

Mighty McVeigh's Make Their Mark at the International Armagh Road Races

Report by Siobhan Grant

Thursday welcomed the return of the Armagh 5K International Road Race after a 3 year hiatus. The event is organised by Armagh Athletic Club and attracts athletes of the highest elite standards from all over the world on this fast course with more than half of the runners last time out being from beyond this country.

In the lead up to the start of the best and most popular road race in the world there is always a flawlessly executed, jammed packed line up of fully inclusive, junior races beforehand where many youngsters get to represent their schools and clubs on the large scale.

As many sat at home awaiting an update from dedicated parents, Connaire and Patricia, on how things were going, it was hard to forget that this week all three McVeigh children were toeing the line for their third competitive race in 5 days. The relentless training and dedication to their sport could have possibly at this stage taken its toll on their legs, however with youth on their side, they bounced back race after race and never failed to impress, whether that was for club or school.

With darkness engulfing the bustling greenery of The Mall, at 6.55pm there were immediate sparks of light visible from his Nikes as Harry McVeigh set off at a blistering pace from the line, leaving 214 other runners in his dust. Although Connaire had advised him to sit tight, this young man is the personification of control and his awareness of his own ability is unmeasurable so he ran the race he wanted to, his way. The video footage that filtered in afterwards shows Harry clearly choosing to race the lead vehicle in his own personal race between the two of them as 2nd place was over 20 seconds behind and never posed a threat. There is no doubt that in a handful of years we will be reading about this young boy's performance at the Armagh 5k as a Senior athlete. He will look back on races like this as a key stepping stone in his quest for representing his country at elite level.



Harry in a class of his own

Connaire Og McVeigh did have the hardest challenge of the evening as he was racing in the U14 category and therefore he stood beside the other 143 athletes on the line, who were head and shoulders taller than him and with an extra year worth of training and growing over him. This did not deter him as whatever this young man has eaten for breakfast this week, whether it was Flahavans or Whites porridge, it is definitely bringing out some notable performances and on Thursday in Armagh this continued. He battled hard and fought his way right to the finish line to take 14th place. Needless to say, being one of the youngest in this race will give Connaire Og endless faith in his ability and the confidence to enter into the season ahead with the knowledge that he's got this!



Connaire Og, the man with a plan.

The oldest in the household had broken out the Vaporflies for this race. Very fresh off the back of a strong performance at the Ulster Schools Cross Country Final in Mallusk just over 24 hours before, Maisie had access to the full book of excuses to not be 'on form' on the night. Yet she knew in herself, through recent training and coaching focused on developing her mindset, that she favoured the more predictable and solid surface of the road and this was her opportunity to prove it. With confidence high and putting faith in the same legs that have carried her over a multitude of finish lines to podium finishes, mentally she was the strongest she has ever been and it was just up to her legs and a flawless race strategy to get her around. Those waiting at home, getting lap by lap updates were on the edge of their seats as she dictated the race with the lead group hanging on by their fingertips. Though

learning her lesson from previous big races and knowing the competition chasing her, Maisie kicked at the perfect moment and elegantly strode down the straight of The Mall, chasing the same blue lights her youngest brother had done less than 30 minutes prior, to take 1st place in the U14 girls.



Maisie dictates the race throughout



A smile of relief accompanied by some bling

Thursday evening, under the watchful eye of hundreds of runners and spectators, stood three amazing young runners from Newcastle AC who have marked that evening in not only the club history books but also the family history books as one never to be forgotten. One coach had left her final race instructions of "get good pictures for the paper- bonus if it's a podium one." Although meant in jest, she isn't complaining about the outcome on the night and the children's literal interpretation of her advice. Though it must be noted that this sort of history doesn't write itself without a solid support network, alongside the club, coaches and schools. Primarily, the dedication of parents, Connaire and Patricia, who endlessly support their children's dreams, travel hundreds of miles to and from races in all weathers and encourage them daily to become the best possible version of themselves has been instrumental in achieving such results, race after race. The live McVeigh video feed was deafening and the joy was shared by all.

The club would like to thank Armagh Athletics Club for a seamlessly executed event and all the local businesses which helped make this event such a success. The addition of the junior races will only go to further help athletics grow from the grassroots level, up and ensure that this event which is currently in its 31st year will continue for years to come.