



Chelmsford's combined Senior Men's and Women's team put in an amazing performance in the Southern Athletics League at West London Stadium last Saturday. In one of the closest and hardest fought competitions for many seasons, Chelmsford came away with a victory by the narrowest of margins. The final score being: Chelmsford 203, Thames Valley Harriers 202, Nene Valley Harriers 197.5 and Walton AC on 138.5 points.

Although Chelmsford topped the league going into this match it was never predicted to be an easy day of athletics. Nene Valley were second in the league and Thames Valley (TVH) were known to be a strong club and had home advantage.

However, Chelmsford rose to the occasion with many athletes filling events other than their own, sometimes just for a single point. Caroline Hill competed in five events, with Jade Harding, Chay Clark, Marcus Hunt and Mike Bartlett all competing in four. It proved critical in the final result. As the competition progressed it was clear that predictions were correct and Nene, TVH and Chelmsford soon open up a points gap over Walton. This trend continued over the course of the day with Nene and TVH constantly swapping places for the lead and Chelmsford jumping between second and third.

By the final events - the relays - everyone knew the score was close. The points for the top three teams stood at TVH 172, Chelmsford 170 and Nene on 169. This meant that the whole day was going to be decided on relay results. Chelmsford are not generally strong in the Women's 4x100m but the ladies team of Caroline Hill, Erin Minton-Branfoot, Jade Harding and Connie Forman, were fired up and stormed around to inch out Nene Valley by 0.6 of a second. Another win in the Women's 4x400m (Erin Minton-Branfoot, Emma Perks, Connie Forman and Caroline Hill) and a second place in the Men's 4x100m (Bradley Reed, Marcus Hunt, Luke Keteleers and Alex Cooke) meant that the match was now resting on the Men's 4x400m.

Chelmsford's have a strong 4x400m squad but knew that they could not afford a mistake. So with first runner, Harry Sloman, coming home in the lead but only by a metre or two after running 50.7 secs, the match was set for an epic finish. Chris Youell and Paul Owen on the next two legs extended the lead slightly. Then it was down to Marcus Hunt who took over and dominated the anchor leg in a sensational 48.5 secs, coming down the home straight some 50m clear of second place. The Chelmsford 4x400m runners had raised themselves to clock a new best time of 3 minutes 21.0 seconds (an impressive average of 50.25 seconds per runner). After not having held the overall lead at any point during the day, the Chelmsford team had snatched victory!

Men's performance of the day came from Darren Blackwell. Running in the 1500m, he tracked the leading pack of five in a fast race and put in a terrific last lap to come through for the win. Then, without leaving the track and having his numbers and shoes changed by his team mates (akin to a F1 pit stop) he was lined up again for the very next race - a gruelling 2000m steeplechase, where he incredibly went on to win the B race. Darren was partnered in the steeplechase by Ken Hoye who had also run the 5000m an hour earlier!

In other events, Marcus Hunt took the B 200m (Alex Cooke having come second in the A) and Chris Youell won the B 800m (Callum Charleston again have secured second place in the A). Bradley Reed won a sensational 110m hurdle race against an arch rival and top hurdler from TVH. The two were locked together until the last barrier when the TVH runner over-reached, caught the hurdle, and stumbled enough for Bradley to pull clear. Luke Keteleers followed by winning the B 110m hurdle event in another close race.



Serg Zotin produced one of his best performances of the season to clear 1.90m and win the A string High Jump (only narrowly brushing the bar off at 1.95m). Mike Bartlett and Jamie Allway continued to push each other in the Pole Vault, this time with Mike clearing 4.20m and Jamie finishing with 4.00m (a reverse of their previous encounter). Mike also won the B Long Jump teamed up with the ever reliable Fluke Ladphanna who, as an under 20, is a regular in the Senior team long and triple jumps. Newcomer and U17 Charlie Everest also performed well with a second place in the B 1500m as did 400m runner Adam Bernard who ran in the 5000m for points and managed a third place! Harry Sloman improved his personal best in the 400m to 50.2 seconds and comes ever closer to breaking the 50 second barrier.

The Ladies also had significant success. Erin Minton-Branfoot won the B string 400m. Under 20 Emma Perks ran well in the 800m to take a second place. Jade Harding won the B string High Jump competing with Chay Clark who was second in the A string. Chay and Jade then teamed up again to take a double win in the Long Jump. Amy Hoyer was first in the B 400m hurdles and second (whilst setting a personal best) in the 2000m steeplechase. Under 17 Connie Forman ran an excellent race in the 400m hurdles and also went on to be part of the winning 4x100m and the 4x400m.

In the Hammer, Chelmsford veteran and coach Shirley Quinn placed second in the B event, accompanied by, a returning to fitness, Rebecca Healy in the A string.

The Women's Pole Vault saw Ellie Besford showing she is coming back to her best by producing a fantastic jump of 2.90m to win the A string by half a metre. Ellie was ably supported by Clare St. John Coleman who won the B event. Another brilliant double win.

With three matches and three wins in a row and only two matches remaining, Chelmsford AC are now strong favourites to win the Senior Southern Athletics League in 2016!