

Scottish Cross Country Championships

Falkirk 23/2/2013

Referee's Report

Ron Morrison

As I said in last year's report, the stability of staging the Scottish Cross Country Championships at Callendar Park, Falkirk for the 8th consecutive time this year has many benefits – athletes, spectators and officials alike are familiar with the environment, promoting efficient racing tactics, viewing strategies and optimum course design respectively. The increase in entries and finishers year on year clearly shows the venue is popular with athletes and clubs. Furthermore the number of spectators this year was remarkable.

The major innovation this year was the introduction of chip timing provided by Interloq. By any measure this has to be considered a success. Chris Shepherd and his team were both efficient and helpful and even mentioned that it was a delight to work with a well-organised event. The chip timing allowed us to present the individual and team medals very soon after the event finished.

As this was our 1st year with chips, a backup paper system was run in conjunction with a video recording and a voice tape. To call it overkill is an understatement.

The discrepancy between the paper system and the chip timing was, as far as we know, 12 athletes out of the 1386 finishers. That is about 0.09% and not all the errors were caused by chips. **We should repeat this every year and review the use of timekeepers and recorders.**

One athlete who deserves special mention this year is Doug Gunstone (Fife AC) who ran his 44th consecutive Championship last year and is recovering from major heart surgery. It is unlikely that his record will ever be broken.

Last year I commented that I could not remember such an incident free Championship. This year had even fewer incidents. Despite the snow showers before the event and in other places in Scotland, it was a beautiful day which may account for the large number of spectators. Generally the weather was sunny and dry with the temperature remaining at about 5C. The going was at best soft turning muddy in the latter races. In all it was a great day for cross-country running.

Pre Race Action

1 With the retirement of Peter Jackson, who has provided the computerised entry/results for the National (and many other events) for the last 17 years, we moved to a spreadsheet based system that allowed the production of a programme and input into the chip timing system.

Over that period Peter developed a sophisticated reporting of the entry/results to a level that is now expected as standard. This replacement system, although tied to the SAL membership database does not have that level of sophistication.

A new web based system should be put in place for entries for next year.

The entries team ensured that all athletes were members of SAL and that all were running in the correct age group.

The entries were put on the web in good time for scrutiny. There were no scrutiny errors reported on the day.

- 2 The pre(and post)-race publicity was fitting and excellent for the major event of the cross country calendar. Peter Jardine and his team are to be congratulated for this.
- 3 Entries for the Championships were the highest (1956) since 1996-7 with the highest number of finishers (1386) since 1994-5. The only significant drop was in the U20.

On the Day

- 1 After discussion with the Clerk of the Course, Andy Ronald, Assistant Referee David Cairns and I did not walk the course. We concentrated on the briefing of officials on the integration of the chip system and on the start/finish area including the de-chipping area. We both agreed that the start/finish area set up was excellent. The SAL staff, led by Ross Cunningham, are to be congratulated for the slickness of this operation.
- 2 It was good to see the SAL CEO, Nigel Holl, Performance Director Stephen McGuire and President Leslie Roy in attendance for the whole day and participating in the presentation of prizes.
- 3 The start/finish area worked very well. We have a very experienced collection of officials who operate very efficiently. Despite the number of finishers only the senior men's race required 2 funnels.
- 4 Again this year the Hunters Bog T inflatable doll failed to finish by not getting under finish gantry. If it had I would have disqualified it immediately for not starting or completing the course.
- 5 There were no recording anomalies between the chip timing and the paper recording in the U15G, U15B, U17W, U17M, U20W, U20M and Senior women. There were 2 anomalies in the U13B and U13G that looked like chip misfires. Of the 7 anomalies in the senior men's race at least 3 were caused by athletes losing their shoe during the race.
- 6 Over the years we have refined the announcing duties in the Championships. This year there was 1 announcer, Bryan Burnett, on the on-course commentary and finish, another, Graham Bennison on the race introduction and the start and a third, John Wands, on the presentations. This worked extremely well.
- 7 The doctor at the First Aid tent reported that there had been no serious injuries during the day and only a few people treated for minor complaints.
- 8 The burden of hosting this event falls largely on Falkirk Victoria Harriers who's army of members turn out in their droves to support the National. This year we asked Clubs to share a little of this burden in providing marshals and indeed about 20 turned up on the day to help out. The incremental improvement over the years provided by the Club is largely unnoticed but this year I listened into the marshal's briefing and noticed the improved funnel construction.

Some additional comments from the Assistant Referee David Cairns

- 1 Timekeepers required to be positioned to avoid the chip timing equipment and allow the chip timing access, this resulted in them being slightly forward of the line but I don't think that affected timing significantly.
- 2 Finish line was subsequently marked on the protective mats over the chip timing mats (NB the line was set to the course set up markings but I'm not sure where the first trigger point was for the chip timing in relation to this?).

- 3 The protective mats over the chip timing mats require to be fixed down to prevent them rucking up and presenting a trip hazard. This became apparent in the later events and particularly in the Senior Men's race.
- 4 With respect to team results, perhaps a check beforehand of the input information would be worthwhile (team positions changed in the U17W & U20W races where there were only 3 to count instead of 4).
- 5 I didn't get the opportunity to fully compare the chip times/positions with the manual results but did notice a few position "reversals" further down the fields.
- 6 Although I was concerned over the use of snips for de-chipping (picturing shoes/athletes being damaged/injured with subsequent claims) I'm pleased to say that de-chipping went well with no incidents that I am aware of.

Post Race

- 1 Interloq provided me with an electronic version of the results and I checked them against the paper recording. I then formatted them and they were placed on the SAL website later in the evening.
- 2 7 corrections to the results were made after athletes spotted they were missing. The paper recording allowed them to be placed in the results.