



National Athletics League Match 1 – Peterborough – 6 Jun 2021

With the 2020 athletics season wiped out by Covid, and the 2021 Track & Field season late starting for the same reason, it was close to 22 months since their last match when the Chelmsford AC Senior team took to the track at Peterborough on Sunday for the first match in the inaugural year of the National Athletics League (NAL).

The NAL replaces and combines the previous British Athletics League (a Men's competition) and UK Womens Athletics League. Chelmsford had been placed into the second tier of this new league (the 'Championship') – but Covid restrictions have meant that for 2021, travelling has been minimised by running the competition as a series of more local mini leagues. Hence for this season, Chelmsford will be competing against Peterborough & Nene Valley AC, Herts Phoenix AC, Bedford & County AC, and Southend AC in the 'Championship East'.

Despite the long competitive lay-off though, and the challenges with maintaining match-fitness during the pandemic, Chelmsford's athletes showed no sign of rustiness as they surged ahead of their opponents from the very start, ultimately securing a substantial victory, with a final match scores of:

1. Chelmsford AC:	374.9
2. Peterborough & Nene Valley AC:	217.3
3. Bedford & County AC:	217.2
4. Herts Phoenix AC:	180.3
5. Southend AC:	52.6

The highlight of the day was undoubtedly the breaking of a club record in the Women's 4x100m relay which has stood since 1969! The team of Aleasha Kiddle, Leah Duncan, Kisiwaa Mensah and Lily Parris crossed the line in a time of 48.2 seconds. Their record was all the more remarkable for the fact that two of the team are in the U20 age group, and one is an U17 athlete. Breaking club records has become common place this year for Leah Duncan and Lily Parris – with Leah setting a new mark for the 100m, and Lily breaking the record for the 100mH several times on her way to achieving a European Juniors qualifying time. Lily duly recorded a win in the 100mH, looking every inch the current UK U20 No.1.

Elsewhere in the Women's team, Lola Kuponiyi continued her rapid progress with an impressive win in the Shot, with 13.50m - just 8cm short of a club record herself. She also took on the Discus, where she recorded another PB, competing alongside Jade Harding, who threw over 30m, to claim a PB of her own.

Chay Clark made her return to the team after a few years away at University, took victory in her specialist event, the 400mH, whilst also filling in at short notice in the 100mH.

Martha Smith and Georgia Tombs did sterling jobs in the middle-distance races and the 4x400m relay, teaming up with Faye Sweeting, who was Chelmsford's 'Woman of the Match'. Having been selected to run just the 1500m, Faye ended the day also covering the 800m and 400mH, and hence scoring significantly for the team.



Aleasha Kiddle and Leah Duncan both ran very fast 100m races, before Leah also ran an impressive 200m - before both moved onto the 4x100m relay.

Kissiwaa Mensah, a first year U17 athlete, had a mixed day in her first senior competition, but is clearly going to be a force to be reckoned with in the sprints, where Chelmsford now seem to have substantial strength in depth.

Jess Hopkins showed both strength and stamina in putting in fine performances in FIVE events – High Jump, Long Jump, Triple Jump, Shot and Javelin.

Chelmsford have also been able to recruit three 'higher claim' female athletes to compete for the team this year, and they were quickly proving what assets they will be. Pole Vaultler Shannon Rapacchi arrived on Sunday to find that her event was cancelled - but she still stepped in to compete in the High Jump and Triple Jump. Kirstie Overfield - a sprinter - ran an impressive 400m, and also a leg of the 4x400 relay. Josephine Larkins finished second in the Hammer, with 44m, where Ndidi Okoh also had a PB in the B string.

Erin Minton-Branfoot looked good in running both the 400m, and the 4x400m relay.

Women's Team Manager Shirley Quinn commented " What a great start to 2021 athletics season. The very first NAL, and the first time in more than thirty years that the Chelmsford ladies have been in a league at this level. They should feel very proud of how they performed. It was a pleasure to be part of the team."

In the Men's team, Paul Grange, on his Chelmsford AC debut, ran in the 800m where, not only did he win a very competitive A string race, but led for the entire race, fought off several challenges from the athletes behind him, and recorded a personal best time of 1.53.2 - at 42 years of age! His performance ranks him 4th in the UK for athletes over 40!

Lewis Thorn was elected Chelmsford's Man of the Match. He won the A string 100m – a feat that has never previously been achieved by a Chelmsford AC athlete competing at National level. For good measure Nathaniel Sherger won the B race over the same distance.

Lewis went on to win the A string 400m, in a personal best time of 48.7, before cruising home to in the final leg, to secure an easy win for the team in the 4x100m relay. In the 4x400m relay, the team were given a solid lead by Bradley Reed, Johnson Alo and Nathaniel Sherger before Lewis finished the day by running a 400m relay split of 47.9s.

In the field events Yasha threw the Hammer a lifetime second best of 48.27m, making good progress towards finally breaking the coveted 50m barrier.

Nathan Bushnell, improving with every throw, managed 3 PB's in a row in the Discus, finishing with 38.29m – before achieving another PB in the Shot, with 12.43m.

Nick Hardy comfortably won the Steeplechase, before attempting a double victory in the 1500m. After sticking with the pack until 300m to go, he accelerated leaving his competitors stunned by the change of pace. By the end of the race he was well clear of second place.

Sam Tremelling's willingness to cover the events of injured athletes at the last minute was a huge boost to the team on the day as Chelmsford were able to pick up valuable points that would otherwise have been lost.



Kevin Wilson (Discus) and Bradley Reed (110mH) both recorded A string wins, while Luke Keteleers made a typically significant contribution to the team score with B string wins in the 110mH and 400mH - and a second place in the Triple Jump

After hitting the heights of international selection in 2017, High Jumper Tom Hewes has suffered a series of serious injury problems – and a back injury sustained in the last week almost put him out of this NAL match – so it was particularly pleasing to see him claim victory in his event, with a clearance of 2m – his best for over three years.

Competing alongside Tom in the High Jump was Oliver Early, winning the B string event, and coming very close to PB's in both the High Jump and the Long Jump.

The Senior team are next in action in the Southern Athletics League, in a home match on Sunday 20th June.