**TAC Distance Runners and Supporters**

**TAC Distance Runners Update 25th February**

 **National Cross Country Championships**

**Introduction**

I can honestly say that I didn’t foresee the weekend being as epic as some of the recent National Championship experiences, but it ended up being right up there with the very best.

I almost feel sorry for Simon Coppard, who won the National under 20 men’s indoor 800 metres title at the weekend, a performance that gets lost amongst everything else. So it's best I mention him first here !

I can't recall a time when maybe we were so much up against the odds of repeating past successes, but came away from the National Cross Country Championships with such good performances. I had thought beforehand that we might have a chance of three team medals, but that wins were unlikely. Then by the time that we had got to Thursday I was simply hoping that the organisers wouldn't cancel the event, after the recent weather. I get the trip insured against cancellation, but wouldn’t find the process of claiming back around £20k on hotel and bus expenses that appetising.

So we arrived safely on the day and luckily the rain pretty much held off and the runners were simply faced with the underfoot conditions. In places there was surface water or knee deep mud, that tested everyone. Incredibly, TAC had 135 starters across the events and not one dropped out !

The total medal haul was 2 x gold and 3 x silver, which beats a couple of occasions (2013 and 2019) where we have won 2 x gold, 2 x silver, 1 x bronze. In 2015 TAC did win 3 team titles, but the total medal haul was 4.

There are loads of ‘entertaining’ videos and photos on social media, reflecting how tough the conditions were in places and Mark Pitcairn-Knowles kindly put together some clips that he captured. Mark’s video is amongst the race videos that we have posted.

Results - <https://www.tacdistancerunners.com/results-2020.html>

Videos - <https://www.tacdistancerunners.com/english-national-cross-country-championships-at-nottingham-saturday-22nd-february-2020.html>

Photos - Mark Hookway’s Facebook album - <https://www.facebook.com/mark.hookway.5/media_set?set=a.10157878808329788&type=3>

Awards Dinner photos - <https://www.facebook.com/mark.hookway.5/media_set?set=a.10157879020624788&type=3>

Before I go any further I would like to thank everyone who raced and supported. There were very few ‘missing’ who could have been there, which makes organising the event worthwhile.

**Senior Men - 1st**

It was really battle of attrition out there, where mental resolve counted as much as physical preparation. The temptation is often to look at some of the performers from other clubs and take for granted what we have in depth. On another day TAC might have a different scoring six and that’s what makes a big difference, when you have depth to a squad.

Luke Fisher was the big surprise, claiming the sixth scorer spot and walking away with a National gold medal. All the others had done it before, led by Max Nicholls (11th), who would have enjoyed the conditions. Max extended his National team medal haul to  six golds and four silvers, plus a couple of individual silvers ! Ben Cole (24th) was as reliable as ever , whilst Kieran Reilly (32nd) and Ryan Driscoll (42nd) used their experience to great effect. Hats off to Corey De’Ath in 58th, not having his best performance, but hanging in there, when many might have crumbled.

TAC would have won with any of the next three finishers being our sixth scorer, as Jamie Bryant was 90th, Michael Ellis 96th and Cameron Payas 101st.

So that makes three wins and a second in four years, which have come after a previous best of 11th.

Total number of TAC starters was 37, compared to the record of 44 in 2018

Max Nicholls 11th is only behind Chris Olley’s 4th and 5th in TAC history

Other highlights -

Tom Holden finishing 874th and fulfilling a promise he made to himself to get back and run the National, after suffering the major accident less than three years ago.

Tony Cohen finishing, despite being under instructions from the ‘boss’ not to start. “I had to try and keep my sequence going” was his excuse, as he hit 11 in a row.

Andy Wood increasing his TAC record to 13 Nationals in a row.

TAC were also top of the 9 to score table, aswell as the 6 to score.

**Senior Women - 7th**

It was the fourth year in a row of finishing in the top eight and this despite missing some key personnel.

Nicole Taylor (20th) and Lucy Reid (27th) led the team as expected and then there were a row of what I thought were excellent performances from Harriet Woolley (104th), Chloe Bird (124th), Polly Pitcairn-Knowles (157th) and Alex Crockford (199th). I think they could all move up again next year, if they stay fit and healthy. A special mention to Chloe who had battled all sorts of niggles to get to the start line.

Suzie Jeddo won the trophy for the performance, most above expectations, with her 345th, as 911 finished.

There were 19 TAC starters, which equalled the club record, set last year.

**Under 13 Girls - 1st**

Without being an expert analyst for this age group I imagine Chiltern, the Southern Champions, might have been amongst the pre-race favourites, but their challenge didn’t materialise and they finished outside the medals. In the end it was Wreake and Soar Valley who finished just eight points behind. This is equivalent to Georgia Conroy, our final scorer in 84th, running just five seconds slower.

Lily Slack was the highest placed TAC female finisher of the championships in 5th, but it was Gracie MacAuley who produced the stunning performance in 9th. Penny Horne in 38th also had an excellent race.

It took 34 years between 1985 and 2019 to win an under 13 girls’ championship and then two come along in succession.

Finally, a big shout out to Florence Hopkins, who I suspect lost a bit of sleep worrying about her decision to race, as she wrestled with the dilemma. In the end she gave it a go and finished 355th and beating two others. Flo - you have set yourself up nicely to capture an award next year.

**Under 20 Men - 2nd**

Winning the silver medals here was a bit of a surprise with scorers at 17,20,60 and 69, showing once again that you just need to keep battling and there can often be a chance of a medal.

James Puxty returned to form, having finally strung some consistent weeks of training together, without the interruption of tonsillitis. Will Beeston (60th) and Dan Schofield (69th) also had difficult build ups with injuries, with Dan not running for two weeks beforehand. Thanks to Richard Puxty for treating him and taping him up, plus with Dan’s own determination, he came away with a team medal.

James Stoney had been in a scoring spot for much of the race and was unlucky to turn his ankle over and had to hobble home.

In 8 of the last 9 years a TAC team has finished 1st or 2nd in this age group. The one ‘blip' was 2018 with a 4th. If we are to continue the run of success with the seniors then hopefully some of this squad can develop and gradually increase their training levels over the next two or three years.

**Under 17 Men - 2nd**

We are lucky to have good numbers in the age groups, which hopefully bodes well for the future and this squad is no exception.

Another team effort where the final scorer in 50th highlights the importance of everyone in the squad.

Matthew Taylor (5th), Henry Taylor (30th) and fifth man home Matthew Dubery (59th) are all young enough for the age group next year.

He probably doesn’t realise it but a few of us have been watching Fraser Gordon battle away over the past months. It's been a challenge for Fraser to convert from being a huge success in the youngest age groups to now having to add good training quality to talent. The increased work that he has done over the past few weeks paid off and he helped the team to the medals, in 24th.

This is another age group where we had a ‘blip’ in 2018, as otherwise teams have won a medal in every National since 2008 !

Matthew Taylor won the South of England Championship and had another outstanding race here in 5th.

Relative newcomer to TAC, Rhys Page, had his best race to date, although his chip timing didn’t record a finish position. Checking the video footage he was around the early 90s.

**Under 15 Boys - 2nd**

After the disappointment of missing out at the South of England Championships, this squad bounced back with 8 in the top 100. South London Harriers were convincing winners and TAC held off Windsor by just one point.

Adam Jeddo (26th), George Hopkins (35th) and Ananjan Ganguli (37th) all had cracking runs, even in conditions that one or two have found very difficult in the past. Josh Prendergast closed the scoring team in 42nd and we tend to forget how young he is, since he has another year in the age group.

George Thomas won the ‘Best Performance’ trophy for his race in 198th from 364 and hopefully can continue his upward trajectory.

The silver medals made it 13 podium positions in this age group since 2006.

**Under 13 Boys - 5th**

Although the team were outside of the medals there were a few individual performances amongst the best on the day, from a TAC perspective.

Harrison Fraser’s 25th has probably surpassed all of his dad’s achievements already (only kidding Simon), whilst Oliver Head (41st) also had a stunning run. Then came James Petrie (74th), who has another two years in this age group and has already stated one of his targets is to do ten Nationals in a row !

Tom Daly (78th) completed the scoring team and having watched him do ’strides’ on the Thursday night I expect him to fly in the Summer.

Daniel Jeddo (115th) won the TAC ‘Most Improved’ award, as he was up from 462nd in his last National.

**Under 17 Women - 6th**

This age group is one where it starts to get really tough, as the 'drop out rate’ in sport between under 15 and under 17 is significant and then again to under 20.

It’s partly one of the factors behind Amber Crush winning the TAC ‘Biggest Improvement’ Award at the Dinner. Amber had previously finished 454th as an under 13 and 442nd as an under 15, before this year finishing 239th.

Katie Goodge led the team home in 22nd, which was probably expected, but just behind her was Erica Bowen in 25th, who has hardly raced for TAC and lives away from the club. She is in the process of moving clubs, so this will have been her last competition for TAC. Alex Evans (97th) was the third scorer, whilst

Flora Currie (111th) was next home and moved up from previous National places of 276th (u15) and 152nd (u17).

**Under 20 Women - 8th**

This is the only age group with just three to score, in the team competition, and TAC placed 8th. However, if it had been four to score, as in years gone by and as per all the other young athlete races, then we we would have finished 4th by my calculations. This is with a first scorer in 79th.

The girls are great friends and I just hope will continue with the sport as they go to university and enter the senior ranks. A few have come all the way through the age groups and helped out Winter and Summer teams so often.

**Under 15 Girls -12th**

We have some gutsy girls in this age group ! I could go through all of them and highlight aspects that they have overcome.

Olivia Breed (20th) has been 2nd and 9th, at the National, in the past two years and then suffered a freak accident back in the Summer, leaving her with a broken foot and a few weeks away from the sport. It's been great seeing her battle back, plus her attitude to finishing further down the field, in early races, than she had been used to.

Sophie Slack (100th) had been quite unwell in the week and I imagine couldn’t have enjoyed racing, but really wanted to be part of it all. Annabelle Hales (184th) and Ella McIntyre (186th) completed the scoring team, whilst Aimee Holdstock (265th) had also been unwell, but this season has demonstrated how it’s possible to come back from being almost at rock bottom and get some excellent results. For this she won the TAC ‘Achievement Award’ in the evening.

**Award winners**

Best Debuts - India Nicholson and Oliver Head
Most Improved - Amber Crush and Daniel Jeddo
Best Performance (above expectations) - Susan Jeddo and George Thomas
Highest Placed - Lily Slack and Matthew Taylor
Achievement Award - Aimee Holdstock
Team Manager's Award - Steph Puxty

**Finally**

Next year the National Championships will be in the South, at Parliament Hill, on Saturday 6th March 2021. I have confirmed this with Ian Byett, the Secretary of the English Cross Country Association this morning.

This is a bit later than usual, since the UK Inter Counties will be held earlier, on 20th February as trials for the World Championships (u20s and seniors) in Australia.

The years in which we have a ‘home’ National are easier to organise, but on the day more stressful in terms of the Awards Dinner. I don’t want to break the sequence of 14 years for the dinners, so feel we should do something. If anyone has any suggestions to make it simpler and easier to get home and to an evening function, please let me know. In the past we have booked Salomons Conference Centre, at Southbororough.

Once again I can't stress enough how important it is that so many of you make the effort to attend the championships and the whole weekend and I thank you for the support.

Mark

**Championship dates Winter 2020/21**

Sunday 20th September - South of England Road Relays at Crystal Palace

Saturday 3rd October - National Road Relays at Sutton Coldfield

Saturday 31st October - National Cross Country Relays at Mansfield

Saturday 9th January - Kent Cross Country Championships at Brands Hatch

Saturday 30th January - South of England Cross Country Championships at tbc

Saturday 20th February - UK Inter Counties and trials for World Championships

Saturday 6th March - National Cross Country Championships

Sunday 27th March (tbc) - South of England 6/12 Stage Road Relays at Milton Keynes

Saturday 10th April (tbc) - National 6/12 Stage Road Relays at Sutton Coldfield

If you book all of these in your diary/phone calendar I will be very happy !