

HERNE HILL HARRIERS SENIOR MEN'S TRACK & FIELD REPORT FOR 2007 TO 2008

As with the 2007 season our men's British League track & field team were again to face travelling to fixtures in 2008, as after a relatively local start at Abingdon and a home fixture at Kingsmeadow we would then be required to visit Swansea for the 3rd successive year before completing our league season at Derby for the 2nd year in a row. No complaints, this is, after all, meant to be a British League.

I had confidently predicted that this year's BAL National 2 would be stronger all round than in the past couple of seasons and I was not wrong. I had also been confident Herne Hill Harriers' squad would cope well with the expected improvement in standards, but unfortunately a combination of injury absentees, injuries during the match and disqualifications gave us an uphill struggle as we finished a disappointing 7th out of 8 teams in our first match at Abingdon. A position of at least 6th was there for the taking even with our depleted team, but we fell short of this by only 4 points.

Those who took part put in a great effort nonetheless, but the overall standard was reflected by the fact we had only 4 event winners and these were all in the earlier stages of the fixture. Royden John and Paul Oluyemi scored a win double in the Long Jump, Mark Hanily won the B hammer and 18 year old Dele Onifade underlined his talent with a clear 100m win against strong opposition with a legal hand timed personal best of 10.6 seconds. Unfortunately both Royden and Dele picked up injuries during the match which prevented them from scoring further good points that we would reasonably have expected from them.

The best of our non winners were Thomas Ashby, another 18 year old who competed in 5 individual events plus a relay and recorded a PB of 15.7 over the 3' 6" 110m hurdles against a 1.0m/s wind, was very close at a PB attempt over 1.90m in the High Jump and ran PBs at 400m of 52.2 and a 50.7 4x400m anchor relay split. Idris Ojuriye was a good 2nd in both 100m and 200m against the wind, while Stuart Thurgood was 4th in probably the most competitive event of the day, the hammer, where an increase of less than 2m on his on the day distance would have won the event. BAL debutants were James McMullan and Ali Hassan Hammad, who both ran very encouragingly in the distance events and Kevin Burke who competed in 4 field events plus a relay despite bringing a knee injury along with him.

So after our opening BAL match of the season we were not for the first time up against it with 3 matches to come. At least in 2008 we had a home match at Kingston as our second BAL meet and a chance to quickly redeem ourselves. The team was required to be stronger all round to produce an improved performance to move us out of the relegation zone and up the league table. Our injury list was still lengthy and costly in terms of potential points lost, but that you have to deal with and we did so to good effect on this occasion as we placed a very decent 4th on the day, a tantalising 2.5 points behind 3rd placed South London rivals Blackheath & Bromley. That we are a team with few big stars was illustrated by the fact that we had only three event winners, actually one less than at Abingdon and indeed only one 2nd place to add to that, but the all round contribution with a good number of 3rds and 4ths and very few last placings meant our overall points tally was much better than at the previous match.

Two of our event wins again came in the earlier part of the match. U20 Paul Oluyemi, who had won the B Long Jump in the first match and in the absence through injury of our own A winner from that fixture Paul stepped up to score one of the most decisive wins of the day as he this time took the A string honours by almost 50cm with a jump of 7.08m. Buoyed by a wind assisted 7.40m leap as a non scorer in the previous week's Southern League match,

Paul put together a great series with a no jump well in excess of that mark and a long looking jump which was curiously not measured as the pit had been raked over by the time it was deemed he had not marked the plasticine. Our other early afternoon winner was Mark Hanily in the B Hammer, repeating his placing in the first fixture, but things were much closer on this occasion as Mark's 53.93m effort prevailed by just 4cm. With Stuart Thurgood again placing a close up 4th in the A Hammer this has become one of our strongest events in BAL thanks to these guys. We are always strong in the sprints, which featured our other event winner as Idris Ojuriye produced a great victory in the B 200m. Our 4th placing at Kingston moved us up to 5th of 8 teams in the overall divisional league table at the half way stage of our BAL season.

Our next match featured yet another trip to Wales, as we were at Swansea again in early August knowing a solid result would put us relatively safe in the division going into the final fixture. The team we mustered was a combination of real strength in some departments and less so in one or two others, but this was another all round team effort in which the HHH spirit shone through admirably from the quality of our hammer throwers in the first event to the battling efforts of our 4x400m relay team at the end of the afternoon. Frustratingly in finishing 6th in the match we again fell just short of beating local rivals Blackheath & Bromley but crucially beat off the two teams below us in the league table to leave them both with much to do to catch us in the final fixture at Derby on 16th August.

Our main area of strength was in sprinting, where Dele Onifade again performed well against strong opposition to place 2nd in the 100m and 4th in the 200m. If our A string man couldn't quite win on this occasion, our B men showed our depth as both Robert Graham (100m) and Idris Ojuriye (200m) strode to good victories. Sammy Mensah used his own speed base as a platform to run a fine pb of 49.22 in the 400m, but such was the quality of the race his time placed him 5th. These four athletes combined to form a formidable 4x100m team which with some baton practice together and maybe a tweak in the running order could threaten a club record that has stood since 1991. At Swansea the team was 3rd, 0.72 seconds outside the record so still a bit to do, but the potential is there. Our 4x400m team also performed well as a relatively fresh quartet who are all members of the same training group produced a rousing finale as Toby Adeyemi, Phoenix Williams, Yomi Adeyemi and Gary Linton brought the baton home in 4th place in a well contested race. With respective splits of 52.9, 51.0, 51.7 and 50.8 this has the makings of a useful relay squad and it was good to see all four runners more than holding their own to score points that made a big difference at the end of a match that was close between the 5th, 6th and 7th placed clubs on the day. Our hammer throwers and steeplechasers also made their usual excellent contribution, as did Allandre Johnson in the javelin and Thomas Ashby again covering several events and performing particularly well in the high jump.

We travelled to Derby for the final BAL in the knowledge that we needed to avoid disaster akin to that we had suffered in our first fixture of the season back in June to ensure we were not to be relegated to BAL National 3. Looking at our team sheet at the start I figured this unwanted outcome was highly unlikely. Although nothing in life should be taken for granted, the performance of our team did the club proud and, given the higher quality and depth in most events in this division this season, this was arguably one of the best ever from our men's team. An excellent 5th placing on the day meant that not only did we comfortably avoid finishing in the bottom two teams in the table but actually moved up from 6th to 5th place in the final league standings.

As with the previous fixtures event victories were very hard to come by. However, 18 year old Paul Oluyemi has had a superb season and, apart from a blip in our third match at Swansea, Paul has achieved three event wins in the long jump, one in the B string and two

in the A string, including his best series yet at Derby. With at least three jumps over 7m, Paul twice jumped in excess of the club U20 record as he had winning efforts measured at 7.11m and 7.17m with what appeared to be zero wind readings, although the sprint races later in the afternoon were aided by sizeable tailwinds.

We had no other A string victors and indeed only one of our team was able to get full B string points. The fact that Idris Ojuriye won not one but two B string races (100m and 200m) illustrates his value to the team and his marked improvement this summer, especially in the longer sprint. HHH sprinting is the envy of many clubs and the competition for team places is healthy. Indeed we are now becoming famous for filling the majority of lanes in the non scoring 100m races held at these fixtures. Dele Onifade has been our A string scoring sprinter when available (and only missed one match as a result of a trip to the World Junior Champs in Poland) and has always scored well in very strong fields this season. The overall strength of the sprints in our division is illustrated by the fact that our 4x100m relay team of Yomi Adeyemi, Jeffrey Ocrach, Idris and Dele were within 0.2 seconds of the club record at Derby but could still only place 4th in the race.

Other notable contributions were again Thomas in a number of events, James Parker and Sam Parsons in the 400m hurdles, the hammer and javelin guys and Simon Wurr and Andrew Donno in a very strong steeplechase race. Sam and Andrew made their scoring BAL debuts and it is to be hoped they will become regulars in seasons to come. The discus saw a great return to form for team captain Garry Power, who threw a season's best by some margin of 43.40m, a distance which represents an Irish M45 record, but was still only good for 5th in the A string. Our overall 5th position in BAL National Division 2 represents a good effort for the season and maintains our men's flagship team's position among the best in the history of the club. Next year will not be any easier, nor should it be.

Aside from the British League, our Southern Men's League team found the 2008 season a bit of a struggle. Their exploits are chronicled in a separate report from our SML team manager James Ward, as are those of our veteran athletes in a report from Dave Wilson.

The BAL Cup, now called 10 in 100 as 10 individual events and a medley relay are squeezed into (a little over)100 minutes. While our women's team won the Plate Final again our men again treated this fixture as an extra opportunity if they wanted it. Dele Onifade in comfortably winning the 100m was our only event winner in this match, although Thomas Ashby found a PB over the senior high hurdles good enough for only 5th in a strong event. In the Rosenheim League we again won the 6 match regional division but then again messed up the Final at Tooting in August. No change there.

At the Surrey championships Dele Onifade scored an impressive double in the U20 100m and 200m, while Paul Oluyemi won U20 Long Jump gold. Although no HHH first claim member won a senior men's gold, there were 3 club members eligible to compete for HHH in the British League under the Higher Competition rule who did win their events. Austin Ferns won the 400m hurdles in the colours of Hercules Wimbledon emphatically in a CBP time of 52.66, his second fastest ever run, while his clubmate for both HW and HHH, Royden John, won the Long Jump in the final round with 7.28m. Kevin Quinn, racing in the colours of Aldershot, won the 5000m while James McMullan, who races for Thames H&H in the winter was Kev's nearest challenger. Robert Graham and Idris Ojuriye took advantage of the unusually hot May weather to record fast, if slightly wind aided times in the senior 100m.

At the Inter Counties, Stuart Thurgood threw the hammer 57.60m in atrocious weather conditions for 4th place with a performance adjudged to be best of the season from a HHH

senior man. At the British Students Championship in early May Jeremy Odametey was crowned U20 triple jump champion, but was unfortunately injured and unable to compete for the rest of the season. At the Irish Championships Mark Hanily set a another new club hammer record to improve his 2007 standard, although we do have the anomaly whereby Stuart has thrown further than Mark but is ineligible to hold the club record as a HCA member. The South of England senior champs saw rather less HHH activity than at the previous years equivalent, although Simon Wurr did yet again claim a medal in the steeplechase, this year it was a bronze, while Allandre Johnson placed 4th in the javelin.

Although not being around for BAL this year, Michael Dyer recorded a pb of 1.51.64 to retain the Boomerang Trophy for fastest HHH 800m man of the season. New BAL team member James McMullan produced our best track 5,000m run of the season in the first BAL match at Abingdon. Paul Oluyemi's winning senior boys long jump performance at the English Schools Championship won him our award for best U20 male athlete of the season, beating off very strong claims indeed from both Dele Onifade and Thomas Ashby, both of whom gained international selection but failed to land a big title. All three athletes are wonderful prospects for next season and hopefully thereafter with London 2012 looming on the horizon.

As with every year, I must thank all who have coached, supported, encouraged or helped in any way at all, you are too numerous to list but you will know who you are. I am of course already making plans for 2009, when it appears certain we will have fixtures at Cardiff, Bromley, Leeds and Kingston, but not necessarily in that order. We can do better in BAL, SML and Rosenheim if we really want to. The key is for our best men to make themselves available for as many of the team fixtures as they possibly can. Individual aspirations are of course paramount, but we should never lose sight of the value of the team ethic, something at which, certainly at BAL level we are better than a good number of our rivals. Together let's take it to another level...

Here's to an even more successful 2008/09 - up the Hill!

Geoff Jerwood
British Athletics League Track & Field Team Manager
27 October 2008