



Southern Athletics League Division 1 – Gillingham – 23rd May 2022

Chelmsford AC returned to full Southern Athletics League action for the first time since 2019 on Sunday, visiting Gillingham, to take on Medway & Maidstone, Woking AC, and Windsor Slough Eton & Hounslow for the first match of the 2022 season.

In the last full SAL season in 2019, Chelmsford's three opponents finished sixth, fifth and first in the Division 1 table respectively, so the team were well aware of the challenge ahead – especially with a squad weakened by injuries and exam absentees – but they pulled together exceptionally well, with juniors stepping up, and athletes covering non-specialist events in general, and their hard work and commitment was rewarded with a fine victory on the day, in a very close match. The provisional result was:

1. Chelmsford – 191.5
2. Windsor Slough & Eton – 183.5
3. Medway & Maidstone – 183
4. Woking - 180

The Field events were under way first, and Jess Hopkins was straight into action in what would prove a very busy day for her – taking on the Hammer, in partnership with Ladies team manager Shirley Quinn. Having got the team's points total started, Jess moved straight on to one of her more specialist events – the Shot, where she teamed up with younger sister Maegan, to score maximum points for Chelmsford.

Erin Minton-Branfoot was also extremely busy, ultimately competing in an incredible seven events, and she started her day with useful points in the Long Jump, where she was partnered with U17 Grace Tremelling, who was taking a very brief break from exam studies.

In the Men's Hammer, Yasha Bobash only missed first place by 8cm – before Tom Hewes continued his excellent return from long-term injury by taking victory in the High Jump with an SAL Man of the Match winning clearance of 2.13m.

The Track events then began with the 400m Hurdles, with Bradley Reed claiming the first of a Hurdling double on the day, later winning his more usual event, the 110mH. In both races he was ably supported by Luke Keteleers, who eventually competed in six individual events, plus the relays, and was later awarded Chelmsford's Man of the Match accolade for his tireless efforts.

U17 Will Steadman, and Joe Abbott recorded a pair of second places in the Men's 800m, in the A and B races respectively.

Chelmsford's Woman of the Match was Rebecca Quinlan, who took on a punishing schedule, claiming second place in both the 800m and 1500m, before winning the 3000m (where veteran Wendy King backed her up superbly by winning the B race) – and still then finding the energy to run a leg in the 4x100m relay! Showing similar levels of stamina, Hannah Bolton ran very well in the 1500m and the Steeplechase, before immediately lining up for the 4x400m relay.



Erin Minton-Branfoot was back in action in the sprints, taking second places finishes in the 100m and 200m before winning the 400m. Juniors Teegan Rayner (U20) and Nneka Okoh (U17) supported her well, running well in the 200m and 400m B races. In the Men's sprints, George Gutteridge scored valuable points in the 100m and 200m, and Darcy Sullivan showed he is putting his injuries behind him with powerful wins in the 200m and 400m.

Finishing off the individual events on the Track, Will Nuttall took second place in the 1500m, Seb Cirillo and Chris Youell contributed vital points in the 5000m – before Men's Team Manager Paul Owen showed his own commitment by running in the Steeplechase just after competing in the Pole Vault!

In the Field events, Lily Brand continued to show her value to the team by teaming up with Jade Harding to record a couple of second places in the Javelin – and in the Men's team, the ever consistent Kevin Wilson weighed in with wins in the Shot and Discus. U17 Sam Wright claimed second place in the Long Jump, while Dan Botnari did likewise in the Triple Jump.

Jess Hopkins returned to the action, finishing second in the High Jump, before teaming up again with sister Maegan, to score their second double-win of the day, in the Women's Discus.

Once the relays had been completed, and the final match score calculated, the Chelmsford team were able to return home both extremely tired, but delighted to have recorded their tenth successive match victory. They are next in action in the National Athletics League, in Manchester on 4th June, followed by a home Southern Athletics League match on 12th June.