

SOMERSET TEAM MANAGERS REPORT 2009

The activities of the Somerset county teams this year have produced a contrasting set of results. Once again we have been involved with Cross Country, Road, Track & Field and Sportshall events.

The year kicked off with the South West Inter-County Cross Country at Bicton in January. The event goes from strength to strength in terms of quality and support, and is easily as high a quality as the Midland Area Championships that take place later in the month. It is therefore most disappointing that many of our outstanding seniors choose not to support their county. The Somerset teams, from memory, performed generally to par – I say from memory as the results of this event remain elusive and because of the poor organisation on the day, many of the team results were either in error or not available. Thankfully a more “normal” service should be resumed this year. The CAU Inter-Counties at Nottingham showed Somerset athletes holding their own in the combined Avon & Somerset team, though team-wise 2009 was possibly the worst ever year with no team medals and neither senior men or senior women finishing a scoring team. Individually, Frank Tickner won a silver after having done everything possible to run away from the opposition. Other leading Somerset runners were Holly Brown (6th, U13G), Aoife Thorogood (12th, U15G) and Ben Tickner (13th, SM).

With the U11 South West sportshall events being split into two competitions we were denied our traditional battle against Cornwall and Devon, but did well against Avon and Gloucester. The boys finished 1st and 3rd, from the two teams per county, with the girls equal 2nd. The event continues to highlight a number of outstanding athletes who will be joining the U13 ranks in the coming season.

With Somerset now aligning itself with the Midland Counties, we did not contest a number of our usual Track & Field fixtures (the U15/U20 match and the U13 event at Kingston). Our efforts were therefore concentrated on the South West Inter-Counties event where, despite the event being targeted more seriously by both Avon and Gloucester, we managed to achieve our best ever result in finishing the match in second overall behind “perpetual winners” Devon.

On the road, perhaps hampered by a low-key half marathon being chosen for the South West Inter-County event, there was poor interest from our better runners, though we came away as second team (largely due to most of the counties not fielding teams).

There are a number of general comments I would like to make regarding the provision of Inter-County competition, and more generally with the subject of Team Management:

I believe that road running in the South West is not being well-served by the current SW Council set-up. A SW Inter-County event should be held as part of a prestigious event that would attract the best runners. Further, expecting the entrants (or their counties) to fork out £16 per entry is not acceptable, and I would urge the county to canvass for a better event selection for next year. John did as good a team management job as he was able to, though perhaps getting involved at senior cross country level would get him in contact with our more elite endurance runners.

Once again it appears that UKA and ESAA have conspired to give us a log-jam of cross country fixtures during February and March, which looks likely to impact the CAU Inter-Counties, which is set for a change of venue to Birmingham for 2010. This should ease the transport problems that usually beset us.