



Midlands Men at Antrim

On the 25th March, alongside the ladies teams, a junior and Senior Men's squad travelled to County Antrim, to compete in the Home Countries International Cross Country at the CAFRE, Greenmount Campus. The event was hosted by Northern Ireland Athletics.

We met on the Friday afternoon and flew into Belfast City airport where we were met and taken by coach to the team hotel. The atmosphere was upbeat as athletes drifted in from various teams throughout the evening.

Race day was gloriously sunny, warm but not too hot, perfect race conditions and had obviously been especially arranged by NI athletics who did an excellent job of the organisation throughout. Buses left from the hotel at various times, but as the men's races didn't start until mid afternoon, for us, the morning was about resting up and looking for stuff "Trolle" had lost!!!

When we arrived on campus, races from the earlier SIAB schools International, were well underway, the atmosphere was almost carnival like, the sun was still shining but the course looked mudless, pristine and VERY flat!! not our usual terrain....



First up at 2.50pm, the junior men, *Tom Curr (Captain) - Stroud, Jelle Verwer – Tipton, Kyle Fowler – Staffs Moorlands & Gregg Haliwell – Stroud*. Took on the 4-lap 7200 course. Tom, running on tired legs following the Worlds, still managed to come home as first Mids counter, followed in, having an excellent run in his first Midlands vest, by Kyle Fowler. Jelle and Gregg battled it out together and followed each other across the line respectively. The team finished 5th overall and I am confident we will see even stronger performances from this squad, who really seemed to gel as a team from the offset.



The final race of the day at 3.45pm was the Senior Men's. *Rich Kay (Captain) – Tipton, James Trollope – Birchfield, Seb Duffy – City of Stoke & Paul Richardson – OWLS*. This time a 6 lap 10800m flat, fast slog. For me, although good performances from all, given the end of the season, the run of the day had to have been from Paul Richardson who stormed home in overall 4th place, in a neck and neck sprint to the finish with England's Adam Hickey and only 4 seconds behind

2nd place Andy Wiles – Northern England. Rich, James & Seb then brought the Midlands team a 3rd place finish, behind winners the mighty England team and just a mere single point behind the second placed Scott's.

All in all, it could not be argued, that the Midlands had another good International day at the office, the second this season. The Midlands were the only region to field four complete teams across the Men's and Ladies events. In each event, they managed to beat National teams. Job done lads and lasses.

As fair reward, that evening, all eighteen of us enjoyed a good team meal at a local grill followed by some, with a trip (of mixed fortunes!!) into Belfast. Team managers returned to the hotel and worried quietly about the implications of not returning with the same number of athletes we had started with, but concluded that a loss of up to 15% could be considered an acceptable level of collateral damage.

Our fears were not grounded and everyone returned to Birmingham more or less in one piece on the Sunday afternoon. I have already awarded my man of the match to Paul Richardson but would like to award the Midlands Cross for bravery to Tom Curr, not for his herculean effort in running after the Worlds but for sitting next to Gregg on the plane home!!!

Titch

