

English Schools National Championships Sheffield 10th and 11th July 2009

Gloucestershire Schools sent a full team of twenty-five athletes to the National Schools Track and Field Championships at Sheffield. The event was held over the two days, Friday, 10th July and Saturday, 11th July and fortunately the predicted rainstorms did not pass over the Don Valley Stadium.

Kate Yhnell brought home the first medal, a bronze, in the Senior Girl's Hammer competition. With three athletes throwing similar distances, she thought she was lying in fifth position. But she was delighted to find she was third in the final results with an National Standard (ns) throw of 45.70m. Kate, coached by Lorraine Shaw, at Gloucester, has just finished her final year at Chosen Hill School, Cheltenham. So it was a great way to finish her school career.

The Hammer Squad was well represented with Tim Williams (Crypt School), Michael Tommey (Brockworth Enterprise School), and Ashley Andrews (Wyedean School, Lydney), in the Senior Boys event on Saturday. They acquitted themselves well placing 5th, 6th and 7th respectively with throws of 57.66m (ns), 52.45m (ns) and 51.76m (es). Ashley, a newcomer picked up at the beginning of the season, achieved a personal best over two metres beyond the pb he submitted at the entry deadline, three weeks previous.

Meanwhile, Gareth Winter (Gloucester College), having come up into the Senior Boys category this year, was pleased to bring back another medal, a bronze in the Shot competition, with a throw of 14.49m, a National standard.

Two newcomers qualified at the County Schools Championships in early June, at Prince of Wales Stadium. George Salter, from Katherine Lady Berkeley School (South Cotswolds), had only been training for five weeks but came fourteenth in the Junior Boys Shot putt competition with a throw of 11.40m. Annabel Sherry, from Bournside School, Cheltenham, came 7th in her Junior Girls Shot putt competition with a entry standard throw of 10.67m.

Liam Downer, from Severn Vale School, Gloucester, was satisfied with a throw of 55.40m in the Intermediate Javelin competition. Still an National Standard performance, it was a couple of metres below the memorable 57.61m he threw at Gloucestershire School County Championships, witnessed by a full stand of watching parents and School staff. He unfortunately pulled his back in training just before English Schools, which restricted his training up to the competition.

Jamie Courtenay, from Balcarras School, Cheltenham, has competed in the shot in previous years. He opted for the Pole Vault this year and equalled his personal best of 4.20m (entry standard), to come 9th. It is challenging for a multi-eventer to excel at individual events when they have to balance training for ten disciplines and so it was a great achievement to qualify for both the Senior Boys Shot and Pole Vault. Jamie won the South West Multi-events Competition, Senior Decathlon, in late June.

Gloucestershire were pleased to be able to send a clutch of four hundred metre athletes. Both Andrew Scull (Cotswold School) and Charlie Scott (Sir Thomas Ritchie, Gloucester) qualified for the Junior Boys race. Charlie emerged at the County Schools Championships to join Andrew on Friday. Both achieved entry standards and personal bests, Andrew with a time of 54.45s and Charlie with 54.27s.

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In the Intermediates, Joel Clutterbuck from Maiden Hill School, Stonehouse, made it through to the semi-finals with a personal best of 50.57s which he improved to 50.28s in the semi-final. Improving all the time.

Training partner, Kacey Garraway, was another new find, coming through the school system, from Archway School. He contested the Junior Boys 200m Sprint, achieving a personal best of 23.97s, breaking the 24s barrier for the first time.

Will Paulson qualified for the Junior Boys 800m race and produced an entry standard performance of 2:03.43s coming 6th in the Final. This was also a personal best by over a second.

In the Intermediate Boys 1500m, Gloucestershire produced two contenders, in Luke Carroll from Cleeve School, and Tom Purnell from Wycliffe College. Tom was unable to reproduce his recent winning form, recording 4:11.16s, but Luke dominated a slow semi-final to qualify for the Final. In a second tactical race he eventually had to take the lead out in the final lap, for a convincing win in a National standard time of 4:01.20.

Tom Curr judged his 3000m Intermediate Boys race well to come through in the last lap to win gold in a National standard time of 8:37.14s. From Marling School, Stroud, he had overcome a niggling injury two months previously and was strong enough to get over two seconds clear of second.

A third gold medal came via Jennie Batten. She comfortably won her heat in 23.91s, and proceeded to demolish the field in the Final on Saturday afternoon, posting a time of 23.92s. National standards and personal best performances.

Her brother, Jamie, competed in the Intermediate Long Jump competition two years ago. He returned this year as a Senior Boy in the 100m sprint. He broke the eleven-second barrier, with a personal best time of 10.87s. Richard Morrissey, from Cheltenham College, progressed on to the Final with a time of 10.85s. The Final saw him in a blanket finish of three athletes fighting for fourth place. Richard lost out by less than a hundredth of a second, placing sixth in 10.92s.

Ben Coldray, from Denmark Road, Gloucester, kept in with the pack in the Senior Boys 1500m, coming 7th in a personal best time of 3:55.09s, entry standard.

Training partner, Amber Watson, (Kings School, Gloucester), contesting the Intermediate Girls 800m was up against tough competition. With a high entry and standard, there were three rounds. Amber made the Semi-final in 2:17.73s which she repeated in this race with 2:17.24s but wasn't enough for the Final which was won in a Championship Record time.

Sprinter Sophie Clifford, from Stroud High School, took on the Intermediate Girls 200m challenge, progressing from the semi-final in 12.44s to the Final. Here she produced a similar time, 12.46s to secure 5th place.

Savannah DeVillez qualified for the Intermediate 300m hurdles race but received a knee injury whilst doing her Duke of Edinburgh Award the week previous to competition. Doing the sensible thing, she rested and iced (R.I.C.E.) for the week leading up to English Schools. So, a little short of competition fitness, she was delighted to complete her event with a time of 48.01s.

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Imogen Briscoe, from Stoud High School, competing for the first time at English Schools, carefully planned her race to come through to qualify for the Final, in an entry standard time of 2:16.67s. She secured 6th place in the Final.

Medals were presented to the first three in each competition and Certificates to the first six, so Gloucestershire came away with a good haul of medals and certificates. Twenty percent took medals and eighty four percent of our athletes achieved entry standard performances over the weekend. Forty percent went home with new personal bests!

Overall, Gloucestershire did not win a Group or Aggregate Trophy, as we have so often in the past. But we came creditable second in the Senior Boys Category "C" and third overall in the Aggregate Group "C" Category. We are in Category "C" based on number of Secondary pupils in school in Gloucestershire.

Three qualified for the International against Ireland, Wales and Scotland, being held at Antrim, Ireland next weekend. This is purely for the Intermediate age group – school years 10 and 11 and to have three qualifiers is a tremendous accolade to athletics and athletes in the County.

Jennie Batten has had to decline because she has already been selected for the European Youth Olympic Festival in Tampere, Finland, on 18 to 25th July.

Luke Carroll and Tom Curr are both taking up the challenge and flying out on Friday to compete in the 1500m and 3000m respectively.

Joyce Barrus
Secretary and Team Manager
Gloucester Schools Athletics Association

