**Blackheath and Bromley Harriers Athletic Club U13 boys and U15 girls are both NATIONAL CHAMPIONS.**

Mansfield was the venue for The National cross country relays and despite an event packed weekend all our athletes produced some fantastic results in what turned out to be a brilliant weekend of running.

The bulk of the boys squad and a few of the girls squad travelled up by minibus on the Friday but as numbers increase each year we are very fortunate to have parents willing and happy to transport our athletes all the way to the midlands and back.

Nick Swatton, Cameron's dad did just this and took four of the U13 boys. Unfortunately Nick had a blow-out puncture on the M11 and despite jacking the car up and undoing the wheel nuts was unable to remove the wheel. The two hour wait in a field next to the motorway was great fun for the boys who re-enacted X factor over and over, but not so for Nick.  we weren't the only ones with vehicle issues, the Griffin contingent were oping to leave early and spend the afternoon relaxing with Dave Cordell and Nic Corry in the pub however, their plans were scuppered when Dick (narrowly missing the Wally award) filled his son Gareth's car with the wrong fuel. Several hours and pounds later they were ready to join the traffic jams!!

The mini bus had less problems but still had to endure huge traffic jams meaning less swimming time before dinner!

Once booked into our rooms it was down to the swimming pool for a few ball games. We were soon joined by track manager Ken Daniel whose work out consisted of two widths of the pool around 20 m, very impressive!

We were joined at dinner by Mr and Mrs President Dick and Shiela Griffin, VP's (amongst many other things) Dave and Hanna Cordell and  Nic Corry. Dinner passed peacefully with the highlight being an irate Ken Daniel (starving after his workout) complaining about the lack of choice of desserts. The speedy athletes had devoured the cheese cake and lemon meringue leaving Ken with only fruit salad!!

The young athletes then took over the snooker room and after a couple of hours chatting and doing what youngster do, it was lights out and resting up in preparation for the next days exertions.

Dave and Hanna were first up for breakfast and were already en route to set up our tent before many were even awake. Many thanks once again go to Hanna and Dave who work tirelessly to set up our base at all our athletic events. It was a great sightseeing our huge black tent flanked by BBHAC banners on arrival and in a prime location at the front of a very busy team tent area. If Hanna wants to continue helping Dave put the tent up she might need to get down the gym to build her arms up (so says Dave)!!

After breakfast it was a bit concerning seeing diligent Dave, our driver for the weekend, rushing back into the hotel looking concerned. The minibus wouldn't start as the battery had completely drained.  We thought Nick Swatton had had enough of vehicle problems but he reacted quickest and whisked Dave away to find somewhere to buy jump leads. Thirty minutes later sporting a heavy duty pair they quickly set about getting the minibus started. Huge thanks go to Nick Swatton for many reasons but especially for making light work of the situation and getting us all mobile again. Nick did get his rewards as all of the Blackheath contingent cheered him on during his senior mens race, despite wearing the colours of our rivals Herne Hill Harriers!!

The course at Mansfield is undulating, woody, dryish under foot and very well marked out. Having walked the course, pinned numbers on and secured timing chips to their ankles, all were ready to go.

First race of the day was the U20 girls and sad to say we had no BBHAC woman running, however Jess Jones (coach Mick's daughter) was running in the purple of her university, Loughborough. We all agreed Jess looks better in black but good to see Loughborough university coach VP Bill Foster gaining success with a fine 3rd place finish.

Jessica Keene had a great lead off leg for the U17 girls, running the fourth fastest leg of the day, handing over to Shannon Riskey who had a strong run and passed over to Kelsey Fuss who brought the team home in a great 7th position.

Next up was the U20 men and for the first time in many years BBHAC had more than enough running to complete a scoring team. Will Ruiz made the short journey across from his University at Birmingham to take on the fierce, competitive first leg and did well to hand over to Will Fuller in 40th. Will had a great run moving through the field taking many scalps handing over to  Richard Webb in 22nd. Richard, having interrupted a holiday to race, continued the scalping crossing the line in a very creditable 14th place.

Showing we have strength in depth Thomas Desborough ran the first leg of our incomplete B team running nearly 20 seconds quicker than last year.

The U17 boys trio of Joss Barber, Marco Arcuri and Charlie Davis are all first year in the age group so their 21st position finish was a great achievement and bodes well for next year. Joss had a very strong first leg handing over in 14th, passing to Marco who handed over to Charlie in 15th. Charlie was going well until being taken out with an upper cut head butt to the shoulder from a spectator clambering under the course marking tape. Charlie was able to finish but went straight to first aid where he was hoping to see a spectator with a bloody nose!

The U13 girls had two strong teams (they even had a travelling reserve in Zoe Austridge). First year in the age group Morgan Squibb and Lily Tappenden had the difficult task of leading the teams out on leg 1. With 112 girls crammed onto the start line it was no surprise that girls were getting spiked and falling but unfortunately Morgan was one of them. Getting spiked, ripping a brand new pair of spikes and tumbling right at the start is hard but Morgan gallantly got up, carried on and worked her way back up through the field. Not a great experience for her first National relay championship but hopefully it won't put Morgan off. Lily had a strong run handing over in 37th. Emilie Penlington ran a strong second leg for the A team gaining 21 positions while Sophie Hoare making her debut appearance for BB ran the fastest Blackheath U13 girl leg. Jessica Neal continued her great season with a fine last leg making up 9 places and bringing the team home in 20th position. Gracie Horton in her first competitive year also took a tumble at the start but recovered well to bring the B team home in 23rd place.

The U13 boys were looking forward to their race and were confident of doing well having won bronze medals at both the National Road relays and the South of England cross country relays. 90 teams started leg one and for the BB A team Peter Guy stormed off in usual power fashion leading from start to the home straight but was caught in the last few hundred meters by the City of York youngster. Not surprisingly these two recorded the first and second fastest times of the day. Joseph Georgiadis soon regained the lead and stayed in front all the way around the undulating 2km course and past over to 11 year old Rowan Fuss. Rowan never looked troubled despite being followed by some very useful athletes and crossed the line as Champions some 5 seconds clear, having run the sixth fastest time of the day. A fantastic team performance (and slightly more impressive than Joseph's dad Steve first to finish the Mansfield park run earlier that morning!)

Cameron Swatton took on the challenging task of leading the B team out on leg 1 and more than rose to the challenge with a superb run passing over to Robert Suckling in 37th. Robert pushed on through his leg gaining 7 places before handing to Keir Lundy who gained 5 places crossing the line in a great 25th as the second placed B team. A brilliant performance from all the U13 boys.

Next up was the current U15 girls National Road relay Champions team of Naomi Kingston, Yasmin Austridge and Katy Ann McDonald and what a thrilling race they produced right up until the final few strides. Naomi set the team up in a field of over 100 teams with a powerful leg handing over in 5th placed (having run the 6th fastest time of the day). Yasmin set off in determined fashion and was soon in 3rd place and gained an extra spot on the long hilly run in passing to Katy Ann in second place. Katy Ann flew off chasing the race leader but fully aware that hot on her heels was her school friend and running rival Alex Brown. Katy Ann pushed on throughout her leg and clawed back the leader and took the lead coming into the long home straight, still looking strong but with Herne Hill Harrier Alex Brown closing the gap. Approaching the last hill Alex eased forward and past Katy Ann to take the lead and looked good for the victory until Katy Ann open up her famous sprint finish to regain the lead and win a magnificent gold for the Blackheath team. A very exciting finish to a great race. The Blackheath U15 girls are so strong that the B team of Millie Smith, Stephanie Taylor and Grace Scopes finished a terrific 19th place being the 3rd B team to finish. We also had an incomplete C team comprising Madalina Samoila running in her BB debut recording a great time and Amy Leach running her leg nearly 20 seconds faster than last year.

Two age groups as National Champions, a very impressive statistic.

Coleman Corry led the U15 boys charge with a strong run on leg 1 with Angus Harrington making up 3 places on leg 2 before handing to Callum Myatt, (who would have run in his football boots had it not been for the last minute negotiations to borrow a pair of spikes) finishing in 43rd. Charlie Andrews making his National debut did well on the challenging opening leg despite running in trainers. Interesting to note that all these boys will still be in the same age group next year while many will move up an age group.

The journey home was less eventful with a quick stop for a fast food refuel and a lorry / car accident to slow us down before finally arriving back at the clubhouse around 8.30. With only one parent to wait for we thought we were in for an early night until Charlie D's car refused to start. Fortunately Dave our mini bus driver was still around and after a quick jump start a knackered computer was diagnosed, it was piling into another car for a small detour.

This week 'boys managers award' goes to **Cameron Swatton** for his fantastic gutsy run on the challenging first leg.

The 'girls team managers' award goes to **Millie Smith** for her excellent run on leg one.

The first ever 'Wally award' goes to Yasmin Austridge for locking her parents out of their room 10 minutes before they were due to leave. It took a supervisor 20mins and three attempts to unlock the door.

I would also like to thank my very able Team Captain Marco for his continued support and good humour a pre requisite for the job along with being a tea drinker!

The whole weekend was a terrific success and it was great to see so many BB supporters around the course supporting all our athletes and indeed our own athletes supporting each other.

It was commented on more than one occasion what  great camaraderie we have amongst the  young athletes we have within our great club.

Next fixture is the Kent League on November 8th, incorporating the Club Champs at Sparrows Den.

Paul Austridge