

NAC Juniors Shine for their Schools

Report by Siobhan Grant

For many of our Juniors, their love for running is unearthed in the playgrounds of our local schools. It is from here, amongst their friends, that they are challenged in football matches, sports days and playing tag. There is no greater honour than to represent your school and for many of the Newcastle Junior Squad this week, they swapped their red and yellow vests for their school colours and ran at Flahavans Primary Cross Country League and for our Senior Juniors, the Ulster Schools Final in Mallusk.

The local primary schools have really embraced the Flahavans league this year with many local schools making the trip to Newtownards to race the 1400m course. Each being individually selected because they are the fastest in their school. The club was proud to see 11 of our Juniors squad taking part.

With over 126 runners taking to the line for the girls race, Saorlaith McAleenan, Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, took pride of place on the podium in 2nd, knowing her previous performance in the other 2 Rounds allowed her to take it a bit easier and enjoy the race. Mary Houston, Annahilt Primary School, had a fantastic race to secure 6th. She was soon followed by Emily Kerr, Newcastle Primary School, who still has a year to spare in this category in 17th. Lily McMurray was 34th for St.Malachy's Primary School with Emer Quinn in 54th place for the Bunscoil. Aoife Grant, Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche, in 89th and a strong finish from Elizabeth Houston, Annahilt Primary School, in 96th place who like Emily has a year or two still in this competition made an admirable assault on the course.



Start line support with Saorlaith, Emily and Mary ready to take on the challenge ahead

The boys race welcomed 117 runners and there was no doubt that the Newcastle AC boys were out in force for Bunscoil Bheanna Boirche with Harry McVeigh and big brother Connaire Og securing 5th and 9th place. School Mate Rossa McAleenan made considerable strides as he continues to build his confidence and grow within this competition. Rory Quinn has another year in this competition coming 44th and he will be one to watch next year.



Harry Mc Veigh strides to 5th place in Newtownards

On Wednesday, it was the turn of our Senior- Juniors in Mallusk, who had already qualified after a tense battle at Delamont early last month. They were already toeing the line as the best runners in their schools, district and now against the best of what Ulster had to offer.

A strong display from Maisie McVeigh, St.Malachy's HS, secured her 22nd place in the Mini Girls. The club would also like to extend their congratulations to local juniors, Paddy Sherrard, St.Patrick's Downpatrick, in 25th and Falhin Murphy McKibben, Shimna Integrated College, who has now qualified for the All Ireland Schools Championship in 5th place in the Mini Boys.

Aaron O'Boyle, who had tested the legs on the previous Sunday with a phenomenal run at McGradys, secured 6th place and a trip to Waterford for the All Ireland Schools Championship.

The Senior Boys welcomed three of Newcastle AC hardest workers, with Ethan McMullan, Down High, embracing a meticulous plan to ensure he took a top ten place completing the route in 22:53. Patrick McDaid, St Louis' Killeel, crossed the line in 24.39 with Yasin Brannigan, Down HS, not far behind in 22.53.



Yasin Brannigan for Down HS



Ethan McMullan, Down HS, now on his way to Waterford for the All Irelands



Patrick McDaid, St Louis HS



Rival schools, but still clubmates, Patrick, Yasin and Ethan ready to race.

Not to be outdone, Ciara Savage, St. Malachys HS, as the fastest junior to make it up and down Slieve Donard in 2022, took 40th place in the Senior girls with a time of 15.14 and has the legs well warmed up for the season ahead.



Ciara Savage, St Malachys HS ready for a strong season ahead

A huge well done to our Juniors and also a massive thank you to the schools for supporting the growing running talent in this area. The extra support and attention delivered by the teachers and coaches of our schools is invaluable and perfectly compliments the Club sessions and support.