

Race Report – University Relays 2015

Once again the Kapiti Coast turned on the fine weather for the 2015 University Relay held on Saturday 9th May. Over 500 athletes from the Wellington Centre competed in the walk, the 3 kid's races and the main event – the 4 runner relay run over the undulating sandhills and flat paddocks of QEII Park.

30 entrants contested the Chocolate Walk where the winners are the walkers who finish in the time closest to their pre-race estimate. Walking away with the Whitakers chocolate in 2015 were Warren Jowett from the Trentham club and Cathy Gordon from the Hutt Valley club.

151 kids competed in the 3 kids races which were dominated by athletes from the Olympic harriers club. In the 9 yrs and under race, Millie Jenkins from Olympic won the girl's event with Max Pollard from Wellington harriers winning the boys. Jack Julian (Olympic) was a clear winner of the boys 11 yrs and under, and Becks Jenkins (Olympic) not only won the girls event, but also impressively beat home all the boys except for Jack. The 13 yrs and under race again showcased the great work being done by the Olympic club with their young athletes, with Will Anthony winning the boys event and Jess Jenkins leading home two of her club mates to win the girls event.

With all grades in the main relay being run together, there were 88 first lap runners on the start line of the approximately 4 km lap. Wellington harriers continued their domination of the junior men's event with Wellington teams finishing 1st and 2nd though the lads from Olympic almost split the two Wellington teams taking 3rd place only 11 seconds behind 2nd. With gullies full of overgrown lupin out the back of the course, the main relay course had to be modified slightly this year and as a result was slightly longer than the course used in previous years. This did not seem to bother Marcus Karamanolis who covered the lap faster than last year in producing the outstanding individual effort in the relay. He not only repeated his effort of last year in running the fastest lap (12.48) for the grade but also recorded the fastest time of the day over all the grades being the only athlete to go under 13 minutes. His teammate James Preston ran 2nd fastest lap of the day (13.26) with Rugi Jagose and Henry Gautry completing the winning team. Callum Stewart of the 2nd placed Wellington team ran the 3rd fastest lap (13.39) in the grade.

Not surprisingly, the talented Kelsey Forman from Wellington harriers produced the fastest lap (15.30) in the junior women's event, but her effort was not enough to deny the consistent Olympic team first place with Michaela Walker recording 2nd fastest lap of the day (16.23) and Izzy Hegan bringing the team home with 3rd fastest lap (16.33). Verona Conroy and Phoebe van Boheeman ran strong laps to complete the Olympic team.

The Scottish team of Dougal Thorburn, Nick Horspool, John Earles and Tim Hodge lead from start to finish to win the open men's event. The team was consistently fast over the course recording the four fastest individual times in the grade with Tim recording the fastest lap (13.03), just ahead of Dougal (13.06) with Nick having the 3rd fastest lap (13.10). Wellington harriers took 2nd place and the Scottish senior men showed their depth taking 3rd place.

The Scottish senior women raced to victory fielding an identical team to the team that won the Shaw Baton relay in April. Anchored by Nicole Mitchell's fastest lap in grade (15.25) and Ariana Harper's 2nd fastest lap (15.45) on laps one and two, it was left to Hinano Andrews and Amanda Broughton to bring the team home. The Wellington Tri Club women ran 2nd with Olympic 3rd. Trentham's Sarah Gardner recorded 3rd fastest lap of the day with a 16.24 lap.

The masters men 40+ race was the closest race of the day with the Scottish and Olympic teams continuing a close rivalry that has developed over recent years with Olympic having the most recent victory at the Shaw Baton relay. Olympic's Kevin Pugh got his team away to a great start with Scottish's Gerad Gordon keeping his team within striking distance. And strike they did, with fast laps from Scottish's Michael Wray (3rd fastest lap 14.39) and Todd Stevens (2nd fastest 14.34) seeing Scottish leading at the handover to the final lap. Understandably, it was a nervous looking Brendon Thompson who took off for the final leg knowing that he would be chased all the way by Mike Waterman. Mike ran a very impressive fastest lap in grade (14.22) but couldn't quite catch Brendon who punched the air in delight crossing the line just 8 seconds ahead of the Olympic team. Both teams will no doubt be looking forward to a rematch at the Bay's relay in August. The team from Wellington harriers was 3rd.

The Scottish's master's women matched their male counterparts by taking out their event but not before a great contest with the team from Olympic harriers. Tricia Sloane led out for the Scottish team with Rachael Cunningham and Emily Solberg running the middle legs. When they handed over to their last leg runner, they were trailing the Olympic team by 3 seconds and it took the 3rd fastest leg (17.30) of the day from Scottish's Lindsay Barwick to bring the team home in first place. Olympic came home in 2nd with the Tri Club team in 3rd. Kapiti's Renae Creser ran the grade's fastest time with an impressive 16.45 with Olympic's Michelle Van Looy running 17.09 for 2nd fastest lap in grade.

An impressive number of 13 teams contested the open masters 50+ race and like the masters men 40+ race, it was a closely fought event. Wellington harriers have great depth in their 50+ men's squad and decided to spread the talent between their 3 teams which offered the opportunity for the Olympic team to challenge them for the win. There were some nervous faces in the Wellington squad when Olympic club president Mark Handley set off on the last lap in pursuit of the Wellington's final lap runner. Some might say he was running for the glory of his club and his teammates – Grant Carroll, Chris Speakman and Tony Simmers; others might say it was the attraction of the prize for the winning team – whatever the reason it was the barefooted maestro from Olympic who came through his Wellington counterpart to bring the win for his team by 12 seconds and collect the beer. Despite not winning the event, Wellington teams finished 2nd, 4th and 5th with Wellington runners recording fastest (Paul Sharp 15.23) and 2nd fastest laps (Jono Hales 15.57). The Wellington squad will no doubt be looking towards the bigger prize of defending their national road relay title in October. Marcus Smith anchored the Hutt Valley team with the 3rd fastest lap (16.06) of the day to lead his team to 3rd place.