

THE CLUB NIGHT SERIES THIS WEEK GOES DOWN TO THE SOUTH EAST OF ENGLAND TO VISIT TONBRIDGE AC

History

TONBRIDGE AC may have been formed back in 1947, but over the last decade it has gone from strength to strength. Perhaps best known for a while as the first club of Dame Kelly Holmes, it has now established itself as a national-class competitor in a number of areas.

The Kent club has proved to be successful with young athletes over the years, but rarely turned junior success into senior achievements. With a thriving junior section amid the current 800-strong membership, it also has many competing for the club who are either studying at university or working full-time and this continued development has established the foundations for senior success in years to come.

Background

Club night training has been expanded in the last year or so to four days a week, Monday to Thursday, plus Sunday mornings. Mondays and Wednesdays are generally reserved for the under-11s, while around 30 coaches oversee the training of the older age groups.

Tonbridge's headquarters are Tonbridge School, with whom the club have a mutually supportive relationship. For example, on busy

Tonbridge AC



summer club nights, training groups will be operating both on the track and across the school sports fields.

The sprint, hurdles and field event groups have grown under the tutelage of coaches such as Iain Presnell and Dave Hull and have seen the elevation of the club's latest junior international, Lewis Church, who was selected for Great Britain in the under-20 indoor heptathlon this winter.

Mark Hookway is the team manager of all the winter teams at the club for distance running and says: "Tonbridge has been on the up, in terms of numbers and successes for a few years now, and hopefully it still has a way to go. We have developed a group of coaches who organise, plan and communicate with each other rather than compete with each other, which has been key in making it a positive environment. Much time is spent communicating with the athletes, plus parents and supporters, to try and make them feel part of the club and because of this we get a lot of help when hosting fixtures and races. A real positive is that athletes like Lewis Church in multi-events, or Tom Bosworth, a senior international race walker, plus more than a dozen current young distance running internationals are not only doing well, but still developing. Hopefully, it means the club has a bright future ahead of itself."

Amazingly, at the National cross country at Parliament Hill this year, Tonbridge won the under-15, under-17 and under-20 male team events and additionally James West won the England indoor under-20 1500m.

The club has been a huge supporter of the leagues and championships and its traditional trip to the annual National cross country typically involves three bus loads and more than 200 athletes and supporters. In the last decade the club has won 36 team medals at these championships, including 14 gold, the most recent being those this year.

Sessions

There are five separate training groups for distance runners, each with 30 to 40 athletes and these are organised by age and ability. These groups meet once a week

at another location in Tonbridge to provide different runs, hills and loops for their long reps sessions.

Each training group has a plan, with close coordination of the numbers, so that training takes place at different locations and routes. There is always a healthy mix of running at different paces, including hills and intervals, and the volume increases through the age groups.

Other key support comes from two of the parents, who are trained as fully qualified sports therapists and are regularly on hand to offer advice, treatment and massage during club nights.

Want your club featured?
Contact: david.lowes@athleticsweekly.com with some history and details of a typical winter session at your club and we'll do the rest!



U20 success: Max Nicholls, Corey De'ath, Ryan Driscoll and Robbie Farnham-Rose