



St Paul's Collegiate School participation in the National Secondary School Athletics Championships Timaru, December 2009

Full Report

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The annual Secondary School Athletics Championships event attracts up to 1400 athletes, both boys and girls, in junior and senior age groups. The St Paul's athletics team had been training for three months for this event and confidence was high for a good showing.

The first day of competition was on the Saturday and this is traditionally a day of heats, quarter finals and some semi finals. The team's two most experienced athletes were the first to compete in the morning, with heats of the Open Boys' 300m Hurdles for Cameron French and the Senior Boys' 800m for Michael Eggleton. Cameron ran strongly to win his heat in a time that qualified him second fastest for the final and Michael ran sensibly in the sixth heat of the 800m to finish third, earning himself automatic qualification into the semi final later in the day.

Izak Eksteen then continued the team's positive start by running a personal best in the heat of the Junior Boys' 800m to qualify for the final on Sunday. He took four seconds off his best in running 2 minutes 7 seconds. Jonty Rae then won his heat in the Junior Boys' 400m by running a controlled race where he was able to ease off the pace in the last 100m and run a comfortable 54 seconds. This made him one of the top qualifiers for the semi final on Sunday.

A new starting rule has been introduced to athletics competition in 2009 which means one break at a start and the athlete concerned is automatically disqualified. Unfortunately, the team's youngest athlete, Bennet Rogers, fell foul of this rule in his heat of the Junior Boys' 400m. He was not to be the only athlete this was to happen to over the weekend. This unfortunate situation did have an upside as it meant he was going to be very fresh for the 4 x 400m relay late on Sunday.

Aaron Keppler and Emma McCallum then stepped out onto the track in the Junior Boys' 200m and Senior Girls' 200m respectively. Aaron, fresh from his time at Tihoi, ran well to qualify for the quarter final later in the day by placing second in his heat. Emma was not to be outdone by the boys' performances and ran very well to qualify for the semi final with her third placing.

After the lunch break Cameron French competed in the Senior Boys' 110m Hurdle heats and qualified for the final. Sam Hewat and Jono Sullivan matched the performances of their team mates when competing next in the heats of the Senior Boys' 400m, as both comfortably qualified for Sunday's semi final.

Competition in the Junior Boys' 100m was tough, as there were eight heats. Graydon Scheres competed in this event but unfortunately did not qualify for the next round. However, he still had the 4 x 100m relay to look forward to later in the day.

Bryony Wilson and Sarah McCallum lined up in the Senior Girls' 100m heats and both looked very good in comfortably qualifying for the quarter final. Jack Murphy and Hadleigh May then ran in the Senior Boys 100m with Jack making the quarter final and Hadleigh just missing out on progressing.

Quarter finals for Aaron, Jack, Sarah and Bryony and a semi final for Michael made for a busy hour for the team as the afternoon programme drew to an end.

Jack was the unluckiest athlete of the group as he missed out on a spot in the 100m semi finals by two hundredths of a second. Sarah and Bryony were drawn in the same quarter final and they both qualified for the next round with a first and third placing respectively.

Competition for Michael in the Senior Boys' 800m was cut throat, with only the top two place getters from each of the three semi finals guaranteed a place in the final. However, this was not an issue as he executed his race tactics well to finish second and qualify.

As is usual at the end of the first day's competition the heats for the 4 x 100m relay take place and we had three teams entered. Unfortunately, things did not go to plan for the junior boys' team of Jonty, Aaron, Graydon, Izak and senior boys' teams of Jack, Hayden Gutry, Cameron and Hadleigh, as they were disqualified for a baton change infringement and an incorrect team declaration respectively. On a brighter note the girls' team of Steph Henley-Smith, Bryony, Emma and Sarah did qualify for the final.

The standard of performance by the St Paul's athletics team on the first day clearly indicated top eight placings were a distinct possibility for many on Sunday, and for a number of athletes' medals could be won.

A relaxing evening back at the motel after a fine meal from Mr Henley-Smith and Mr Wilson had the team well prepared for the next day's competition.

Sunday meant finals day for many of the team and there were plenty of nervous athletes at breakfast as a result. The short drive down to the track for some of the athletes was probably not long enough and for others it took too long.

First out on the track on this final day of competition were Bryony and Sarah in their 100m semi final. Unfortunately for Bryony she could only place seventh, but she had performed exceptionally well to reach this stage. Sarah ran another great race to place third in her semi final to qualify for the final.

Jono and Sam were next up in the Senior Boys' 400m semi final. Jono ran a blinder, to place second in his heat recording a personal best time of 50.74 seconds, thus qualifying for the final. He was now a distinct possibility of a medal. Sam ran well in his semi final and while he did not qualify for the final, he gained the racing experience the coaches wanted in preparation for the 4 x 400m relay at the end of the day.

Jonty Rae continued from where he left off on Saturday, in his semi final of the Junior Boys' 400m, by easily winning his race in a time fractionally over 52 seconds. He was now clearly one of the favorites for the final.

Aaron and Emma now faced their semi finals over 200m. Emma ran well again but couldn't quite make it to the final; however, she had earned herself a top 10 ranking in this event. Aaron was getting better with each race and this semi final was to be no different as he ran a wind legal personal best of 23.64 seconds to place fourth and qualify for the final.

Cameron was next up on the track and he was our first finalist to compete in the final of the Senior Boys' 110m Hurdles. This is not Cameron's favoured race but he raced solidly to place fifth in this challenging event. The team now had its first top five placing.

Ollie Smith had been waiting one and a half days to compete in the final of the Junior Boys' 3000m but the wait was worthwhile. He started well and settled in with the leading group. Conditions were tough as there was a blustery wind blowing, which had to be negotiated every lap over the seven and a half laps. With two laps to go there were four athletes in with a medal chance and Ollie was one of them. When the pace went on going into the last lap Ollie was able to

lift his effort enough to secure third place and earn the first medal for the team. He covered the distance in 9 minutes 14 seconds to easily break the school record for his age group.

The next finalists after the lunch break were Izak and Michael in their junior and senior 800m finals respectively. Izak ran very well and demonstrated his fine running ability by placing fifth in an event he had only taken up seriously three months earlier. In the Senior Boys' 800m final the standard was high and Michael gave himself every opportunity to earn a medal but it was not to be this year. His positive performance saw him finish sixth.

At around 1pm the excitement levels in the stadium lifted another notch as the finals of the 100m were about to take place. Sarah was involved in this and her final was the first to be run. She did not disappoint with a very slick 12.58 seconds in a tight race. In placing fifth she was just over one tenth of a second away from winning a medal in a blanket finish for the minor medals. A great effort!

The Open Boys' 300m Hurdles was the next event and Cameron was ready to perform at his best. Unfortunately, it was his turn to fall foul of the new starting rule which meant he was disqualified. His efforts later in the day were to demonstrate how he used this disappointment to motivate himself.

After Cameron's disappointment the team's attention turned to Aaron in the final of the Junior Boys' 200m. A sigh of relief was expressed when he legally blasted out of the blocks on his way to finishing fourth. This is an outstanding effort given his limited preparation due to his time at Tihoi.

The last two individual finals for St Paul's athletes were in the 400m where Jonty and Jono lined up in the junior and senior events respectively. Jonty was up first and put in a great effort in a close battle with an athlete from St Bede's. Unfortunately for Jonty on the day he couldn't quite catch the other athlete. The silver medal Jonty received was deserved as he had worked hard to achieve it.

In Jono's final he entered the home straight locked in a titanic battle for bronze with another athlete and they were still neck and neck going into the last twenty metres. Jono was working incredibly hard at this stage and unfortunately because he had put in so much effort in his determination to win the bronze medal he stumbled and his great effort went unrewarded, as he missed out on a medal in those last few metres. It was a gut wrenching finish for Jono but he didn't have much time to dwell on it as he only had two hours to recover from the pain and strain he had put his body through before he was going to have to do it all again in the 4 x 400m relay.

Attention on the track now turned to the relays and the confidence of the team coaches was high after the group's performance over the two days of competition. The senior girls' team was the first team to compete in the final of the 4 x 100m relay. The same team from Saturday lined up with Emma being the lead off runner. She gave the team a perfect start and a good baton change with Sarah saw the girls change with the leaders. A tremendous leg down the back straight from Sarah then had the team in definite medal contention. Steph had the responsibility of running the bend on the third leg and she did not disappoint by running up to her best. Passing the baton to Bryony the team was locked in a three way battle for the silver medal. In a superb last leg Bryony was able to prevail by one hundredth of a second to earn the girls a well deserved silver medal. Good baton changing and a dedicated approach to training in the months leading up to Nationals had been rewarded.

The next team up was the junior boys' in the 4 x400m relay. The team of Aaron, Izak, Bennet and Jonty were after gold and they delivered in emphatic style.

They blitzed their opposition by seven seconds; they were never headed after Aaron's impressive run on the first leg. Izak and Bennet built up the lead over the next 800m giving Jonty the luxury of a huge advantage going into the last leg and he didn't let it slip, bringing the team home in first place.

The girls from the 4 x 100m relay were out on the track again in the 4 x 400m relay but this time a tough weekends racing finally caught up with them. Their 10th placing finish was still a creditable effort in their final race of the meeting.

The last event of the meeting was the Senior Boys' 4 x 400m relay where the team of Hayden, Sam, Jono and Cameron were determined to finish on a high note. Hayden ran an excellent first leg to have the team changing in the top three. He passed the baton to Sam who then ran well to consolidate a top three placing before handing the baton to Jono. Jono then put in a gusty effort to make sure there was only a matter of five metres between him and the top two teams at the end of his leg. Cameron had the responsibility of running the last leg and he was up against the individual 400m champion from Southland Boys' High School and the silver medalist in the Senior Boys' 800m from Rangitoto College. He was not daunted by the challenge and the frustrations from the 300m hurdles earlier in the day really had him ready to run fast. Going into the last 200m he attacked the Southland Boys' High School runner and put himself in front; he was giving the St Paul's team every chance of winning. However, the Southland Boys' High School runner responded and with 40 metres to go he regained the lead. Although Cameron pushed him all the way he could not get past, resulting in a silver medal for the team.

The excitement of the relays and the medals won by the three relay teams was a fitting end to an excellent weekend where the students represented the school with great pride.