

Team Berkshire U13 Girls and U15 Boys Excel, Once Again, at UK National Sportshall Final

Saturday 13th April saw team Berkshire U13 Girls assemble at Sportcity in Manchester for yet another very exciting and tense day of Sportshall athletics. Representing the South region is always an honour and knowing the level of competition in the region the girls arrived with a high level of self-belief but no complacency.



The competition started with a small hiccup in the obstacle relay, but all of the girls rallied unbelievably well, pulled together and supported each other as a real team as the field events got underway.

They say success is infectious and contagious - it spread rapidly throughout the team as we saw superb performances in each of the field events; Madisyn Woodley (Slough Junior AC) won the standing long jump with a massive jump of 2.45m, backed up superbly by Charlotte Bigmore (Reading AC) in her first year coming 10th with a PB of 2.22m. In the shot an inspired Eden Hill (Slough Junior AC) set a PB of 10.97m in coming 3rd with Rosie Cooper (Slough Junior AC) a solid 10th, maintaining the pressure on the other teams. Tomi Adejuwon (Reading AC), another first year athlete, recorded a magnificent 7.08m in the standing triple jump, yet another new PB, as she came 4th, with Annie Jonkers (Reading AC) also PB'ing as she came 12th in one of the closest competitions for years. In the speed bounce Aimee Dickson (Team Kennet) won with 88 bounces and Charlotte Ashby (Reading AC) came 15th on a day when the finest of margins separated the places. Finally, Demi Obilanade (Slough Junior AC) equalled her PB coming 2nd in the vertical jump with Aimee Munt (Slough Junior AC) improving her PB in coming 4th.



This set the girls up magnificently for the remaining track events and they did not disappoint. In the 2-lap race Demi Obilanade showed what great potential she has as she won the final (in a time that would have seen her 4th in the U15 girl competition on Sunday!). Charlotte Bigmore showed maturity

in her running coming 20th and scoring valuable points for the team. In the 4-lap race Rosie Cooper 11th and Annie Jonkers 14th ran their hardest against very strong opposition. Imogen Wilson (Maidenhead AC and Team Captain) ran superbly in the 6-lap race pacing herself really well to come 5th with Madisyn Woodley 8th as they combined to come 3rd overall in this event.

The finale was the 4x1 lap and 4x2 lap relays and the Paarlauf.

The 4x1(Aimee Dickson; Eden Hill; Tomi Adejuwon; Kaya Slater) team qualified with ease for the final and produced a masterclass in baton hand-offs the final to win by the finest of margins - 0.2 seconds yet 1.1 seconds ahead of the 3rd placed team.

In the Paarlauf another superb run by Imogen Wilson supported by Aimee Munt saw the girls come 6th and pick up invaluable points.



It all came down to the final event, the

4x2 relay. The girls (Rosie Cooper; Madisyn Woodley; Demi Obilanade; Kaya Slater) qualified comfortably fastest, laying down a marker for the other teams to chase. Norfolk brought in a fresh pair of legs and ran us close however we held them off to win the 4x2 relay, again with a masterclass in baton hand-offs.

The girls came a magnificent 2nd overall (1180 points), a repeat of 2018's position, just 7 points behind Norfolk (1187 points).

As Sunday 14th April dawned Lauren Watkins (Bracknell AC; national best speed bouncer U15 girls) and the U15 boys gathered for team breakfast knowing they had qualified as the "best runners-up" yet determined to prove they could be so much better, and to reverse the defeat by Surrey at the Regional final.

As Sammy Ball (Reading AC and UK Championship Record holder in the indoor pentathlon U15 Boys), sadly injured and therefore not able to represent the county but there in Manchester to support the team, welcomed the individual All-round athletes representing their regions and the best in each field event from around the nations including our own Lauren Watkins, as well as sharing a few words on his experience in Sheffield and previously in Sportshall competitions as an U13, there was a growing, and palpable, sense of belief amongst the whole Sportshall team Berkshire that it might be a special day if they all pulled together and worked as a team, supported each other and really gave it their all.

Lauren was disappointed with her speed bounce but came back fantastically well in the vertical jump 10th and the 2-lap race 14th= to show she has real ability as well as spirited determination.

Ben Britton (Bracknell AC and Team Captain) ran hard and well to finish the 2-lap race in 9th= position in a time that in previous years might have seen him medal. He then went on to speed bounce really well (82) coming 6th and his standing long jump saw him come 5th= with a solid 2.62m.

Trey Bennett (Slough Junior AC) and a first year U15 did superbly in the 2-lap race coming 4th= in one of the fastest times seen by a Berkshire athlete at the UK Final in recent years. His speed bounce (83)

equalled Ben's 6th place and a massive PB of 2.62m in the standing long jump again equalled Ben's 5th place.

Jonty Curtiss (Bracknell AC), another first year U15 athlete, was the only team member experiencing a Sportshall UK Final for the first time. He rose really well to the occasion with solid performances in each of his events 2-laps 30th=; speed bounce 22nd and standing triple jump 16th. Jonty is a fine example of how important the third team member is in the overall reckoning and gave his absolute all throughout the day.

Gregory Menkiti (Slough Junior AC) was the third member of the team competing at U15 in his first year. He ran a magnificent 4 lap race to finish 4th = and followed this up with 12th in the shot and 10th = in the standing long jump - jumping only 8cm less than Trey and Ben proving just how close the whole competition was.

Oliver Gregory (Team Kennet) and Harry Booker (Team Kennet) were both returning the National Final having competed in previous years for the county at U13 level and Harry last year on the U15 team. Their experience in the competition was invaluable. Despite being "throwers" both ran superb 4-lap races to keep the team well in the competition. Both were a little disappointed with their shot performances with Harry coming 2nd (12.70m) and Oliver 7th (11.69m). Going to the standing triple jump they knew they needed to give it everything and did so with Oliver going over 7m for the first time (7.07m) and Harry jumping out to 7.46m.

Oliver and Harry then ran the 8 Lap Paarlauf and left everything on the track. The county could not have asked more of them as they came home in 9th place

As the boys gathered for the 4x2 relay, having qualified fastest, we noticed some changes in personnel in the main rivals and knew we were in for a close race. Great hand offs once again kept the boys very much in the race. In the end 0.4 seconds covered the top 4 places with team Berkshire 2nd.

As the final results were announced for the individual all-rounder places our optimism regarding our overall team position grew. Ben Britton finished 6th, Gregory Menkiti 8th and Trey Bennett 3rd - much to his surprise and apparent bemusement. Taking nothing away from the other boys these are great results.

As the team results were announced in reverse order the tension mounted. Eventually there were only 2 team captains on the stage - from Surrey and Berkshire.

The boys had realised their initial ambition of reversing the regional result and most appropriately were crowned 2019 U15 Boy National Champions 24 points ahead of Surrey and the second time in the last 4 years the team Berkshire U15 boys have won the national title.



Congratulations to everyone who competed over a very exciting and successful weekend.

Thanks also to Francesca Rowland and Salwa Irfan (both Slough Junior AC) who officiated throughout the weekend and who have both received much praise from other team managers and Sportshall Associates from the way they conducted themselves in officiating so consistently.

Thanks also to all the parents and other supporters who were in Manchester with the teams for helping to make it such a wonderful weekend to remember.