The penultimate race in the McGrady Financial Junior Cross Country Series was held at Delamont Country Park on Sunday 17th January 2016 at 1pm. East Down Athletics Club hosted Race 4 out of 5, and the extremely soggy race track made it a day for the welly boots instead of spikes. Junior athletes from East Down AC, Newcastle AC, Dromore AC, Burren AC and 3 Ways AC competed, as this increasingly popular race series, heated up.

Proceeding began with a minute’s silence, at the start of the race, in remembrance for Ellen Finnegan of Castlewellan, who was a past junior runner. Everyone at Newcastle AC sends their sympathy and prayers to Ellen’s father, family circle, and all her friends.

The P4 girl’s race seen Jodi Foster from East Down clinch her first win of the series in a fast time of 2.21 minutes. Three seconds later Lyndsey Kelly of 3 Ways crossed the finishing line in second, with Caoimhe O’Hare from 3 Ways in third. Lyndsey has 3 wins out of 4 in the series. This was the biggest race of the day with 26 competitors enjoying the fun, including 13 East Down & 8 Newcastle AC girls racing in this age group.

Leo Madine from East Down confidently won the P4 boys race in 2.23 minutes, with Kieran Trainor in second, Niall McCauley (Newcastle)third & Alexander Robinson (East Down) in fourth. The Madine family continued the podium finishes, as Leo was not to be outdone by his big sister Lauren’s performance in the P6 race! Kieran and Leo both have 2 wins under their belt, and the final race has all to play for, in this age group.

P5 girls race was won by Laura Hanna of Newcastle, who led from the start in a long lap round the soft, gruelling muddy terrain and held on, up to the final hill finish. In second place was Amy McCartan (Dromore) and Rosa Donnelly in third, also of Newcastle. Amy has had 2 wins in this year’s series, Laura one, and Anna McDonagh won at Castlewellan.

P5 Boys were next up with 3 Ways Tiernan O’Hare finishing first in 2.55 mins, Noah Sheridan of Newcastle stormed to second, ahead of Donal Coffey (3 Ways), who defended third place to Oliver Robinson of East Down. Tiernan has won the last 2 races, with Noah and Oliver having a win each.

P6 Girls was won by Lauren Madine (East Down) who beat the boy’s time yet again, in 4.06 minutes. She was in the lead from the start in Delamont Park, but it was a tight finish with Anna Gardener (East Down) who finished 3 seconds behind, in second place. Then Aoibheann Mynes (Burren) was third, ahead of Lucy Foster of (East Down) & Catherine Cousins (Newcastle). Laura Madine has now won 4 races out of five to win P6 Girls age group, but all is to play for in the two other podium places.

Lauren Madine continued her impressive victories, in the 3rd round of the Flahavan’s Porridge Primary School Cross Country League in Donard Park. She displayed remarkable maturity for one so young, as she stalked the early leaders through the first lap, before accelerating away, to record her second win in the series, and qualify for the Ulster finals to be held next month at Mallusk. Certainly, a starlet to look out for in the years ahead. Anna Gardiner, who had taken 9th place the previous day at Greenmount in the Primary School Race, also gave eye-catching performance from another prodigious local talent.

P6 Boys race seen Daniel Sheil of Newcastle AC take his third win of the series in a row. Eoin Cunningham of 3 Ways AC, Cathaoir King of Newcastle AC & Cormac McGovern of 3 Ways AC, where 2nd, 3rd & 4th in this closely contested race.

P7 Girls race saw Kate McCartan of Dromore AC take her 1st podium position, Lianna Farrelly of Burren AC in 2nd, closely followed by Hannah Owens of 3 Way AC. Lara McCarthy was not racing but has 3 wins out of 4 in the series.

P7 Boys race had a 1st & 2nd from 3 Ways AC, with Caolan O’Hare in first and then Brian Watters with a close 2 second gap, between the pair. East Down runners of MacKenzie Murray & James Gilliland took third and fourth respectively. Caolan has 4 wins out of 4 to take first place in the series.

Year 8 Girls was a 1-2-3 from 3 Ways AC led by Caitlin Coffey, with her 4th win of the series, followed by Siofra McAteer in 2nd and Olivia Hall in 3rd.

Year 8 Boys saw 3 Ways Oisin Lennon take his 1st win of the series this year, with Ultan O’Callaghan (3 Ways) in 2nd , followed by 3 Newcastle’s Oran O’Connor, Ronan McVeigh and Aaron Noade. Odhran Hamilton has 3 wins in the series to date.

Year 9 Girls saw the battle continue with Aoife McGreevy of 3 Ways and Eve Kenneally of Newcastle in 1st & 2nd. Emer Matthew’s of 3 Ways was 3rd, ahead of Dromore’s Leah Donnelly and Lucy Bradshaw.

Year 9 Boys saw Christopher Neill of Newcastle Ac took the first podium place and Nathan Tumelty came in second. Cathal Farrelly has 2 wins in the series and Christopher one under his belt.

East Down had to wait until the final two races of the day before reaching the winner’s podium again with Edie Carroll and Hannah Gilliland taking top honours for the Year 10 Girls and Laura Gardiner and Aoife Cochrane performing similar heroics in the Year 11 category.

Year 10 Girls had Edie Carroll of East Down take her fourth win of the series in front of Hannah Gilliland also of East Down (four consistent 2nd places). Kiara Cairns of Newcastle AC was third and Lara Procter-Amos (East Down) in fourth.

Year 10 Boys saw Oisin Coffey of 3 Ways take his first win ahead of Adam McKibbin (Dromore) and Adam Morgan of East Down. Each race has had a different winner, and the last race will see the first finisher take the series. Best 4 out of 5 races win the series.

Year 11+ Girls – Laura Gardiner (East Down) stormed home 1 min 11secs ahead of Aoife Cochrane of East Down (1st in Castlewellan), with Rachel Collins of Dromore in third. Laura Gardiner has three wins in the series out of 4.

Year 11+ Boys - 3 Dromore men of Ethan Dunn, Jack Ferguson and Adam Hilditch took 1st 2nd and 3rd positions ahead 3 East Down athletes of Daniel Atkinson, Matthew McGrattan and Owen Edwards. Ethan has now clinched the series with 4 wins out of 4.

Well done to all who participated in this race and many thanks to all the organisers and the parents who make it a great experience.

Congratulations are due to the many people who remembered to bring their race number, and to register in good time for the races on the day. Thanks to all the clubs, volunteers and to everyone involved in the race, who make the event such a success.

The Fifth & final race in the McGrady Financial Junior Cross Country Series will be held at Tollymore Forest Park, Bryansford, on 28th February 2016.