



## St Peter's AC Stormont Race Report

**11/01/2023**

After a Cross Country Season which has seen its fair share of knee-deep mud, sub-zero temperatures and lung-busting hill climbs it was off to the verdant and gently rolling lawns of Stormont Estate, nestled high on the hills of Belfast for the penultimate fixture in the 2022 Cross Country League

Edward Carson and Mother Nature jointly looked down and smiled upon the gathered runners, seeing fit to reward us with more than the occasional ray of sunshine and splendid views of the largest asylum in the country



Bitter inter-club rivalries were set aside in the build-up as consensus was reached that politicians and nappies have one thing in common; they should both be changed regularly and for the same reason

Pleasantries and jousting for optimum gazebo locations out of the way, it was down to the serious business of racing.

First up was the mixed Under 13s, seeing Dominic McGeough Jr and Matthew Morrow come in close together, with Emily McGeough putting in a very game performance in a field where she was running with kids several age groups above her



Following on from the U13 race we had the U15/17 race, where Cadence Hamilton, Leah Balfour and Beth Morrow donned the Black and White once more, with Leah belying the fact that this was only her second race for the club. Leah and Beth had a fantastic race, pushing each other around the course and crossing the line less than one second apart

Cadence showed her class once more, finishing very strongly in 2<sup>nd</sup> to add to a very impressive season, and hot on the heels of an outstanding 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Armagh International Road Races two days earlier and qualifying for the All Ireland Cross Country finals.

Everyone at the club is very proud of our juniors and very appreciative of the hard work and dedication shown by the coaches. The future is very bright for this club!





Next up was what has fast become the main event at the Cross Country meets; the Senior Ladies race.

There is not a single club in the country who have not now heard of the incredible St Peter's Ladies. They have torn up the form book this season, putting many bigger clubs to the sword, taking home an outstanding haul of cups and consistently claiming podium places. They are, without a shadow of a doubt, *the* team that everyone wants to beat and they have handled the pressure magnificently

The ladies were joined on Saturday by debutants Beverley 'The Brawler' Balfour and Paula 'Pure Power' Doran, who had obviously heard that any lady running a Cross Country race this season would qualify for a position on the open-top bus which will be touring the borough should the ladies win the league. One of the highlights of the season has been seeing so many ladies giving Cross Country a go for the first time.

It was a strong field at the start line, with an ever-improving Beechmount Harriers contingent jostling alongside Newcastle AC and Willowfield Harriers, looking for that all-important fast start with which to put the St Peter's ladies under pressure. It was the St Peter's ladies, however, who got away and set the early pace on the first of three climbs up the deceptively tough series of hills towards Stormont Buildings before turning back into a series of downhill S-bends through a beautifully maintained wooded area towards Parliament gates and the start line. Compliments to the gardening staff, who must surely be the only people earning their keep around these parts.

With 3 to score for the cup, this was going to be a very tight race, with very little margin for error. Gillian pushed hard and earned 3<sup>rd</sup> place and yet another podium finish, but was sandwiched between two Beechmount runners who finished 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> respectively. With Beechmount needing only one more



finisher to lift the cup, it was a relief to see Kate blaze down the hill in 5<sup>th</sup>. The joy was short-lived, however, as two North Belfast Harriers crossed the line in quick succession, followed by two North Down athletes.

Everything hinged on the next few seconds as the supporters of each of four teams craned their necks, hoping to see their athlete crest the brow of the final hill and gallop to the finish line and glory. It was St Peter's who prevailed, with Patria O'Hagan and Orlagh McKavanagh coming over the hill together, crossing the line and ensuring St Peter's took home yet another cup – SEVEN for the season!

If winning the cup is equivalent to winning the battle, it is winning the league which is equivalent to winning the war and crucial league points were earned by Fiona Toman, Linda Farquhar, Beverley Balfour, Joan Melanophy, Sarah McGeough and Paula Doran

As has been the case all season, this was a fantastic team performance. The final race of the season is at Billy Neill Country Park, Comber, on 26<sup>th</sup> February. There are still places available on the open-top bus for those that would like to race that day. For those that would simply like to come along and spectate, you will be in for a treat as you will get to witness in the flesh your 2022 Cross Country League Champions. Let that sink in!



As has been the case in every race this season, the Senior Men lined up having just witnessed a master-class in teamwork and feeling the heavy hand of expectation rest upon their hairy shoulders.

Minus their talisman, James Monaghan, the men looked for inspiration. In Stephen Cochrane, they found that inspiration. As the whistle sounded, Stephen took off up the hill at break-neck pace and maintained the pace over four laps, finishing well up the field. A flawless performance tarnished only by forgetting to attach his number to his vest.

A great display of teamwork saw Alan Ritchie cajole the ageing Mark Willis around the course when he noticed Mark labouring two laps in, before moving up the field with Matthew Mulholland when the fresher legs of the curly-haired firecracker powered him comfortably past Willis on the 3<sup>rd</sup> lap. Alan made it look incredibly easy and is a fantastic addition to the club.

Gary McNally had an absolutely storming run, putting on his best display of the season.

Rounding out a great performance for the Senior Men and consolidating our position high up the league among very strong clubs were Colin Armstrong, Alex Mark, Seamus Melanophy, Deaglan O'Hagan, Marty McCracken, Kevin Toman, Christopher Sharkey, Dom McGeough Sr and Dwyer O'Connor. Incredible representation from the men; with 14 runners, we had the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest team on the day

Special mention for William McBride (who is definitely *not* a Willowfield spy) for turning up once again - as he has done so often this season - to cheer team members on, despite carrying an injury and being unable to run. We're looking forward to seeing you recover and get some miles under the belt.

Final special mention for Marty McCracken who put on a display of indecisive parking the likes of which your humble correspondent has never before seen and who parked so far from the start line that we effectively completed an ultra on our walk to the gazebos. So indecisive was his parking, we went for a coffee on the Newtownards Road and ended up parking 15 miles away at the Applegreen outside Lisburn. Still, it doesn't compare to the Cookstown Catastrophe, for which I will forever hang in my head in shame.



