



## TJ McElmeel XC Race Report Sept 24th 2023

Palace Demesne, Armagh was the location of the first Athletics NI XC league race for the 2023/24 season and with St. Peter's the current holders of the women's title and bolstered squads for the upcoming season, expectations were high. The Irish weather was being, well, Irish and set the scene for an old school muckfest and cross country racing in its purest form. Thanks to former Dromore AC man but now fully fledged St. Peters stalwart Colin Armstrong for collecting the much needed club Gazebo from the AWOL Mark Willis. Also to the Conwells and everyone else who ensured its safe dismantling in miserable conditions.



The junior races started off the day in relatively mild conditions. Zac McCrory was first off in the U9s and he gave it everything right the way through to the finish. The U11s saw Wyatt McMahon, Aoibhe McCracken and Amelia Armstrong put in hard shifts before the U13 race where we had Matthew Morrow and Zoe McCrory also do the black and white vest proud.



In the U15 races we had St. Peter's newcomer Harley McDowell and old hand Cadence Hamilton put in solid runs to start their XC seasons. No podiums for our juniors this year but it's great to see so many of them developing well and more importantly enjoying their running.



The Women's senior race consisting of 2 x 2500m laps was next with the rain now bucketing down and the soggy ground ripe and ready to be torn apart by newly bought spikes. Absolutely

ripped apart it was by over 150 runners including 8 brave St. Peter's women with 3 cross country debutants - Laura Mulholland, Emma Greer and Nadine Murray. Eileen Stevenson, meanwhile was making her long awaited return to the muck and may or have said afterwards that she really enjoyed it and will definitely be back! Paula Doran, Grainne Crilly, Orlagh McKavanagh and Gillian McCrory, all now experienced hands at cross country after last year's exploits made up the rest of the women's team.

The women's race itself was not without controversy. The U18 female race was run alongside it as a 1 and a half lapped course with the seniors running 2 laps. Consequently, most onlookers were unaware that our Gillian McCrory had developed a sizeable gap at the front of the race as all those around her were participating in the U18 race. Gillian herself didn't realise this either as there was no way of telling which race they were in until the U18 racers were directed to a different turn from the main loop. In the confusion that followed and due to some lax course marking and marshaling, Gillian took a wrong turn resulting in her taking a slightly shorter course. She continued to extend her lead from then on, finishing over 30 seconds in front of her nearest challenger. Upon finishing and having realised the error, Gillian immediately informed the Armagh AC organisers but was assured by them that she was so far in front that any advantage gained was minimal and wouldn't have mattered. Nonetheless, an appeal was set in motion later that evening by an un-named club (that may or may not have been 'laggin' behind between the hills) and which resulted in an unfortunate disqualification for Gillian.

The remaining St. Peter's runners also put in top performances and did the club proud in horrible conditions. The consistent Orlagh McKavanagh continued her Dublin Marathon prep in finishing an excellent 5th followed by top running from Eileen, Laura and Emma to complete the 4 scoring positions. Nadine, Grainne and Paula also ran brilliantly and put in hard shifts to gain extra team participation results. League team results still haven't been released at the time of going to press but the points we've gained are really appreciated especially from those who were initially reluctant to give it a go. Hopefully it was enjoyed by all.



The men's race was the final event of the day with the terrain now truly a mess. St. Peter's had an extraordinary and record turnout for this race with 16 men lacing up for the start and all finishing despite some questionable footwear for the conditions! Scorers for the men were James Monaghan, Matthew Mulholland, Irish Mountain running international Alan Ritchie and St. Peter's newcomer John McManus. Valuable points were also gained by the remaining runners who were Gary McNally, Daniel Moorcroft (Former rugby man making a St. Peter's debut), Booter Clarke (Another debutant), Ethan Headley (Yet another debutant and one of club's chief recruiters with Fiona Toman), Colin Armstrong, William 'Ironman' McBride, Seamus Melanophy, 400m man Alex Marks, Gareth Morrow, Donagh McLaverty and the Conwells-Patrick and Bryan. Preliminary results indicate that the men may be 3rd in the XC league as a result of strong performances and full participation results with this to be confirmed by Athletics NI in the coming days.





The team spirit on display in Armagh was remarkable with so many St. Peters seniors, juniors, coaches and supporters in attendance. Hopefully we can attract even more to future cross country events in a season where all hands will be required if we're to equal or better last year's unprecedented achievements.

The remaining fixtures of the XC League are:

Bobby Rea - Sat 21st Oct - Dundonald  
Comber Cup - Sun 19th Nov - Dundonald  
Malcolm Cup - Sun 26th Nov - QUB Dub Playing Fields Belfast  
Irwin Speirs - Sat 9th Dec - Cookstown  
North West XC - Sat 16th Dec - Derry Thornhill College  
Mathieson Cup - Sun 14th Jan - Mallusk  
Stormont XC - Sat 10th Feb - Stormont  
NI & Ulster Seniors - Sun 25th Feb - TBC

We of course have our own race, the Spadetown Cup & Shield on Sat 14th October which is the perfect opportunity for anyone new to XC to give it a go and for others to hone their skills on the muck.