



Southern Athletics League R1 – Chelmsford – 20th June 2021

After the loss of the entire 2020 season due to Covid, the Chelmsford AC Senior team were finally back in Southern Athletics League action on Sunday. For 2021, the league is temporarily operating on a more localised basis, before hopefully returning to its usual Divisional structure next year. Hence Chelmsford will be competing against the same four teams – Braintree, Basildon, Harlow and Colchester Harriers – in a four match series in the 'Essex' division.

Sunday's first match of the 2021 season was a home fixture at Melbourne Park, and despite the loss of a number of athletes to injury both prior to, and during the match, several competing at national championships in Bedford, and some having to self-isolate, Chelmsford eased to a comfortable victory, with final match score being:

1. Chelmsford AC – 378.1
2. Basildon AC – 287.3
3. Harlow AC – 245.1
4. Colchester Harriers AC – 198.8
5. Braintree & District AC – 158.3

The match got off to a very positive start for Chelmsford, with U17 Onyeka Okoh making his debut for the Senior team in the 400m Hurdles. Onyeka has already broken the U17 club record for 400mH several times this year, and he didn't disappoint on his Senior bow, taking victory in the A race by over two seconds. Bradley Reed had to step in to run in the B race at the last minute, but secured a win too, to get Chelmsford off to the perfect start on the track.

Erin Minton-Branfoot, who was later to be awarded Chelmsford's 'Women of the Match' was in excellent form in a number of events during the match, and she kept the excellent start going by winning the 800m A race, before U17 Will Steadman, also making his Senior debut, claimed a fine third place on the Men's 800m, and U20 Finlay Staff kept the points accumulating by winning the B race.

Meanwhile, Chelmsford's points total was also building quickly in the Field events, with Kevin Wilson and Nathan Bushnell gaining an A and B event maximum in the Shot – and Oliver Early and Tom Hewes doing likewise in the High Jump, where Oliver claimed a long sought after PB, clearing 1.92m. Maximum points were also secured by Mia Chantree (with a PB) and Isabel Lawrence in the Women's Long Jump, and by Yasha Bobash and Sam Larkins in the Men's Hammer, while Jaimee Smith won the Women's Pole Vault.

Back on the track, Men's Team Manager Paul Owen had been pressed into action due to injuries elsewhere, and won the 400m B race. Paul went on to counter something of a mini injury-crisis during the course of the match by also running in the 110m Hurdles and Steeplechase, before even winning valuable points for the team in the Pole Vault, where James Allway took the overall win.

In the Field, Lola Kuponiyi and Jess Hopkins, fresh from winning Silver and Bronze medals in the event at the National U20 Championships the previous day, dominated in the Women's Shot, securing yet



another maximum for the team. Jess then went on to win the Javelin B event, where Mia Chantree took second place in the A string.

U17 Larna Morgan – another debutante – ran extremely well to take second place in the Women’s 3000m before Bradley Reed claimed another comfortable win in his specialist event, the 110m Hurdles.

U20 Sam Tremelling, expanding his expertise beyond his specialist Pole Vault this year, threw really well in the Men’s Javelin to take second place, before Kevin Wilson and Nathan Bushnell repeated their maximum in the Shot by winning both the A and B string Men’s Discus. Not to be out-done by their male team-mates, Lola Kuponiyi and Jade Harding managed the same feat in the Women’s Discus, where they both recorded PB’s.

Back on the Track, sisters Nneka and Ndidi Okoh pushed themselves to their utmost to claim a substantial points haul in the Women’s Steeplechase, before it was time for the always exciting relays, where Chelmsford finished the day in perfect style by winning both the Men’s AND Women’s 4x100m event – AND the Men’s and Women’s 4x400m race, to make it a relay ‘clean-sweep’.

All in all, despite numerous selection challenges due to athlete availability, injury and illness, it was a very successful start to the SAL season for Chelmsford, demonstrating the great strength in the depth at the club, and the quality of the numerous younger athletes who have progressed from the academy into the Senior team.

The team’s next SAL match is also a home fixture, on Sunday 11th July.