

## **Race report McGrady Financial Services Junior XC Series 2017/2018 – Race 5 Sun 25<sup>th</sup> Feb**

The fifth & final race of the series was held on a day beautiful to look at - blue skies and with little cloud - following a few dry days. If, like the evident crowds visiting Newcastle later, everybody was hoping for a nice spring day, there was a spoiler: a stiff easterly breeze dragging the feeling back to a harsh winter. With temperature not far above freezing, the ground played a pleasant hard and dry, not frosty.

After registration; final bits of advice passed out here and there: “don’t forget to cross the line”. It was to be the P4 girls leading out by example. Here, Erin Easton led home finishing with a final stretch for the line; Kelsey Murray & Helen Barbour closely followed in second and third respectively. I spotted one more winner the race though: Ciara McVeigh, who couldn’t make the start of the series, was back competing; surely the biggest applause for the warmest race finish of the day.

The P4 boys followed up with the lead pair away early. Was it too early? They held on and finished: Darragh Crimmins, Ciaran Kelly - one, two; Cillian McCarthy, third close behind, leading the rest of the field in. Lovely to see was William Taylor’s fighting finish. Every place counts and there was nearly another one in his grasp.

Back to the girls, P5’s this time. With the distance up from the nominal 500m to 750m there was more of the climb to take on to the finish. The start took longer to settle to a pace & tense order. Our leader managed her distance to after the final turn left and leaving the line of the entrance drive on a parabola, climbing tighter to the monument. Erin Moore’s finish need to be strong and sustained to keep Kari Foster at bay, the pair now leading out, with Emma McEntee in third place.

P5 boys, how would they handle the course? As it turned out it was with clearly a good spread in the field lead to finish in order: Alexander Robinson, first; Kieran Trainor, second; Ryan Stevens, third, with only Louis Donnelly adding a threat to the running order with a close fourth.

The P6 girl’s race had set off for the start line now, a full 1000m to run. At this distance the field was now leaving our sight round the copse of trees on the lowest point of the course. An out of sight chance for the order to change. No surprises this time, the order remained Jodi Foster leading Lyndsey Kelly next, Lily Rimmer following. The girls were running a fast race and Jodi did not let up. Confident in her ability, the lead growing towards the end and so they finished as the top 3.

The P6 boys race turned out to be a closer affair. Places changed on the back of the course. With the order seemingly settled: Daniel Carr stable in front, Ciaran Wallace second and Robbie Nicholl third, as with many of the rest of the field strung out behind with established distances.

The P7 girl’s competition was dictated to by Ava Mehaffey who went on to win. Ava stepped out strongly and teased out a gap that she maintained throughout the race. With a quick look back on the field behind at the final bend, Ava finished with a lengthening stride and a final hop. Cara McQuade, second, finished smoothly, ahead of a closing Emily Gabrielle Burns in third.

P7 Boys race continued a theme for the day: that of the early lead, setting the pace, and going on to finish in order. And so, Alex Watson set out at pace in front, followed in order by Tiernan O’Hare, then Oliver Robinson. This was the last of the races split by gender.

Year 8 pupils now gathered to run as one and straight from the start a split emerged with a smaller group of four setting out strongly: Daniel Reid was the early leader and would go on to win the Boys, with the trio of girls Lauren Madine, Anna Gardiner & Lucy Foster making up the balance of the group, and pulling away impressively & finishing first, second and third. For the boys, Daniel Reid was followed over the line by Daniel Shiel, second, and Jamie Wallace, right behind in third.

Now the turn of the Year 9 pupils. As with all races from P6 up, another 200m was added; now at 1600m. The pace was fast from the start, some of the onlookers asking was it too strong? We needn't have feared: Caolan O'Hare & Mackenzie Murray were on a mission and had settled into a groove that would continue to stretch them well out in front. Caolan finished first, then Mackenzie, and in third place Christopher Barbour. The girls held a steady pace, running relatively close together until the midway point when Kirsti Foster started inching a lead out that would take her to first. Anna Byrne followed by Ciara Savage finished the top spots, continuing their fine effort to the last.

Time for the Year 10's. The wind was picking up and was more blustery in nature, and so it was with the start of this race - the first few positions swapping like leaves in a gust, but then settled down to an established order. The girls had a smaller field in this race, with Lora Stevens finishing first ahead of Alea Brannigan. For the boys, Calum McDonagh held the lead where he would stay to the finish line; Ronan McVeigh then Ultan O'Callaghan kept the following position of second and third occupied to the end.

So to the last race of the day - the year 11s. Again, and for the last time, the course lengthened, now 2000m. As with the several of the days races the early running order was to give a good indication of the finish. The Girls race was won by Edie Carroll, who had led her race in and sportingly finished the day shaking all the hands of her fellow competitors, starting with Eve Kenneally in second and Rebecca Magee in third. The lead pair of boys Matthew McGrattan and Christopher Neill were away to the front, pushing hard after the first lap, their positions well cemented. Matthew came in first, Christopher second, and Darragh Connolly in third.

Well done all.