

Determination On Display at Delamont from Newcastle Juniors

Report by Siobhan Grant

A low lying February sun shone down upon Delamont on Sunday afternoon as East Down AC prepared to host the third race of the 22/23 McGrady's Financial Services Junior Cross Country Series.

Many of our Juniors welcomed a return to the course after representing their schools here last month at Round 2 of Flahavans Primary Schools Cross Country League and at the Ulster Schools District Heats. Many of whom would be pulling on their spikes as imminently as the next day in Newtownards for Round 3 of Flavahans and in Mallusk at the Ulster Schools Finals on Wednesday as they change their vests from club to school.

Yet you can't run tomorrow's race today and this meant a number of our runners had to employ strategic runs to ensure they performed well across back to back competitions focusing on their main race goals.

First up we welcomed back the shortest legs in the competition for the P4 and Under Category. Méabh Flynn was on fire as she led from the front and tackled that first hill like it was a Hill and Dale race. Pushing hard right to the end. Not far behind was Sophie Kerr who used the final downhill to stretch out and finish strong. Rua Gosling was hot on her heels and with more race experience will definitely come into her own. Event favourite and newly turned 4 year old Charlotte Kerr was flanked on all sides by her cheer squad as they encouraged her and kept her focused on the finishing flags.



Méabh Flynn leads the way in the P4 and Under girls

The P4 and Under Boys race welcomed Ruaidhri Watson back to the field who was raging that he had missed the previous race due to illness. He fought so hard at the end but was pipped to 3rd place. Luca McIntosh ran well over the 500m course and led club mate Mark McDonald across the line.

The P5 race witnessed some amazing performances from our Juniors. Harry McVeigh took a convincing win in his first of three races in the next 5 days for the current Under 10 Ulster XC Champion. Rossa McAleenan tussled with East Downs Mark Canavan throughout but it was the opposing red and yellow jersey that secured 2nd place with Rossa taking 3rd. Cuan McMurray followed shortly behind with a focused and smooth run.

Elizabeth Houston took 2nd place in the P5 girls category as she dug deep on the final straight to finish well.

The P6 race was entertaining to watch as the boys and girls both lined up together. Always a fan of the mixed races as it does give a different dynamic to the event, this race surely showed it. Leading young lady Emily Kerr was matched stride by stride by club mate Senan Gosling who was not going to let up even if it was Emily's 10th birthday. The two of them crossed the line together to rapturous applause for a well fought battle right around which earned Senan 2nd boy and Emily 1st girl. It was fantastic to see Isla McMullan back to herself and maybe the welcomed addition of a puppy to the family and the day's support crew helped encourage her to take 3rd place. Luke McDonald was close behind in her footsteps for 4th boy home.



Senan Gosling and Emily Kerr battle it out for place in the P6 race

The P7 category reverted to the boys and girls only races to accommodate numbers. A superb and confident run from Connaire Og Mc Veigh rattled a few of his competitors at different points throughout. He crossed the line comfortably in 2nd as he prepared himself to toe the line against some of the same runners the next day.



Connaire Og McVeigh produces his best form this year

Training partner Saorlaith McAleenan made light work of the P7 girls race. Running a conservative race with her focus on the upcoming Flavahans race. It was still a sight to behold. Impeccable form with a controlled run, never challenged from the whistle. Mary Houston, Lily McMurray and Aoife Grant all knew that they would be joining Saorlaith on the same start line in Newtownards for their respective schools the following day however this didn't stop a passion filled display of talent from these young ladies. With all home well under 6 minutes for the 1200m route.

As the day progressed into the Post Primary categories, strategies moved from those preparing for Flavahans to those having to consider the Ulster Schools Finals this coming Wednesday. With some runners opting to not take part on the day to save themselves and avoid a potential injury.

The Year 8 girls race saw a return to winning ways for Masie McVeigh, just in time for a confidence boost and a reminder of the talent that she has before she heads to Mallusk. Cruising through the finish with 15 seconds over 2nd place. Estelle Austin has recently really come into her own and that mixing up the Monday night sessions between speed work and trips to the Mast are paying off as it was clear she believed in herself and her natural running abilities. She secured a very convincing 4th place and was soon joined across the line by Niamh Watson who has also continued to embrace the Monday climb to overlook a lit up Newcastle.



Maisie Mc Veigh smiles as she reclaims her winning ways

The craic and banter on the Year 8 boys start line was soon silenced as spectators witnessed a hard fought battle throughout the race. Fiachna McAleenan found the skilled race tactics of Paddy Sherrard posed a challenge and at many stages they were shoulder to shoulder. Paddy had spent the morning at Mary Peters Track for his final meet of the Flahavans Endurance Squad and maybe the drive and acceleration of Fiachna in the closing stages was just too much this time for him to take the lead, both boys admitted it in the aftermath that it was a great race and the spectators are looking forward to the next race. Fionn McEvoy put in a steady race and showed promise over the 1400m with Rónán Grant taking the race to a close with a finish even Euid Kipchoge would be proud of.

Aaron O Boyle continues to lead the Year 9 boys category and although he was at no point even threatened with a 18 second cushion in the end, he pushed himself and showed grit and determination to the last stride. Club mate Jamie O'Flaherty continues to make his mark in this category and displays remarkable courage and drive just losing out to 2nd place. Rowan Bailey competed in the competition for the first time this series and produced a confident display throughout the race.

The Year 9 girls race marked another win in the competition for Erin Easton using the second lap to widen the gap between school and club mate Sarah Uhomuibhi in 2nd.

Emily McMullan joined both the Year 10 girls and boys race as the only Newcastle AC representative for a multi lap 1800m. She was focused and steady throughout taking 4th place.

To finish, the Year 11+ race ensured that the day finished on a cliff edge. A smart, controlled run from Euan McIntosh throughout as he employed the sit tight and know your competition tactics. As

the race neared a close, the early acceleration from East Downs Daryl Glennon unlocked the most powerful finish of the day with Euan driving forward in a straight out sprint for the line. His strength, determination and knowledge of his own abilities was clear as he crossed the line in 3rd place with a 2 second advantage over 4th.



Euan McIntosh pulls out an amazing sprint finish

Sophie Neil went out hard and soon found her pace settling over the 2000m. Finishing in 9.10 for 2nd place.



Amazing running this series from Sophie Neil continues

A huge thank you to the team at East Down AC for an efficient and smoothly organised event and to the event sponsors McGrady's Financial Services for affording the opportunity to our local young athletes to participate in such an amazing event.

Next up in the Series is Race 4 which will be hosted by ourselves at Newcastle AC on March 5th in Tollymore and we look forward to what Race 4 will bring to the series.