

Halesowen Athletics Club

Newsround

Review of the Year 2020

The new decade began with all the usual battles with the winter weather and muddy cross country courses before everything changed with the enforced halting of all club activity due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

The switch from real life to virtual competition saw some creative and inventive ways to keep all ages active and engaged whilst we patiently wait and keep our fingers crossed for a fuller resumption of club competition in 2021.

JANUARY – MARCH

2020 BC (before COVID) started with team golds for our senior women and Under 15 girls teams at the Worcestershire Cross Country Championships at



Lily Higgins winning the Midland U20 Cross Country at Prestwold Hall

Warley Woods before Lily Higgins set her sights on regional glory in a dominant performance to win the Midland Women's Under 20 Cross Country Championship at Prestwold Hall.

Lily Higgins, Sarah Thompson and Simone Jones were top three

scorers in the Worcestershire team in the Inter Counties Cross Country at Prestwold Hall, whilst Paul Allen won an M70 bronze in the Welsh National Cross Country, some 50 years after he first toed the start line at the event!

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Our men's team valiantly but unsuccessfully fought against relegation from Division One of the Birmingham Cross Country League and Peter Dear notably enjoyed a spot of bog snorkelling at the English National at Wollaton Park!

Iris and Josie Oliarnyk won the Under 20 and Senior Women's Long Jump at the Midland Indoor Championships.

Mark Hadley ran 1:18:57 in the Helsby Half Marathon, a performance good enough to earn a call-up for the England team in the ultimately cancelled Fleet Half Marathon.

And in one final pre-lockdown moment of glory for the club, Lucy Cambridge, Emma Higgins and Mel Hepke won W45 team gold at the British Masters Cross Country at Corwen in North Wales.

Tuesday 17th March saw England Athletics suspend all athletic activity and the club shut its doors two days later.

The trickle of event cancellations turned into a tidalwave, and it soon became clear that the chances of any meaningful competition in the summer months were fading fast.

APRIL – JUNE

But even though the club and grounds were closed and strict lockdown rules were in place, the club quickly found its feet with the creation of a number of virtual challenges.

Team Evens triumphed over Team Odds in the C-19 Relay Challenge, in which the challenge was for team members to run as far as possible in 19 minutes.

Peter Dear and Katrina Simpson were the quickest for the club over 5k in the England Athletics Virtual National Road Relays competition, and our women's vets team finished in 20th place.

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Chairman Steven Millington's Easter weekend challenge saw Peter Dear, Sarah Thompson and Alex Taylor triumph over 2 miles.

Team Sheppard, captained by Katrina Simpson, won the Paul Allen Marathon Challenge in which six teams of six athletes competed in an Ekiden-style relay in an attempt to beat Paul's Marathon 1971 PB of 2 hours 24 minutes and 11 seconds.

Only two teams broke the three hours barrier, with Katrina's team still over 19 minutes shy of Paul's PB in 2 hours 43 minutes and 51 seconds.

Our junior athletes ran from Land's End to John O'Groats (virtually of course!) in the C-19 Junior Challenge.

Led by Peter Barks, 26 athletes took part in 34 difference activities and completed the 1,111 mile route in just under 11 days.

Peter's next junior challenge was the Route 66 challenge, a virtual relay from Chicago on the east coast to Santa Monica on the west coast of America.

The 2,354 mile route took just 21 days to complete thanks to our team of 35 athletes, with seven youngsters amassing over 100 miles each!

Even though the clubhouse was closed, the social side of the club continued unabated and weekly gatherings at the Jack Price Arms virtual pub were quickly established via Zoom.

Wednesday nights soon became the home of James Hoults' cult quizzes and regular Urban Player acoustic gigs, live from the Black Country's top music venue – namely Adam Cross's kitchen!

There were virtual birthday celebrations for Steph Adam's 40th and for Dave Lloyd's 70th, in which runners from across the club ran the toughest 5k they could.

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And in what we believe is the world's first indoor fell race, Bill Nock ran 101 laps of his humble abode to complete the 3.1 mile distance!



Dave Lloyd celebrating his 70th with a birthday run!

June saw the lifting of the first national lockdown and the subsequent easing of restrictions saw competitive action return with Ollie Wright's club time trial event.

Peter Dear solo sub-2 800 metres was the star performance on the Halesowen track, whilst back in the virtual world, Marc Turner (17:05) and Sarah Thompson

(20:35) were quickest in the British Masters virtual 5k.

Nick Hazlewood also organised a Halesowen Virtual Relay competition with three teams of six taking on distances ranging from 200m to 3000m and Team Parker-Simpson were the clear winners in 24:13.

JULY – SEPTEMBER

The summer months saw all club facilities and most importantly, the club bar fully reopen!

Katrina Simpson and Joe Rogers battled both a competitive field and a full two lap stagger in notching up 800 metres wins in the BMC meeting in Manchester, and Joe followed that up with a new club 800 metres record of 1 minute 51.56 seconds at the Nuneaton Open meeting.

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Further editions of Ollie Wright's track time trials were notable for James Hoult's enthusiastic and somewhat premature celebration of an 800 metres PB and a blistering mile run of 5:13.4 by Dave Lewis.

The much postponed Cross Country presentation evening was finally held through an impressively produced YouTube video with Halesowen's answer to Phil and Holly, Peter Dear and Lily Higgins.



Joe Rogers' start line wave at the British Championships!

Meanwhile, Joe Rogers set his sights higher than YouTube with a live primetime BBC2 appearance in the 800 metres at the British Championships in Manchester.

The club 5k championship was won by Peter Dear and Sarah Thompson with Amelia Hartshorn and Alex Taylor taking the junior 3k titles.

Local racing resumed after a break of almost six months, as Peter Dear finished seventh in the Andy Holden 5 mile race.

Alex Taylor and Jessica Dale won the one mile junior races.

James Robinson won the Pole Vault at the Mark Cawte open meeting in Swindon and James Hoult had an 800 metres triumph at the Nuneaton Open.

And we sadly said goodbye to local running legend and former Halesowen stalwart Nigel Lloyd, who passed away after suffering a heart attack whilst out running.

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OCTOBER – DECEMBER

The autumn began with the inaugural race in the Halesowen Invitational Cross Country League.

Held around the club grounds in a two mile relay format, Team Morgo took the team prize with Peter Dear and Amelia Hartshorn running the fastest individual legs.

Our junior athletes dominated the Furious 5 series, with Jess Dale, Cerys Brook and Alex Taylor all notching up wins in races over tough multi-terrain and cross country courses at Tipton, Wombourne and Wolverhampton.

There was also a second place for Marc Turner in the senior 3.3 mile event at Compton Park and a third place finish for Peter Dear in the five mile race.

Julie Bellfield came back from Madeira with W50 gold in the 10k walk at the European Masters Championships.

And Glenn Lacey knocked an incredible 22 minutes off his half marathon PB at the Newbury Racecourse Half.

And that was that ... as far as competitive racing in 2020 was concerned as the second lockdown and subsequent Tier 3 restrictions put pay to any significant club activity from November 5th onwards.

But more virtual challenges were quickly set up including the Halesowen Lockdown League, in which over 50 club athletes competed in sprint and endurance events over a three week period.

The overall League winners were Adam Parsons (sprints), George Allen and Alex Taylor (junior endurance) and Peter Dear (senior endurance).

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Dr / Santa Dave (delete where applicable!)

The year ended in fine festive style with the 12 K's of Christmas, a relay event in which four teams of twelve got points not only for the fastest leg but also the most impressive festive costume.

Matt Allen and David Lewis both donned full Santa suits and scored highly on both counts!

The overall winners were the Jingly Joggers, led by Adam Cross with 36 points.

And although there was no club handicap run this year, some of our members did carry out virtual Boxing Day runs instead!

This included our esteemed club chair Steven Millington, who unilaterally declared himself Boxing Day champion after a run around his extensive Barnt Green estate!

ATHLETES OF THE MONTH

JANUARY – LILY HIGGINS for winning the Under 20 Midland Cross Country.

FEBRUARY – MATEUSZ SLIWINSKI for his performance at the English National Cross Country in Nottingham.

MARCH – W45 team of LUCY CAMBRIDGE, EMMA HIGGINS and MEL HEPKE for winning team gold at the British Masters Cross Country Championships in Corwen, North Wales.

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ATHLETES OF THE MONTH

APRIL – STEVE HORTON for his sub-20 minute 5k at the virtual Batavierenrace.

MAY – BILL NOCK for his 101 lap indoor fell race for Dave Lloyd's 70th birthday.

JUNE – PETER DEAR for breaking 2 minutes in the 800m at the club time trials.

JULY- PETER DEAR for his 800m PB of 1:58.50 at the Nuneaton Open meeting.

AUGUST – JOE ROGERS for setting a club 800m record of 1:51:56 at the BMC Trafford meeting,

SEPTEMBER – JABEZ BERRY for setting Hammer and Shot PBs at the Midland Open meeting in Nuneaton.

OCTOBER – GLENN LACEY for a PB of 1:27:12 at the Newbury Racecourse Half Marathon.

NOVEMBER – PETER BARKS for his 100m and 200m performances in the Halesowen Lockdown League.

2021 PREVIEW

As much as I could leave this section blank, everyone at the club is hoping that by late Spring / early Summer the usual programme of races and events will resume, and that club activity will be back in full swing.

Our Facebook group and website will be the first source of any important COVID updates, and keep an eye on our Twitter and Instagram feeds as well as the monthly Newsround newsletters.

Thanks for everyone's support during 2020 and here's to a return to some form of normality in 2021.

Up Owen!

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