset	4844

Intermediate Boys' Octathlon (Record - 5786)

1. Matthew Trickey	(Somerset)	4292
2. Gio Downie*	(Wiltshire)	4269
3. Luke Reynolds	(Somerset)	4079
4. Nicholas Smith*	(Devon)	3782

Team Result (Record - 14009)

1. Somerset	11846
2. Wiltshire	11420

Senior Boys' Decathlon (Record - 6726)

1. Nicholas Hunt	(Dorset)	7050 CBP
2. Brendon England-Frost*	(Somerset)	4859
3. Daniel Martin	(Dorset)	5124
4. Matthew Curtis	(Dorset)	4544
5. Joe Trickey*	(Somerset)	4083

Team Result (Record - 18124)

1. Dorset	16266
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Junior Girls' Pentathlon (Record - 3143)

1. Breagha Campbell*	(Wiltshire)	2993
2. Ada'ora Chigbo*	(Avon)	2979
3. Georgia Doyle-Lay	(Cornwall)	2939

Team Result (Record - 8371)

1. Somerset	8064
2. Avon	7882
3. Wiltshire	7419
4. Dorset	7024
5. Devon	7018

Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon (Record - 4687)

1. Grace Davies-Redmond*	(Wiltshire)	4518
2. Jade Simson	(Devon)	4178
3. Mollie Courtney*	(Gloucestershire)	4160

Team Result (Record - 12277)

1. Devon	10985
2. Somerset	9818

Senior Girls' Heptathlon (Record - 4847)

1. Emily Dixon*	(Wiltshire)	4469
2. Kate Davies*	(Gloucestershire)	4157
3. Alice Vage	(Cornwall)	3941

Team Result (Record - 13129)

No Teams

*** Individual qualifiers for the ESAA Championships.**

Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk

1. Gareth Stockton	(Somerset)	29:09.1
2. Nicholas Bretherton	(Somerset)	30:08.5

Throughout a thoroughly enjoyable week-end the unique atmosphere of Combined Events was maintained thanks to some excellent performances, rousing team spirit and the commitment of so many individuals and groups mentioned earlier. That commitment was epitomised by Dick and Jan Edwards who celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary by officiating all weekend!

The venue for the 2014 Championships (due to be held on Saturday 28 and Sunday 29 June) will be Yeovil Athletics Arena, organised by the Somerset Schools' AA.

With regard to the organising county and venue for the 2015 Championships, a letter inviting 'bids' was sent to County Secretaries (supported by an email to other interested parties within the South-West counties) on Tuesday 24 September with responses due by Wednesday 16 October. The 2015 hosting county and venue will then be decided at the South-West Schools' AA Annual General Meeting at Wellington School on Saturday 19 October and colleagues will be informed of the details following that meeting.

RICHARD BOWDEN

E.S.A.A. COMBINED EVENTS AND RACE WALKING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Alexander Stadium, Birmingham
Saturday and Sunday 21 and 22 September 2013

The ESAA Combined Events and Race Walking Championships returned to Alexander Stadium, Birmingham, for the first time since 2008 and once again this international-standard facility proved to be the perfect venue for the biggest Combined Events meeting in the country; its central location being a bonus, particularly when some teams have to leave for far-flung parts of England after 6.30pm on the Sunday.

The local organising county was Northamptonshire Schools' AA who deserve great credit as sound preparation and attention to detail were clearly evident throughout a wonderfully enjoyable week-end.

With two teams and six individual athletes qualifying for the Combined Events Championships, and two Race Walkers selected, our group would once again be one of the largest on show (only Essex with 21 and Hampshire with 16 had more Combined Events qualifiers). Unfortunately, injury forced Gareth Stockton (Brymore School) to withdraw from the Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk, nevertheless, we finally arrived in Birmingham with a total of 15 athletes and 4 Team Managers. In fact the Somerset group comprised 16 athletes as Joshua Brown (Lincolnshire Schools' AA) joined us, having started at Millfield School this year. Inevitably we encountered several lengthy hold-ups on the Friday journey up the M5 which took four-and-a-half hours from Taunton; however, the athletes were patient and well-mannered despite the delays and this encouraging attitude set the tone for the entire weekend.

Devon returned to the fold in good numbers (11 qualifiers) this year and shared the Somerset transport and accommodation. A 29-seater coach from Knight Brothers of Taunton again proved our best option (and a significant money-saver). The team hotel was the West Bromwich Central Premier Inn, just seven miles and a fifteen minute journey to the stadium. This hotel had been selected and booked in March and I took the opportunity of an ESAA Education Committee Meeting on the weekend before the Championships to stay at the hotel, meet the staff and confirm final details.

The weather was warm and pleasant throughout the weekend with conditions generally favourable for the athletes. The organisation was most efficient, the stadium looked magnificent and our athletes were given every chance to perform well.

Our full results were:

Junior Boys' Pentathlon

Sam Chinn	(West Somerset)	16	2371
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Intermediate Boys' 5000m Race Walk

Nicholas Bretherton	(Brymore)	7	31:20.14
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Intermediate Boys' Octathlon

Luke Reynolds	(Haygrove)	22	4089
Matthew Trickey	(Westfield)	25	3998
Harry Atkinson	(Sexey's)	38	3427
Tim Kirkman	(Downside)	39	3407
Team Score		6	11514

Senior Boys' Decathlon

Brendon England-Frost	(Yeovil College)	15	5267
Joe Trickey	(Sexey's)	27	3962

Junior Girls' Pentathlon

Anya Turner	(Wellington)	9	2856 (NS)
Evie Gubb	(Millfield)	17	2624
Georgia Silcox	(Westfield)	22	2528
Izzy Care	(Millfield)	35	2249
Team Score		2	8008

Intermediate Girls' Heptathlon

Ellen Barber	(King's School)	16	4016
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Senior Girls' Heptathlon

Grace Cottrell	(Bridgwater College)	24	2984
Olivia Eaton-Jones	(Wellington)	27	2890

The Junior Girls' team achieved their expected place on the podium but there was really only one individual performance of note. Anya Turner was in third place after four events (with England vests for the Home International Indoor Pentathlons on offer for the top-four) but slipped to ninth after a 2:47.32 800m clocking. Nevertheless, Anya's total of 2856 was a National Standard score in a competition of particularly high quality. A Derbyshire athlete took the fourth England spot, moving up from thirteenth with a storming 2:19.90 over the two laps.

The team enjoyed tremendous support from our loyal group of parents, and they certainly helped engender a most encouraging team spirit. Another factor which should never be underestimated is the incredible work carried out by the Team Managers – Jane Yandell, Richard Llewellyn-Eaton and Rhys Llewellyn-Eaton. It should be noted that people continue to want to be involved with Somerset teams thanks to the excellent response we invariably see from everyone who dons the red vest. Superb care and attention to detail throughout an exhausting two days were afforded to yet another most deserving group of Somerset athletes whose reliability, conduct, pride and loyalty throughout the weekend made the meeting a fitting end to another tremendous season.

RICHARD BOWDEN