



Happy with a seventh successive year in the medals at the National Road Relay. Standing (left to right) Gerry North, Gordon Biscoe, Bill Laws, Brian Pritchard, Tom Osment, Maureen Pritchard, Zara Chidouh, Mark Pollard, Jonathan Blackledge, Janet Blackledge, Mike Blackledge, Neil Speaight, Alan Mead, Padraic Buckley, Paul Freary, Eric Hall, Pete Willis, Hazel Mead. Front row. Mavis Hall, Charles Jones, Richard Ward, Simon Jones, Malachi Byansi, Will Cockerell, Pat Mead, Phil Wicks.

In this issue:

- 11 Road Relays
- 11 Bels lose an exciting SEAA 12-Stage
- 12 Women's SEAA 6-Stage Relay
- 13 National bronze medals were truly worth the struggle
- 14 Belles in National top ten
- 14 Skipper's Corner
- 16 Results Roundup

Contributors in this issue: Will Cockerell, Alan Mead

Road Relays

SEAA Men's 12-Stage Road Relay,
Milton Keynes, 1 April 2007.

Bels lose an exciting SEAA 12-Stage

Going into this race we knew we'd be short of a winning team. A "stag do", house moving, marathon training, Scottish Relays, Irish Relays ... you name it and all had combined to ensure quite a different look to our line-up. It was felt that it would be most unlikely that we'd continue our winning streak ... maybe we wouldn't medal at all. In reality it turned out to be one of the most exciting races we can remember as our super fast short-stagers interleaved with lesser-known long stage men who had gladly answered the call. We shifted some of our power runners forward with the idea of letting them run, as far as possible, the stages they wanted, giving them the

chance of chasing runners without covering huge gaps - they responded with fastest laps of the day.

Shaftesbury Barnet Harriers were solid all the way through, taking the lead on the opening leg and holding it to the end - apart from stage ten when an audacious "Wardy" stole a break of half a minute. We were up and down the field like a yo-yo in the early part of the race until Phil Wicks put some distance between the Bels and their pursuers.

Each lap was 146 metres shorter than normal, due to building works in the regular takeover area. The Milton Keynes wind ... well, we always say that it's windy in this corner of the world but on this occasion it was something else. The net result was that even though the course was short, the times were more or less the same as normal.

Malachi Byansi - a revelation

Malachi Byansi's progress over the last year has been a revelation. This man has been in our C teams at MK! A best of 26:30 in 2001 had been followed by a worst of 29:10 in 2004. Mal was delighted that a way into the A team opened up for him this time and his 24:53 to give us 9th at the end of the opening lap, instead of a predicted 15th-20th, was our first thrill of the day. Kojo Kyereme had grabbed a handy 5 seconds advantage over Dave Mitchison for the Beagles up at the front and we were just under a minute in arrears.

The intention had been for Shugri Omar to bring us up to around 10th on the first short stage but with that objective already achieved and with the competition on this leg weaker than normal, he took the Bels into 2nd spot and we were just

17 seconds off the pace. Pete Willis was another keen to show what he could do in the A squad – but where it all went right for Malachi, it all went wrong for Pete! Crossing the finish line a full minute later than he was expected, it was “pull off the vest and sit disconsolate on the kerb-side” time. The wind had killed him. But we’ve all been there and Pete will bounce back. For the Bs James Fairbourn deserves a special mention for his positive run.

Phil Wicks - an unbelievable 23:20

Funnily enough, our team position was exactly what we had expected with a quarter of the race over and, entering the fray somewhat earlier than normal, we had a little run of superstars lined up next to redress the balance. His track career has already brought him runs in the 1:45 and 3:38 region but big Neil Speaight is upping his training load. A super 5 miles at Alsager has shown his potential at longer distances and the spring road relays are a further stepping stone along a route to even faster times on the track.

Neil took out seven men ahead of him, failing to catch Wells City by only two seconds, but Shaftesbury still had a two minute advantage – what could “Wicksy” do about that. Plenty! Running for the north London club, Richard Willis is no slouch. It’s doubtful that he had any knowledge of what was going on behind him for he saw no opposition throughout his run – 7th fastest of the day – but Phil Wicks was stirring up a hurricane, halving that lead and setting a time of Cullen-esque proportions – 23:20 – unbelievable. And by the time Jonathan Blackledge had done a similar job on the following short leg, the Shaftesbury lead was down to just ten seconds at half distance.

Tom Ellacott now had the unenviable job of trying to hold our position. Although unable to keep close to Shaftesbury’s James Trapmore, the gap to third place, opened up by Jonathan to well over four minutes, was something that we felt we could defend to the end and Tom’s solid but lonely run was just what we needed.

“Sharp” - fastest short stage

Now it was time for “Sharp” to have a crack and, piling on the pressure, the gap came down to 23 seconds as Stephen ran what turned out to be the fastest short stage of the day – 16:13. Our fourth long stage debutant now made his entrance. Padraic Buckley’s athletics cv shows that he’s run for Leevale AC in Ireland, Iona College in the USA and has even had a spell with Tipton Harriers. Padraic has come back to running after a lot of soccer – and are we glad he has! Initially he gained on the man ahead but on that infamous part of the long stage that has thrown our men before (Charlie Herrington, Alaster Stewart), he went off course, only to be brought back by the urgent shouts of our supporters. It was only a loss of five or six seconds but the impetus was lost and now they hit the wind. But it was good running from Padraic and there were only 48 seconds between Shaftesbury and the Bels. The Beagles were gradually securing third spot for themselves, although keeping an eye on Woodford Green in 4th and Bedford in 5th.

Into action now came Richard Ward with a mere three weeks of training behind him after another injury-enforced lay-off. Maybe he could narrow the gap a little ... The team manager’s day dreaming was interrupted by a phone call from out on the course: “Richard Ward’s gone ahead ... and the Shaftesbury man isn’t responding.” This information was relayed to a nervous looking Skipper as he prepared to take on the graveyard shift yet again. ... Another phone call: “We’re 20 seconds clear,” and before long “Wardy” was in sight and Will Cockerell was away in the lead ... and half a minute had gone before Shaftesbury’s black and white stripes hove into view. Was this enough? Surely, after our thoughts of failing to get into the frame, we couldn’t win it?

Just two seconds in it

Orlando Edwards was three and a half minutes faster than our Will in the National Cross Country Championships and soon he was eating into the Belgrave advantage. Inevitably they came together and the Shaftesbury man pushed to go away – Will clung on. Will pressed on the pedal – but they still remained locked together. Edwards surged – and a little daylight opened. The gap became five, six seconds – but it wasn’t over, for as Shaftesbury’s leader swept around the final corner and into the take-over straight, a flash of a claret and gold was seen over his shoulder – Will was closing! Just two seconds in it after four hours of running.

A baptism of fire for Alex

Eighteen year-old Alex Bodin had been placed on last leg in the thought that the gaps would be massive by now whether we were 5th, 3rd or (dream on) the leaders. As both runners set out, Belgrave and Shaftesbury’s supporters joined in urgent conversation: “What’s your man gonna do?” “Well, he’s about 15 minutes for 5k but we don’t know how fit he is.”

Young Alex ran a mature leg. He must have been nervous but he handled the situation perfectly and ran a time exactly as predicted. A great job by him, then, but it was too big an “ask” on this occasion as the Shaftesbury man ran 28 seconds quicker. What a baptism of fire, though, and an experience that will stand him in good stead for decades to come.

Congratulations to Shaftesbury

Congratulations to Shaftesbury Barnet Harriers ... and now we have two weeks before the National.

For the first time at Milton Keynes we failed to finish a B team; in fact only three teams did – and as a result, with none of them being placed high enough, no Southern B teams were selected to go to Sutton Park. One record we haven’t lost though - we have never failed to medal in nine outings at MK.

A Team: M Byansi (9) 24:53; S Omar (2) 16:43; P Willis (10) 27:05; N Speaight (3) 16:14; P Wicks (2) 23:20; J Blackledge (2) 16:19; T Ellacott (2) 26:17; S Sharp (2) 16:13; P Buckley (2) 25:53; R Ward (1) 17:22; W Cockerell (2) 26:12; A Bodin (2) 17:42.

B Team: M Humphrey (40) 28:40; D Mason (36) 18:34; J Fairbourn (37) 27:54; A Marek (32) 19:50; J Kimaiyo (32) 26:37; J Webb (29) 18:51; D Anderson (35) 32:24; 8 D McMillan (38) 24:19; P Coughlan (38) 38:03; team dnf.

Teams: 1 Shaftesbury BH 4:13:43; 2 Belgrave H 4:14:13; 3 Newham &EB 4:15:34; 4 Woodford GwEL 4:17:36; 5 Thames H&H 4:21:52; 6 Aldershot F&DAC 4:22:03; ... 37 teams finished.

Fastest legs

Long stage (7,826m). 1 P Wicks (Belgrave) 23:20; 2 S Plummer (Woodford GwEL) 23:55; 3 K Kyereme (Shaftesbury BH) 23:56; 4 D Mitchison (Newham &EB) 24:01; 5 M Draper (Windsor SE&H) 24:02; ... 20 M Byansi 24:53.

Short stage (5,356m). 1 S Sharp (Belgrave) 16:13; 2 N Speaight (Belgrave) 16:14; 3 K Gerrard (Newham &EB) 16:15; 4 J Blackledge (Belgrave) 16:19; 5 D Smith (Tonbridge) 16:34; ... 7 S Omar 16:43; 25 R Ward 17:22; 36 A Bodin 17:42.

SEAA Women’s 6-Stage Road Relay,
Milton Keynes, 1 April 2007.

Women’s SEAA 6-Stage

There were some times set on stage one that would have shown up well in the men’s race and in the thick of this action Catherine Bryson set the Belles team going with a 19:19 clocking - our fastest of the day. Further back, Southern 20k Race Walking Champion Maureen Noel took a break from “heel and toe” action to sample life on the road relay circuit. Eventual winners Bedford & County ended lap one a lowly 19th.

While Thames took over from Windsor at the front, Helen Smethurst came home 9th, handing over to Rosie Powell.

Now Shaftesbury led, and just as the order was chopping and changing at the front, so it did further down the field as Sarah Gailey completed leg four for the Belles and sent Juliette Clark on her way.

Our most experienced relay runner with five SEAA 6 stages behind her, “Jules” move up five places as Aldershot took their turn at the head of the procession. It just remained now for team manager Catherine Eastham to close in the team for a very respectable 11th place – now that’s something the men’s outfit just cannot aspire to!

A Team: C Bryson (7) 19:19; H Smethurst (9) 20:36; R Powell (11) 21:35; S Gailey (12) 21:18; J Clark (7) 20:23; C Eastham (11) 23:12.

B Team: M Noel (29) 22:46; J Beecroft (29) 23:57; Clare (25) 20:43; team dnf.

Teams: 1 Bedford & County AC 1:54:07; 2 Aldershot F&D AC 1:54:59; 3 Shaftesbury BH 1:5:46; 4 Highgate H 2:02:32; 5 Arena 80 2:03:39; ... 11 Belgrave H 2:06:23; 24 teams finished.

Fastest: 1 J Wilkinson (Bedford &C) 17:41; 2 S Morris (Windsor SE&H) 17:54; 3 S O’Sullivan (Thames H&H) 18:08; 4= S Abel (Highgate H) 18:15; 4= V Webster (Shaftesbury BH) 18:15; ... 19 C Bryson 19:19.

ERRA Men’s National 12-Stage Road Relay,
Sutton Park, 14 April 2007

Bronze medals were truly worth the struggle in National 12-stage

Having assembled a team that, on paper, had a good chance of winning, we faced all sorts of difficulties in the 48 hours before the start. Even during the race things didn’t go to plan with most turning in a run with which they were less than happy. And yet this has to go down as perhaps our feistiest performance ever. Twice we battled towards the front of the field and went into the second half of the race a couple of minutes down but still not totally giving up on a win. We finally came away with bronze medals that were truly worth the struggle. A trace of early disappointment gave way to the feeling that we had fought well and, let’s face it, although things didn’t go our way we *still* medalled – for a seventh consecutive year. New guys coming into the team went home with hardware that once might have been no more than a dream and prospects for the future continue to look exciting.

Early worries about niggles that may have kept crucial team members on the sidelines were discarded only for “Milesy” to phone in with a cold, and it was confirmed early on the Saturday that he wouldn’t be running. Mark knows from bitter experience how such a problem can develop into a full-blown chest infection and with only seven days until his marathon debut it was something he couldn’t risk.

So with a hole blown in the long stage line-up the running order was thrown up in the air and Simon Jones’ meticulously planned handicap competition was binned as short stage runners went long and long stage runners went short in an attempt to reduce our predicted overall time.

It was hot

We’ve encountered some rough conditions at Sutton Park but for once the sky was blue, the air was still – and it was hot. Malachi Byansi was rewarded for his 8th placing first stage SEAA run with a position on the start line in the National race ... and within half an hour he was our first disappointed man of the day as he ran perhaps half a minute slower than expected for an opening position of 28th. But let’s take a look at the statistics in hindsight ... and note that this time he had improved to become 7th Southern man home. Mal’s run was fine. Ex-Belgravian Rick Hayman placed 19th for Sale Harriers in 27:26.

Early leaders Kent AC, for whom Jermain Mays’ opener was the day’s third fastest, were displaced by Severn AC on the second stage, while serious contenders Tipton were 4th and Newham & Essex Beagles rocketed up to 7th. Belgrave’s

position was improved too, as Padraic Buckley moved up eight places. We were two minutes ten off the lead and now it was the turn of Neil Speaight.

Originally down for last leg, should things be tight for a win, Neil had stepped into a long stage role to keep our challenge alive. Tucking in behind Blackheath’s Mike Skinner, six places were won by Neil – but again in a long stage time that we might have thought would be faster. Another one time Belgrave man took the Beagles up to 6th – John Clarke – but it was Tipton now in charge with previously under-rated Cardiff in 2nd.

Shugri – one of the biggest movers

An extraordinary run came from Shugri Omar on lap four. One of the stage’s biggest movers, he came up ten places to carry our colours through the takeover zone in 4th – the sort of run surely worth 14:25 but in fact – 14:54. With few exceptions all runs now appeared to be on the slow side and could only be put down to the still, hot air – particularly on the out and back stretch up to the far point of the long stage.

Living up to his promise to tackle a long stage to strengthen the team if we lost anyone, Stephen Sharp was up next and here, surely, was where we’d make an impression. But no less than five of the day’s fastest long stage runs were thrown up on lap five and, just to make things worse, Steve was suffering from a stomach problem that had him wishing it was a straight race, groaning afterwards: “ ... I tell ya, I’d have come out ...”

Tipton and Leeds were looking worryingly strong now, although the word on the course was that Tipton were front-loaded.

The Skipper had mixed feelings on receiving a call into the team on race morning. His heart was heavy for Mark Miles, but nevertheless pleased to be getting an outing on the hallowed tarmac of Sutton Park. He hit his short stage just as he intended before sending “Wicksy” away to start the second half of the contest. Phil is intent on setting a blazing time on the long stage some time or other but on this occasion, with his tight calf muscle holding him back, he had to be satisfied with a Belgrave best of the day and a time just five seconds slower than his previous best as he dragged the team up four more spots. Leeds, known to be at full strength and expected to be solid to the end, now went ahead of Tipton while Cardiff were 3rd.

The chase for a medal was on

We’ve never seen a bad run from Jonathan Blackledge in Sutton Park and he flogged himself around the short lap to overtake the Morpeth and Notts AC teams, drawing closer to all ahead of him as he clocked second fastest on the stage – 14:37. Simon Jones was fresh from a best ever 10k the previous weekend and on lap nine he pushed past Tipton, the Beagles and Sale for a super run, beating some illustrious names and giving way only to Morpeth’s Ian Hudspith. A minute clear of second placed Morpeth, Leeds were now looking out and out winners but the chase for a medal was really on for the Bels as Si had brought us to within 13 seconds of bronze.

What a debut from Mark Pollard

Tenth stage was entrusted to Mark Pollard who had been nursing a very sore shin for some weeks, bolstering only a little running with workouts in the swimming pool and on the bike. He was terrific, faster than anyone else on the lap except Darren Bilton who extended the Leeds’ advantage to two minutes. Not only did Mark move past Cardiff, he pulled back 50 seconds on Morpeth, failing to catch their runner by just one second. What a debut!

With eight national team golds in his trophy cabinet it was up to Paul Freary, using every ounce of his experience to give

our final man enough to hold off the advancing Beagles and keep us in the medals. Paul clung on to Morpeth's Mark Hudspith for as long as possible and at the end of the stage we had a minute and 21 on the Newham boys – who had a powerful Mark Warmby due to take over and eager to attack our own Richard Ward.

Warmby was going to have to run a blinder to do it – but all round the lap he was cutting down the gap until, as the final turn was reached, the Belgrave man seemed just out of reach. Even then, further urging from his team mates had him chasing again and it was with huge relief that we welcomed “Wardy” at the end of the finish straight, still with 11 seconds in hand.

Belgrave: M Byansi (28) 27:51; S Omar (20) 15:23; N Speaight (14) 27:20; S Omar (4) 14:54; S Sharp (11) 27:17; W Cockerell (12) 15:34; P Wicks (8) 26:40; J Blackledge (6) 14:37; S Jones (4) 27:06; M Pollard (3) 14:36; P Freary (3) 27:44; R Ward (3) 15:41.

Teams: 1 Leeds City AC 4:11:31; 2 Morpeth H 4:13:42; 3 Belgrave H 4:14:43; 4 Newham & EB 4:14:54; 5 Cardiff AAC 4:16:20; 6 Tipton H 4:16:37; 7 Notts AC 4:16:53; 8 Sale H 4:17:13; 9 Owls AC 4:18:09; 10 Shaftesbury BH 4:18:16; ... 70 teams started; 66 teams finished.

Fastest legs

Long stage (5.38 miles). 1 J Ndayisenga (Birchfield H) 25:21; 2 P Nicholls (Tipton H) 25:52; 3 J Mays (Kent) 25:53; 4 S Deakin (Leeds City) 25:54; 5 R Russell (Thames Valley H) 25:59; 6 G Comish (Sale H) 26:01; 7 I Hudspith (Morpeth H) 26:08; 8 G Thornton (Kent) 26:13; 9 D Bannister (Shaftesbury BH) 26:15; 10 B Farquharson (Notts AC) 26:16.

Short stage (2.995 miles). 1 N McCormick (Morpeth H) 13:39; 2 F Tickner (Wells City) 14:00; 3 J Mellor (Liverpool H) 14:09; 4 D Bilton (Leeds City) 14:30; 5 M Warmby (Newham & EB) 14:31 6= S Durrane (Leeds City) and S May (Owls) 14:32; 8 J MacDonald (Trafford) 14:34; 9 M Pollard (Belgrave H) 14:36; 10 J Blackledge (Belgrave H) 14:37.

ERRA Women's National 6-Stage Road Relay,
Sutton Park, 14 April 2007

Belles in National top ten

It was a successful day for the Belles in Sutton Park as we ended up fourth Southern team and tenth overall in our second best ever time.

Birhan Dagne impressively came home third on the opening stage, her 16:23 being our best ever for the circuit apart from her own 16:19 in 2002. Great running followed from Vicky Clarke who was soon past Shaftesbury, dropping away dramatically on this stage, but was then overtaken by Winchester.

Sarah Gailey had the unenviable job of taking over for the third stage while in the frame – and not surprisingly had to give way – but we were still in the top ten and Tilly Heaton, Juliette Clark and Catherine Bryson kept us at this level to the end. Catherine became our third fastest ever for the course with a time a full minute faster than her previous best.

Belgrave: B Dagne (3) 16:23; V Clarke (3) 17:47; S Gailey (9) 19:04; M Heaton (10) 18:18; J Clark (10) 18:27; C Bryson (10) 17:16.

Teams: 1 Charnwood AC 1:41:14; 2 Aldershot F&DAC 1:41:23; 3 Chester-le-Street & D 1:41:56; 4 Winchester & DAC 1:42:18; 5 Leeds City AC 1:45:04; 6 Bingley H&AC 1:45:11; 7 Bristol & WAC 1:45:37; 8 Windsor SE&H 1:45:40; 9 Telford AC 1:46:24; 10 Belgrave H 1:47:15; ... 56 teams started; 45 teams finished.

Fastest legs (2.995 miles): 1 S Twell (Aldershot F&DAC) 15:57; 2 S Morris (Windsor SE&H) 15:58; 3 H Yelling (Windsor SE&H) 16:05; 4= S Bush (Aldershot F&DAC) and J Potter (Charnwood) 16:10; 6 S Murray (Chester-le-Street) 16:15 ... 9 B Dagne (Belgrave H) 16:23.

Skipper's Corner

What a hog-thumping rip-snorter of a race!

Southern 12-Stage

My 162nd run for a Belgrave team was the most thrilling I've - somewhat stressfully - enjoyed. Congratulations to Shaftesbury, a prestigious club steeped in history, who have had a mercurial last few years but show that they are climbing back to where they belong.

As for us, our nifty sequence of Gold at Milton Keynes is finally at an end. The last time we lost there, the Twin Towers were standing proud, Sven Goran Eriksson had been in charge of England for just one match, Sharp and Blackledge were six months shy of their Bels debuts, Alex Bodin was 12, and I was 13 years off being a 'vet' – now I'm only one! (due to new age categories).

Imagination and comradeship

Considering a whole raft of unavailable runners, Alan and I were delighted with our starting line-up, which gave us about a 20% chance of victory. The message boards have been quick to slam us and do a little grave-dancing, but these are the same folk who wrote before the race: “The Southerners are an exercise in pointlessness... nothing happens after half-way... and should be binned.” One wonders if some of these anonymous mud-slingers love or hate running. This was a race that totally captured people's imagination, and the comradeship of over a thousand people converging on one place to pursue their shared love of road-running was great.

I knew my training pal Orlando “Pineapple-head” Edwards (so called for placing his 3-inch long pony-tail vertically upright on the top of his head), would give me problems on our stage. He has been marmalizing me all winter and word soon filtered thru from the SBH camp that I was cruising for a one-minute bruising. He took me out by 3:38 at the National so that threat was very real.

Come on Willie, let's go faster

Our duel was an example of a race within a race. We both recorded sub-par times but had eyes only for each other. My brief was to hold off Orlando for as long as possible, but when he did catch me to have gas left in the tank. I asked him to say something encouraging if he caught me. This occurred at 13 minutes with the ominous words in my ear: “Come on Willie, let's go faster.”

Over the next 13 minutes Pineapple-head tossed several surges into the mix... and also experimented with a couple of 'go-slows' when the wind was at its worst. This encouraged me to make breaks for freedom of my own, but every time I had this smart idea, I'd get a sharp rap on the knuckles and dispatched to the back of the class. If I'd been offered a two second deficit at the end I'd've grabbed it, and yet such is the sweet mystery of sport that one often feels more could have been done. Why not just blast it? But oh the pressure - and the heaviness of the legs...

Alex Bodin, what can we say? Normally Alan or I wouldn't dream of putting such a new raw talent on anchor leg in such trying conditions but the more we looked at the team the more he looked like the man for the job. Good returns all winter, a lethal kick, and a South of the Thames gold medal team winner. He dealt with the pressure fantastically and I hope this race has hooked him to athletics for decades to come, and won't sending him scurrying for cover in the 'women's auxiliary balloon corps' instead.

Another nod to Mal

“Man of the match” is a close call – can't give it to Wicksy again – five is enough methinks. Our “shorties” were brilliant yesterday, but it's another nod to Mal for his excellent and

clinical start; the result of eight months of consistent, hard training... can he hang on to this form and fitness for the marathon? We all hope so.

Another memorable and fulfilling day

National Road Relays

On another memorable and fulfilling day at the National relays, for some reason the Bels left their "A-game" on the cutting room floor, which wasn't the best place for it since all of us had to be at our best to strike gold. However, with that said, you can sometimes only perform as well as the opposition allow, and midway through stage 8 when we were only a minute-and-a-half off the front, Leeds started cranking through the gears in real style, and our last four runners were never given the illicit hope which they craved.

I don't begrudge Leeds their win one iota. For a while now their ever-present team members have been cult heroes of my mine, for their incredible consistency, willingness to race regularly and defiance of the aging process. To be sure they deserved this triumph. And whilst on the aging process, what a remarkable sight to see Freary and Hudspith duelling on stage 11: two runners at their peak between 1991-1995. (Hudspith won bronze at the '94 Commonwealth Games Marathon, 14 seconds off the silver). Inspiring to us all.

Before we wallow too much in self-pity at having a sub-par day at the races, there is much to be proud of. Not only did we show great fighting spirit, and narrowly defeat Newham for a savoured bronze medal, but also it may be the time to look at our achievements in this race from a wider perspective.

I have dug into the 'race-results.co.uk' archives and peaked at the top clubs this Century at the National 12-stage. Taking the top 8 finishers from the last eight 12-stages, I have awarded points based on the BAL scoring system: 16 for a win and then 14, 12, 10, 8, 6, 5, 4.

Eighteen clubs have returned a top eight finish since 2000. Here they are:

| Club | '00 | '01 | '02 | '03 | '04 | '05 | '06 | '07 | Total |
|---------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| Belgrave Harriers | - | 14 | 16 | 16 | 14 | 16 | 12 | 12 | 100 |
| Tipton Harriers | 14 | 16 | 10 | 14 | - | - | 4 | 6 | 64 |
| Birchfield Harriers | 10 | 10 | 14 | 12 | - | 14 | - | - | 60 |
| Salford Harriers | 16 | 12 | 5 | 8 | 12 | 6 | - | - | 59 |
| Morpeth Harriers | 4 | - | 12 | 10 | 6 | - | - | 14 | 46 |
| Leeds City AC | - | - | - | - | 5 | 12 | 10 | 16 | 43 |
| Sale Harriers | - | 8 | - | 6 | 4 | - | 14 | 4 | 36 |
| Newham & Essex Beagles | - | - | - | 4 | - | 5 | 16 | 10 | 35 |
| Aldershot F&D AC | - | - | - | - | 16 | 4 | 6 | - | 26 |
| Cardiff A A C | - | - | 8 | - | 8 | - | - | 8 | 24 |
| Bedford & County Harriers | - | - | - | - | 10 | 10 | - | - | 20 |
| Bristol & West AC | - | - | - | - | - | 8 | 8 | - | 16 |
| Shaftesbury Barnet Harr. | 6 | 6 | 4 | - | - | - | - | - | 16 |
| Notts AC | - | - | - | 5 | - | - | 5 | 5 | 15 |
| Swansea Harriers | 8 | 5 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 13 |
| London Irish AC | 12 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 12 |
| Bingley Harriers | - | 4 | 6 | - | - | - | - | - | 10 |
| Border AC | 5 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 5 |

Thanks, as ever, to all the supporters and helpers who made the date such a great club day out; let's hope for much more excitement like this in the years to come. And a particular a vote of congrats to the Belles for their brilliant top ten finish.

The long and winding road

The London Marathon

Well I'll say this straight up, running with Weiro should come with a health warning – and running with Mal should be for candidates for the funny farm only... What a pair!

Anyway let me take it from the top of this intoxicating day. First up the London Marathon organizers need to look again at how they transport the runners to the start. We are treated

pretty disgustingly and the problems are far worse than they were at my last run at London in '04. I left home at 7.15am thinking this was a reasonable time frame, but I didn't arrive at the athletes village till 9.10am a soaking, stinking wreck. It makes sense to take the train from Charing Cross since at least you'll be getting on an empty train... but my goodness the bunfight to get on those trains: the queues which start right in the bowels of the tube station. I fought and cajoled and managed to get on a train (albeit for the wrong start) and we were squashed like sardines for a full 20 minutes before we even left. And I was desperate for a wee... Finally we took off and I prayed that since we were "chocka" the train would have the sense to bypass Waterloo and London Bridge. Not a bit of it. We stopped at Waterloo, (platforms completely rammed), and the 'sardines' were even squashed. Another 10 minute wait. Temps inside the carriage over 90 degrees. Same palaver at London Bridge. Finally make it to Greenwich and the long 35min trek up some very steep streets to Blackheath. Ok Ok, so perhaps I shoulda left at 0645hrs, but Mal had very similar problems. I'm sure London can do this bit of the day better – Boston and New York do it brilliantly.

What a journey

I knew we were in for a rough day, as the forecast cloud cover didn't materialise. Through the first mile in 250th place. Andy Weir in sight though – latch on to that consummate pacing artist and you're doing something right. So I did... for the next 21.5 miles. And what a journey: starts out easy, light-hearted with a touch of vaudeville in the air. Weiro full of the joys of spring, endlessly jabbering to his Thames chum, acknowledging his supporters and weaving across the street to do high-fives with little girls. "For goodness sake Andy! Stop messing about, settle down, and start taking this seriously," I scolded. By 15k he started to settle, by 18 he was fully settled, and by 20k he was well and truly bedded down and I was wanting, à la James Bond in Moonraker, to "release the chicken switch so the power could be cut off". But Andy had intentions of an opposite nature, even though runners were already coming back to us in droves. Inside the top 150 now...

Are you sure you know what you're doing old son?

There are just a handful of athletes who accelerated from 20-30k in the race: the ones who had blinders like Ryan Hall, Dan Robinson and Darran Bilton, and I suspect several hundred Serpies who are really into that sort of thing. But upon looking at Hall and Robinson et al., their 'speed-ups' were around 6-8 seconds for this split. Weiro's acceleration?: 51 seconds. Whaaaaah. It was like being on a roller-coaster that was making you sick, but you had no option to jump off. I kept wanting to ask: "are you sure you know what you're doing, old son?" But I knew what the response would be: "yes thanks, quite sure, if you don't like it you can lump it." Interestingly though, on this day of all days, Andy did get things very slightly off as we paid with sharp decelerations in the fourth quarter. (In his last three Londons, Andy has slowed down by an average of less than 20 secs in kms 30-40; this time it was 1:38.)

There's a whoooooole lot of suffering up ahead

But what a thrilling ride. Although I was knee deep in manure throughout, I knew I'd be waist deep if I let him go, just like the poor, wretched souls we'd steam past at a rate of a couple every 300 yards. "Come on Kev, jump on the bus," Weiro sung out to Kevin Quinn at 14 miles – not perhaps what the lad wanted to hear. Andy Lea-Gerrard kept popping up (does the maniac have a tardis or something?): "There's a whoooooole lot of suffering up ahead," he gleefully crowed at 18 miles. "A lot of suffering here too," Weiro dryly replied (referring, I suspect, to me.) Jonesy hove into view about this

time – I had seen him briefly at five miles before he shot off down the road. And then the sight that every runner delights in seeing: Malachi. Yeah! Let's have him! He was only a pinprick in the distance but after a couple of miles we arrived by his side. How nice to finally beat him after a winter of trying. I noticed that Mal's stride looked a lot better than the final mile of the National 12-stage, and that he wasn't buckling anything like the other runners. But he had been caught, and that was that. He needed to accept he had stepped in the Cockerpillar's slime when it mattered most.

Club spirit out the window

A mile later and Mal was grimly hanging on. A little tiresome quite frankly – all club spirit out the window – never once did I encourage him, or he me. Hate filled the air, “just sod off, will you?” was all I could think. At 22 miles just as my legs were really starting to go, Mal finally took his leave, but he had the temerity, outlandishness and sheer balls to leave not from the back door, but from the front. The nerve! I thought... The *élan*! The class... As he scuttled off into the distance with the cruellest of surges, taking a pea-green Weiro with him. I was finally alone, and now had to grind it out with nobody to hold my hand. Cling on I did, and that last mile was a beauty as nearly 10 men, operating at survival shuffle, came back.

As for Mal – a fantastic display of guts and nerve. His training loads at the weekends have been severe: 23 miles in the morning and another 10 at night, or simply, a 50km run. Disgust registered on his face when I reported a longest run of 22m. He reports: “when you and Andy arrived it woke me up – I was startled!” Seeing it was me, a man he knew he was fitter than, inspired him to dig deeper into the well – and all those long, lonely training runs paid off.

Leeds took us out by just 19 seconds

A classic duel then, between Belgrave and Leeds as both teams struggled to reach the medals. They took us out by just 19 seconds; but Mal, me and Warren can have no regrets as we squeezed every second out of the course. Our respective splits for the final 2.2 k were: 7:57, 7:59 and a remarkable 8:00 for Warren – comfortably placing us all in the speediest 25 runners for that stretch of macadam.

All in all a day to remember. I recall my first marathon thirteen long years ago when I popped at 3:12 in Boston. It's great to be back after the ghouliness of Frankfurt '04, and perhaps there's mustard in the ole legs yet. Farewell from Skipper's Corner as it signs off for the summer.

Skip

Results Roundup

Road & Country

February 2007

- 11 **Wokingham Half Marathon.** Correction. Men. 208 P Cross M50 1:29:13.
- 18 **Sussex Beacon Half Marathon.** Correction. Men. 1328 D McMillan M55 1:49:29.
- 18 **adidas Silverstone Half Marathon.** Additional detail. Men. 278 P Cross M50 1:31:04.
- 25 **Eastbourne Half Marathon.** Men. 1 J Baker (Chichester R) 1:11:24; 62 P Cross M50 1:31:33.

March 2007

- 4 **Berkhampstead Half Marathon.** Men. 1 A Jackson (Shaftesbury B) 1:13:07; 80 P Cross 2-M50 1:30:42.
- 25 **Bath Half Marathon.** Additional detail. Men. Team 3 Belgrave.
- 25 **Reading Half Marathon.** Additional detail. Men. 927 M White 1:34:58.
- 25 **Liverpool Half Marathon.** Men. 1 B Fish (Blackburn) 67:15; 3 P Freary 71:24.
- 30 **Serpentine Last Friday 5 km.** Men. 1 S Collins (Enfield & H) 15:48; 10 M Humphrey 17:13.
- 31 **Bushy Park Time 5 km Trial.** Men. 1 R Stannard 16:04.

- 31 **Wimbledon Common Time 5 km Trial.** Men. 1 M Gray (unatt) 17:36; 20 Don Anderson M50 20:27.

April 2007

- 6 **Healthspan Easter 10 km, Port Soif, Guernsey.** Men. 1 W Chinha (Poole) 29:19; 5 N Speaight 31:02.
- 6 **Maidenhead Easter 10 miles.** Men. 1 P Wicks 49:41; 15 J Fairbourn 57:07; 638 D Davies M65 1:26:21.
Teams: 1 Vale of Aylesbury 57; 2 Belgrave H 491.
Women. 1 C Pusey (Burnham) 1:01:07; 71 C Eastham 1:17:47.
- 7 **Easter Bunny Run 10 km, Gloucester.** Men. 1 A Hunt (Cardiff) 30:34; 2 S Jones 30:36.
- 8 **Halton Bridge Race, Runcorn, Cheshire.** Men. 1 T Elly (Salford) 25:06; 3 P Freary 26:24.
- 9 **Lewes AC Easter Fun Run 10 km.** Men. 1 R James (Lewes) 32:21; 46 P Cross M50 41:57.
- 15 **Arundel Park 10 km.** Men. 1 J Simpson (South London) 34:25; 35 P Cross M50 44:29.
- 15 **Dunsfold 10 km.** Men. 1 D Taylor (B&B) 32:34; 2 P Freary 33:11; 4 J Kimaiyo 33:55; 7 K Hegvold M45 34:59; 21 M Kazimierski 37:38.
- 15 **YMCA Hawker 10 km, Kingston.** Men. 1 M Humphrey 36:12.
- 15 **BUPA Great Ireland Run 10 km.** Women. 1 V Mitchell (Australia) 33:06; 7 B Dagne 35:07.
- 15 **Totton 10 km.** Women. 1 L Spencer (Chichester) 34:33; 14 E Fogg 39:47.
- 21 **Bushy Park 5 km Time Trial.** Men. 1 R Stannard 15:34.
Women. 1 L Hasell (Thames H&H) 17:55; 12 C Eastham 21:30.
- 22 **Flora London Marathon.**
Men. 1 M Lel (Kenya) 2:07:41; 18 M Miles 2:24:20; 32 M Byansi 2:29:40; 36 W Cockerell 2:30:39; 70 W Lynch 2:35:35; 493 M Kazimierski 2:54:07; 3149 P Cross M50 3:28:49; 3154 M Taylor M45 3:28:52; 7917 S Baxendale 4:01:27; 12342 E Asiedu M40 4:27:33; 13544 L Rehn M40 4:34:36; 14002 J Walsh M45 4:37:12; 16387 P Coughlan M60 4:51:09; 18396 D Davies M65 5:04:14; 24423 T Newell M70 6:44:19.
Teams: 1 Thames H&H 7:26:10; 2 Salford H 7:26:52; 3 Leeds City 7:35:35; 4 Belgrave H 7:35:54.
Women. 1 Z Chunxiu (China) 2:20:38; 34 T Heaton 2:54:57; 86 N Neal 3:05:00; 109 L Cooper 3:08:18; 219 S Murphy 3:18:51; 840 M Noel W40 3:44:40; 10315 S Parkes 6:41:59.
Mini-marathon. Girls 13-14. 13 M Evans 17:01; 26 K Galley 17:30.
- 22 **Bolton 10 km.** Men. 1 P Freary 32:10.
- 27 **Serpentine Last Friday 5 km, Hyde Park.** Men. 1 A Marriott (Wells City) 15:18; 5 H Raidi 16:05; 189 M Culshaw M40 28:39.
Women. 1 A McKeown (N Herts) 17:52; 3 S Cookson 19:12.
- 28 **Puma Trailfox Hawkshead Trail Race, Hawkshead, Cumbria.** Men. 1 S Vernon (Stockport) 55:34; 13 J Kimaiyo 65:16.
- 28 **Wimbledon Common 5 km Time Trial.** Men. 1 A Bodin U20 15:53.
- 29 **Purley Cross 10 km.** Men. 1 M Humphrey 38:07.

May 2007

- 2 **Chorley 4 miles.** Men. 1 A Ford (Blackpool) 19:18; 3 P Freary 19:48.
- 3 **Dave Clark 5 km, Morden Park.** Men. 1 J McMullen (Thames H&H) 15:28; 3 A Bodin U20 15:30; 5 P Buckley 15:47; 33 P Cross M50 20:54.
- 5 **Wimbledon Common Time Trial 5 km.** Men. 1 A Wilson (unatt) 16:19; 18 D Anderson M50 20:26.
- 6 **Sutton Runners 10 km, Beddington Park.** Men. 1 N Hodges (Dorking & MV) 32:51; 12 J Fairbourn 35:05; 20 T Weeks 36:12.
- 7 **Esher Church School 10 km.** Men. 1 M Humphrey 35:51.
- 7 **Waterloo 15 km.** Men. 1 P Freary 49:58.
- 7 **Barry Jones 5 miles, Wimbledon.** Men. 1 H Dodwell (Highgate) 26:07; 2 M Byansi 27:06; 10 D Mason 29:20; 22 G Reid M45 32:05. Teams: 1 Herne Hill 29; 2 Hercules W. 33; 3 Belgrave 33.

Race Walking

March 2007

- 17 **Enfield League 5 miles.**
Men. 1 P Williams (Enfield) 41:36; 3 J Hall M55 42:54; 11 M Culshaw M40 48:17.
Women. 1 M Noel W40 49:17.

April 2007

- 7 **Enfield League 5 miles.**
16 M Culshaw M40 46:34; 19 P King M55 48:15; 21 M Noel W40 48:59; 25 M Graham M55 50:48; 31 D Fotheringham M75 52:48; 40 E Hall M70 58:35.
- 17 **VAC 5 miles, Battersea Park.**
Men. P King M55 48:28; C Lawton M55 49:15.
- 25 **VAC & County 10 km Track Championships, Battersea Park.**
Men. 1 S Uttley (Ilford) 53:51.8; 8 P King M55 61:44.8; 13 D Fotheringham M75 67:51.2.
Women. 1 E Viljoen 51:48.6; 2 M Noel W40 62:44.9.
- 28 **London Inter-Club Challenge, Cophthall Barnet.**
Men. 3000m: 3 C Lawton M55 16:18.09.