



Above: The start of the Eastleigh 10k on March 19th. The race included the CAU Inter-Counties Championship and Belgravians were racing in some unfamiliar vests. In the red vest with white/red shorts towards the left is the eventual race winner Angus Maclean (Team Southampton). 31 is Richard Ward (Belgrave/Surrey), 32 Phil Wicks (Belgrave/Surrey), between and just behind these latter two is Tim Watson in a white/green vest (Belgrave/Hampshire). To the right of Phil is Hassan Raidi (Belgrave/Surrey), Jonathon Blackledge (Belgrave), and 15 Jermain Mays (Kent AC/Kent). Maclean's winning time was 29:47, Mays was second in 30:00 and Phil Wicks 3rd in 30:02. Belgrave won the team race and Surrey the Inter-County Championship. Full result and report in the previous issue. Photo by Steve Wicks.

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SEAA Men's 12-Stage Road Relay, Milton Keynes, 26 March 2006.

Bels on their toes - a fifth consecutive SEAA 12-Stage win

Is there anything more exciting than a 12-Stage road relay? Well, possibly, when one's favourite team have a nigh-on seven minute advantage. Maybe watching Milton Keynes' fabled concrete cows at their grazing would run it close! But get one thing straight, don't expect it to be like this at Sutton Park in less than two weeks time.

Don't know what it was ... runners off to Japan for the World Cross, runners in Algiers for the World Students' Cross, runners in Melbourne for the Commonwealth Games ... maybe it's because it was Mother's Day ... but whatever, a quarter of an hour before start time few people seemed to be

about. In the end 42 teams made the complete journey - eight fewer than last year. The Bels were well up to par with a final time our fourth best ever - but there was no pressure from the opposition on this occasion.

The weather was blustery, becoming colder and with rain beginning to fall as the race ended.

Stage 1

Undoubtedly very fit, Andrew Swearman had a nightmare run on leg one. Recently back from three weeks training in Kenya he'd gone through 10k in 31 minutes the previous week in the AAA Half Marathon before pulling out, having overcooked it. No worries, a mere 5 miles at that pace would do us nicely - but Andy got a bit caught up in Keith Cullen's slipstream and Karl O'Connell, running for the Bs, was in before him, having run a more circumspect opening section. Karl's run was our fastest ever B long stage outside of Justin Chaston's 23:55 - the year he showed up on holiday from the USA, unannounced an un-entered.

1 K Cullen (Highgate) 23:32; 2 Kojo Kyreme (Shaftesbury B) 24:18; 3 A Moses (Reigate P) 24:39; 16 K O'Connell (Belgrave 'B') 25:47; 20 A Swearman (Belgrave 'A') 26:08; 48 M Taylor M40 (Belgrave 'C') 30:30.

Stage 2

When Andy didn't show up in the top 10, Will's heart rate went up a notch or two; when the top 15 were home and a Belgrave vest hove into sight - Karl's - the Skipper's pulse went into overdrive; and by the time he was away in 20th spot and 2 minutes 36 seconds down on the lead, his vital organs were screaming - and he'd barely started.

An absolutely cracking run followed. Over half a minute came off his best time for the lap as nine teams fell to the

Cockerpillar and the deficit was brought down to just over two minutes.

Eighteen year-old Joe van der Toorn is training like a demon in his quest for a 1:50 800 metres this summer but he took time out to reduce his best time by a similar margin.

1 Highgate H (0) 41:31; 2 Shaftesbury B (0) 42:09; 3 Herne H (+3) 42:39; 11 Belgrave 'A' (+9) 43:31; 16 Belgrave 'B' (0) 44:18; 45 Belgrave 'C' (+3) 50:26.

Fastest: 1 G Amos (City of Norwich) 17:11; 2 W Chinhanhu (Poole) 17:15; 3 W Cockerell ('A') 17:23; 22 J van der Toorn ('B') 18:31; 38 C Dickinson ('C') 19:56.

Stage 3

Highgate hung on to their lead on stage three while the ubiquitous Jermain Mays brought Kent AC up to within a quarter of a minute of the lead with the day's second fastest long stage. But while Jermain is well known on the roads and tracks of the South, the Bels unveiled a new face to bring us to the quarter distance. A Welshman named Jones with the initial "S" and designs on the marathon has got to be worth watching - and true to his moniker, Simon Jones burnt tarmac to go under 25 minutes. He's just had two weeks out due to a leg problem - so expect a bit more in two weeks time.

Only a minute and a half adrift now - and the Bs were also steadily rising; into the top twenty, thanks to a strong run from another would-be-marathoner - Tom Hadfield - with a 24-miler written into his training diary the previous day!

1 Highgate (0) 1:06:50; 2 Kent (+6) 1:07:16; 3 Shaftesbury B (-1) 1:07:48; 6 Belgrave 'A' (+5) 1:08:25; 16 Belgrave 'B' (0) 1:11:04; 46 Belgrave 'C' (-1) 1:20:52.

Fastest: 1 J Mays (Kent) 23:57; =2 D Deed (Bedford & C) & P Sly (Thames H&H) 24:13; 4 S Jones ('A') 24:54; 19 T Hadfield ('B') 26:46; 45 C Smith ('C') 30:26.

Stage 4

Pete Willis had tried everything to ensure that he got an A team berth, trying to run away from Will in the National Cross, running a tough 5 miler the previous weekend in an attempt to impress - and he got his wish. After all this, imagine our joy, then, at seeing Pete clawing his way up the finish slope in 3rd place, having given absolutely everything! He was very hard on himself afterwards, having hoped to have run 15 or 20 seconds faster; but a timely reminder that the game is actually about trying to win the race and that he'd made a vast contribution to bring us up three more places to a position 47 seconds behind leaders made him feel better.

Jason Webb removed around 20 seconds from last year's time and was 15th fastest on the stage

1 Kent (+1) 1:25:22; 2 Highgate (-1) 1:25:38; 3 Belgrave 'A' (+3) 1:26:09; 17 Belgrave 'B' (-1) 1:29:46; 45 Belgrave 'C' (+1) 1:40:06.

Fastest: 1 S Hepples (Newham & EB) 16:33; 2 S Maxwell (Woodford GwEL) 17:24; 3 P Willis ('A') 17:44; 15 J Webb 18:42; 30 T Lines ('C') 19:54.

Stage 5

Another who's spent the winter injured was Hassan Raidi. Drafted into the dozen after a solid run at Eastleigh the previous week, Hassan has only had a few weeks of proper training behind him but nevertheless went well sub-25 to take us into a four second lead. Bedford's new signing Eddie Ernest-Jones - a Brit from the USA looking for a big marathon performance - was breathing down his neck and brought Tony Forrest's team up into the frame for the first time. With the Beagles slipping into third, the leading contenders were slotting into familiar roles.

Moving up to 16th, another marathoner, Warren Lynch, ran his fastest ever long stage on tired legs, having postponed his 30-miler until Monday. And what about Harry Corbett who took nearly three minutes from his previous best for the Cs!

1 Belgrave 'A' (+2) 1:50:57; 2 Bedford & C (+4) 1:51:01; 3 Newham & EB (+4) 1:51:55; 16 Belgrave 'B' (+1) 1:56:30; 44 Belgrave 'C' (+1) 2:12:02.

Fastest: 1 E Ernest-Jones (Bedford & C) 24:12; 2 H Raidi ('A') 24:48; 3 L Jones (Newham & EB) 25:03; 15 W Lynch ('B') 26:44; 46 H Corbett M45 ('C') 31:16.

Stage 6

With the Bels in front and some heavyweights to come, Stephen Sharp took on the role of chief "undertaker" and deftly went into action, knocking the first nail into the coffin-lid of this race. Clocking fastest short stage run of the day, Steve was hammering like a good-un until the end but was far from flat out, remembering that he had a race in Ireland coming up a few days later.

Last year's anchor man, Knut Hegvold, has been suffering from a foot injury, but it was great to see him on the road again, albeit around 40 seconds slower but picking up another position for the Bs.

1 Belgrave 'A' (0) 2:07:25; 2 Bedford & C (0) 2:09:06; 3 Newham & EB (0) 2:09:14; 15 Belgrave 'B' (+1) 2:14:50; 44 Belgrave 'C' (0) 2:34:20.

Fastest: 1 S Sharp ('A') 16:28; 2 T Snow (Woodford GwEL) 16:52; 3 L Cox (Aldershot F&D) 17:10; 11 K Hegvold M40 ('B') 18:20; 46 N Brown ('C') 22:18.

Stage 7

With a 1:41 advantage Tim Watson smoothly ran our third sub-25 long lap - his fastest ever. A period of training in South Africa has done our Royal Marine bandsman a power of good and a challenge from Newham's Kairn Stone had little effect. Wells City's Ben Tickner was fastest on the stage but could only bring the West Country men up from 10th to 7th.

1 Belgrave 'A' (0) 2:32:17; 2 Newham & EB (+1) 2:33:46; 3 Bedford & C (-1) 2:35:00; 16 Belgrave 'B' (-1) 2:43:30; 43 Belgrave 'C' (+1) 3:04:45.

Fastest: 1 B Tickner (Wells C) 24:15; 2 K Stone (Newham & EB) 24:32; 3 T Watson ('A') 24:52; 32 J Galley M40 ('B') 28:40; 40 R Poulter ('C') 30:25.

Stage 8

Seemingly a veteran of our relay teams, one has to remind one's self that Jonathan Blackledge is still only 21. Another nail was driven home as Jonathan posted his third all-club all-time top 40 short stage clocking. Stephen Sharp might have the greatest National medal haul in history but if we can hold things together as a team, the "Kid" has a great chance of surpassing him one day.

And what a stage it was for short lap runs as Lee Greatorex ran his best ever for no less than 6th fastest on the stage. The Bs were an unprecedented 14th

1 Belgrave 'A' (0) 2:48:50; 2 Newham & EB (0) 2:52:15; 3 Bedford & C (0) 2:52:44; 14 Belgrave 'B' (+2) 3:01:52.

Fastest: 1 J Blackledge ('A') 16:33; 2 S Ablitt (Aldershot) 17:12; 3 S Herring (Bedford & C) 17:44; 6 L Greatorex ('B') 18:22.

Stage 9

In the form of his life, and having earned an under-23 international vest during the winter, Phil Wicks opened the lead up to a massive five minutes plus to become our fourth fastest ever on the long stage. Only legends Paul Evans, Marty Dent and Justin Chaston have beaten his 24:04.

1 Belgrave 'A' (0) 3:12:54; 2 Bedford & C (+1) 3:18:13; 3 Kent (+2) 3:19:17; 15 Belgrave 'B' (-1) 3:30:33.

Fastest: 1 P Wicks ('A') 24:04; 2 N Pollock (Kent) 24:29; 3 J Ellis (Aldershot F&D) 25:27; 29 B Barton ('B') 28:41; R Norville ('C') 31:42.

Stage 10

With Paul Freary suffering from his previous week's Veterans' World Half Marathon victory, Tom Ellacott came into the team again. What a sub! His 18:00 was fourth fastest on the stage and the lead increased to getting on for six minutes.

1 Belgrave 'A' (0) 3:30:54; 2 Bedford & C (0) 3:36:15; 3 Aldershot F&D (+1) 3:36:45; 17 Belgrave 'B' (-2) 3:30:18.

Fastest: 1 M Ashton (Aldershot F&D) 16:34; 2 D Russell (Shaftesbury B) 17:53; 3 B Hope (Woodford GwEL) 17:54; 4 T Ellacott ('A') 18:00; 22 M Whiting ('B') 19:45.

Stage 11

The biggest task for Dave Anderson, setting out with a lead of well over a mile, was to work up enough excitement to give himself a “workout”. With just under three months running under his belt since his return at the beginning of the year our Vice-Cap’n stormed the circuit to go fifth fastest Belgravian of all time, just a few ticks behind young Phil’s effort. Heaven knows what he’ll run around Sutton Park with another two weeks behind him.

A heavy fall out by the lake robbed Malachi Byansi of what probably would have been his best time.

1 Belgrave 'A' (0) 3:55:02; 2 Bedford & C (0) 4:01:49; 3 Aldershot F&D (0) 4:03:14; 15 Belgrave 'B' (+2) 4:17:28.

Fastest: 1 D Anderson ('A') 24:08; 2 A Morgan-Lee (Southampton R) 24:46; 3 K Murphy (Woodford GwEL) 25:14; 14 M Byansi ('B') 27:10.

Stage 12

A little excitement was generated on the final leg by Newham’s Andy Robinson pulling back the Aldershot man to go into bronze medal position. Our own Wardy was on cruise control with Bedford’s runner, in second, clocking an identical time and the winning margin remained a huge 6 minutes 47 seconds.

And still the Bs persisted. Mark Humphrey pushed to the end and their final placing of 14th would have made our A teams of the '90s very happy.

1 Belgrave (0) 4:12:38; 2 Bedford & C (0) 4:19:25; 3 Newham & EB (+1) 4:21:14; 14 Belgrave 'B' 4:36:13; 51 teams started; 42 teams finished.

Fastest: 1 A Robinson (Newham & EB) 16:44; 2 A Cross (Bedford & C) 17:36; 3 R Ward ('A') 17:36; 9 M Humphrey ('B') 18:45.

Fastest stages:

Short stage (5,506m): 1 S Sharp (Belgrave) 16:28; =2 J Blackledge (Belgrave) & S Hepples (Newham & EB) 16:33; 4 M Ashton (Aldershot F&D) 16:34; 5 A Robinson (Newham & EB) 16:44; 6 T Snow (Woodford GwEL) 16:52; 12 W Cockerell 17:23; 19 R Ward 17:36; 21 P Willis 17:44; 34 T Ellacott 18:00.

Long stages (7,978m): 1 K Cullen (Highgate) 23:32; 2 J Mays (Kent) 23:57; 3 P Wicks (Belgrave) 24:04; 4 D Anderson (Belgrave) 24:08; 5 E Ernest-Jones (Bedford & C) 24:12; =6 D Deed (Bedford & C) & P Sly (Thames H&H) 24:13; 17 H Raidi 24:48; 18 T Watson 24:52; 20 S Jones 24:54; 48 K O’Connell (Belgrave 'B') 25:47.



Above: Richard Ward – “on cruise control” to bring us home to our fifth consecutive SEAA 12-Stage win. Photo by Steve Wicks.

SEAA Women’s 6-Stage Road Relay, Milton Keynes, 26 March 2006.

No medals this time

At the beginning of the week the Belles looked like possible medal contenders with strong A and B teams for the Southern 6-stage. But as is usual with the relays those early team plans didn’t materialise and as athletes became ill, injured and more, the team changes began to happen on an hourly basis – leading right up to the start of the race!

Stage 1

Following their Reigate relay head to head, Sarah Murphy for the As and Heidi Cayzer for the Bs set off on the first leg. Team entries appeared down on recent years, possibly because of the weather, international duties and the Mothers’ Day clash. By the end of the first stretch reports came back that Sarah Murphy had taken the lead and was running strong, but the pace set was too high and although Sarah posted the Belles fastest time of the day the team were now in 10th spot. Having injured her ankle at a cross country race earlier in the season Heidi was only just returning to fitness and found the fast paced opening leg hard going.

1 M Lee (Marshal MK) 19:08; 2 F Cliff (Chelmsford) 19:36; 3 B Yff (Serpentine R) 19:40; 10 S Murphy (Belgrave 'A') 20:26; 25 H Cayzer (Belgrave 'B') 23:36.

Stage 2

Catherine Bryson took over the baton for the As somewhat relieved that she didn’t have to start off with the lead spot. Another superb runner, Catherine is also returning to form following a long-term injury. Having modestly estimated her abilities over the distance Catherine more than justified her selection for the As, maintaining the Belles’ 10th spot. Trooper Sarah Gailey improved on her last year’s time, despite the blustery winds and will take the strength from the roads and cross country back onto the track for 400m races.

1 Winchester & D (+6) 38:32; 2 Marshall MK (-1) 40:09; 3 Woodford GwEL (+6) 40:49; 10 Belgrave 'A' (0) 41:57; 23 Belgrave 'B' (+2) 47:28. Fastest: L Elliott (Winchester & D) 18:30; 2 F Kennedy (Ealing S*M) 20:24; 3 B Pritchett (Woodford GwEL) 20:30; 10 C Bryson ('A') 21:31; 22 S Gailey ('B') 23:52.

Stage 3

The ever improving Helen Smethurst took over for leg three and showed her road running ability spans the range from 5km to marathon. A strong and consistent 20:53 was an excellent posting for Helen and she was delighted to maintain the Belles position, bringing the gap between 6th and 10th spot down to 10 seconds. Christine Bertram had swapped from the A team into the B team concerned about a nigggle she was carrying. Maybe it was the lack of pressure on her and the ability to relax and enjoy her run, but Christine’s time was the fastest B string of the day and worthy of an A team position.

1 Winchester & D (0) 58:33; 2 Woodford GwEL (+1) 1:01:12; 3 City of Norwich (+5) 1:01:27; 10 Belgrave 'A' (0) 1:02:50; 20 Belgrave 'B' (+3) 1:09:24.

Fastest: 1 R Proctor (City of Norwich) 19:36; 2 E Patel (Winchester & D) 20:01; 3 K Philp (Garden C) 20:07; 10 H Smethurst W40 ('A') 20:53; 15 C Bertram ('B') 21:56.

Stage 4

Tilly Heaton has shown consistent form over the winter but observers may have spotted that she’s been missing a bit of that spark from recent years. She’s still extremely competitive and loves to chase people down and Tilly’s leg was significant in bringing the Belles up 3 places into 7th. Team manager Catherine Eastham put herself on the line for the B team and was pleased to clock a PB over the course.

1 Winchester & D (0) 1:19:12; 2 Bedford & C (+3) 1:21:09; 3 Woodford GwEL (-1) 1:21:25; 7 Belgrave 'A' (+3) 1:24:08; 19 Belgrave 'B' 1:32:33.

Fastest: 1 R Gibbs (Bedford & C) 19:32; 2 G Greenhalgh (Woodford GwEL) 20:13; 3 K McBride (Marshal MK) 20:23; 8 M Heaton ('A') 21:18; 21 C Eastham 23:09.

Stage 5

The team leaders had settled into position and it didn't look like the order would change with Winchester's lead increasing over each stage. Caroline Shanklyn, who's shown considerable promise over the cross country and in training with Charlie Dickenson's group, set off on her first southern relays for the Belles. The wind was beginning to pick up and the first drops of rain were starting but Caroline fought on and although pipped by Highgate's Svenja Abel who clocked the fastest leg of the stage, brought the Belles back a respectable 8th. 800m runner Vicki Goodwin, with her distinctive track runners style, took over for the Bs and using the race as an endurance speed session kept the Belles in the top 20. Sadly, with no-one to handover to, that is where the B team's battle ended. It's frustrating that we've not completed a B team in the 6-stage yet, especially as we were the leading B team by the end of stage 5.

1 Winchester &D (0) 1:39:43; 2 Bedford &C (0) 1:40:42; 3 Woodford GwEL (0) 1:41:27; 8 Belgrave 'A' (-1) 1:46:18; 19 Belgrave 'B' (0) 1:56:39.

Fastest: 1 S Abel (Highgate) 18:52; 2 N Sykes (Bedford &C) 19:33; 3 I Thornburgh (Marshall MK) 19:57; 12 C Shanklyn ('A') 22:10; 18 V Goodwin ('B') 24:06.

Stage 6

Vicky Clarke took on the last leg last year and just narrowly missed out on bringing the Belles home with a gold medal. Starting off in 8th spot it was too much of an ask for her to get anywhere near the medal positions this time round, but Vicky is another gutsy runner who likes to chase and set off intending to do battle. Despite clocking the 5th fastest leg of the stage and the Belles 2nd fastest leg of the day, the gap was just too great and the team's position was maintained with the Belles home in a solid 8th position.

1 Winchester &D (0) 1:58:58; 2 Bedford &C (0) 2:00:56; 3 Woodford GwEL (0) 2:01:58; 8 Belgrave 'A' (0) 2:07:01; 28 teams started; 21 teams finished.

Fastest: 1 K Hazlitt (Winchester &D) 19:15; 2 A Critchlow (London H) 20:09; 3 S Morris (Bedford &C) 20:14; 5 V Clarke ('A') 20:43.

Fastest all stages (5,506m):

1 L Elliott (Winchester &D) 18:30; 2 S Abel (Highgate) 18:52; 3 M Lee (Marshall MK) 19:08; 4 K Hazlitt (Winchester &D) 19:15; 5 R Gibbs (Bedford &C) 19:32; 6 N Sykes (Bedford &C) 19:33.

ERRA Women's 6-Stage Road Relay, Sutton Park, Sutton Coldfield, 8 April 2006.

Belles well satisfied with top twenty placing at Sutton Park

With the nationals being pulled ahead of the marathon for the first time ever the team was looking forward to racing the course on considerably fresher legs than usual.

With the exception of young Catherine Bryson it was very much a case of the 'old' girls doing their bit. The average age of the Belles (at 33) is considerably higher than the boys managed, but with age comes experience and this team used that experience to deliver a top 20 position as predicted.

Stage 1

Team captain, Juliette Clark, took the first leg challenge on knowing that it would be a competitive battle over a blustery course. In good shape in the lead up to London. Jules clocked the Belles' fastest leg of the day bringing the team home in the top 30 as planned. Up front Hattie Dean clocked the fastest overall leg of the day on 16.16.

Stage 2

Helen Smethurst took over leg 2 and having run well on the roads of late was expecting another strong performance. Unfortunately something wasn't quite right and Helen came back still in 28th spot but hugely disappointed with her performance. Checking her pulse rate the following morning a

huge leap in bpm was discovered, suggesting that an underlying cold or bug had been to blame for the unusually slow run.

Stage 3

Catherine Bryson is making a steady return to full fitness having being out of action throughout most of 2005 with stress fracture injuries. Despite her youthful appearance Catherine is a steely determined runner and shows a mature approach to race tactics. Clocking the Belles' second fastest leg of the day Catherine also managed to pull the team up an extra four places into 24th spot.

Stage 4

Now based in the Midlands, we didn't get to see much of Victoria Edwards over the winter season, however, she's still putting in the hard training and competing regularly at triathlons. Worried about her speed over a short course Vicky took over on leg 4 with some trepidation. There was no need to worry though as Vicky maintained the Belles position and posted a solid sub-20 min performance in her first 6-stage outing.

Stage 5

This is the first time Louise Cooper had tackled the 6-stage without a marathon in her legs and despite her own concern that her time would be no quicker with fresh legs, Louise set off on leg 5 to bring the Belles home another two places further up and close to the coveted top 20 position. Her time was also her quickest to date showing the damage the marathon does to tired legs.

Stage 6

Another marathoner, Tilly Heaton took over the glory leg for the Belles. The top three positions had looked settled after the 5th leg but Chester-le-Street played a blinder putting Dixon on the last leg and with a 16:31 leg she pulled back a 45 second deficit to win by 30 seconds from Winchester's Jo Kelsey. Bristol and West, missing many of their usual squad, just missed silver but were clear bronze medal winners. Although times were slower due to the windy conditions, the leaders still finished almost 10 minutes ahead of the Belles. However, Tilly had more than achieved our objective for this year and brought the Belles home in 17th spot with our 3rd fastest leg of the day.

1 Chester-Le-Street 1:44:12; 2 Winchester &D 1:44:42; 3 Bristol &W 1:44:49; 4 Shaftesbury B 1:45:41; 5 Telford 1:46:30; 6 Liverpool 1:47:20; 17 Belgrave 1:53:59 (J Clark (28) 18:03, H Smethurst (28) 19:28, C Bryson (24) 18:27, V Edwards (24) 19:57, L Cooper (22) 19:09, M Heaton (17) 18:55; 63 teams started, 45 teams finished.

Fastest: 1 H Dean (Hallamshire) 16:16; =2 M McDonnell (Chester Le Street) and L Elliott (Winchester) 16:18; 4 J Clague (Liverpool) 16:19; 5 S Abel (Highgate) 16:29; 6 A Dixon (Chester Le Street) 16:31.



Right: Sarah Murphy receives the Women's Cross Country Plate from Team Manager Catherine Eastham. Sarah was unbeaten by a Belgrave runner in all six of the races that count for this competition. Photo by Christine Bertram

ERRA Men's 12-Stage Road Relay, Sutton Park, Sutton Coldfield, 8 April 2006.

NATIONAL 12-STAGE ROAD RELAY

Out of the chaos - bronze medals

This was no occasion for the faint of heart. An Achilles tendon injury took out long stager Hassan Raidi three days before the race but we were already concealing the fact that David Anderson had been unable to run at all since the previous Friday due to a calf muscle problem. We hoped against hope that he would recover in time and in the event, David ruled himself ok with two days to go. We breathed again as, already missing the talents of Spencer Barden, Kevin Nash and Mark Miles, we were desperately short of long stage backup. In spite of all of this, an undoubtedly good and excitingly young team hoped to secure another National win.

Then, only half an hour before the start, we were hit by the shock that our planned first stage runner was not going to be allowed to run.

Unaccountably it seemed that Paul Freary's name had been left off of the list of 72 names from which our A and B teams could be selected. There is no doubt that it was our own mistake and the Team Manager was absolutely "gutted" by his oversight. An appeal to the Race Referee met with a stone wall response. "You cannot run him - if you do then you will be disqualified."

While struggling to cope with this the TM then found that Richard Ward's name was also not on the declaration list. This seemed unbelievable - but reference to a photocopy of our entry showed that Richard HAD been entered. Another audience with the Referee was needed: "Ok, if you can prove that you did enter him then he can take part."

Our response: "But surely you can now see how a minor administrative error can be made by either party. Surely an athlete should not be penalised for such an oversight."

Sadly, there was no softening of attitude. It seemed that the official line was to be more accommodating with their own mistake than with ours.

Chaos ensued as the team order was hastily changed to bring in a reserve, and then changed again to avoid running him when it was suggested that an appeal against the Referee's decision might be worth pursuing. A couple of long stages and five short stages were brought forward to give breathing space during which time we hoped the judgment could be changed. In the end it was not to be and, in hindsight, it was probably the right decision. Imagine the slating we would get if allowed to medal - or perhaps win - with an un-entered runner.

The day was as windy as we can ever remember at Sutton Park, becoming very cold and finishing with a hail storm and freezing rain.

Stage 1

Karl O'Connell, the man due to start off the Bs was at first drafted in to take Paul Freary's place but the need not to bring in a reserve until we knew the decision had gone against us changed that plan, and with a minimum warm-up, A-team member Tim Watson came forward a leg. He'd arrived at the hotel in the small hours of the morning having finished work at 10pm in Dartmouth, Devon! Tough these Marines - and he was fired up too, running well and only ten seconds off the lead as the pack returned from the far end of the park. Sale H Manchester were rumoured to be at full strength and looking for the win, and through Stuart Stokes they made an early bid to complete the initial stage 12 seconds clear. Tim suffered from stitch on the last section of the lap, probably brought on by the upset in his eating schedule through coming on early, and he lost 30 seconds in the final mile or so. But 12th was a

good start and all our expected rivals were close by, with the exception of the Beagles - back in 25th.

1 S Stokes (Sale) 26:21; 2 M Lole (Coventry G) 26:33 3 M Scaife (Morpeth) 26:35; 4 B Raeside (Notts) 26:41; 5 M Hilton (Leeds) 26:41; 6 D Norman (Altrincham) 26:42; 12 T Watson 27:03; 61 J Fairbourn 'B' 30:34.

Stage 2

On his favourite second stage, Richard Ward was on song, his sub-15 bringing us up five places as he was chased all the way by Aldershot's Chris Bolt. Ex-Belgravian Rick Hayman kept Sale's colours near the front while back down the field Karl O'Connell, who by this time had worn more race numbers than contained in the Sutton Coldfield telephone directory, thanks to the team switches, had a great run for the Bs, moving past a dozen rivals.

1 Coventry (+1) 41:18; 2 Morpeth (+1) 41:24; 3 Sale HM (-2) 41:26; 4 Derby (+4) 41:32; 5 Leeds C (0) 41:38; 6 Sunderland (+5) 41:49; 7 Belgrave 'A' (+5) 41:59; 49 Belgrave 'B' (+12) 46:08.

Fastest: 1 J Mellor (Liverpool) 14:33; 2 R Weir (Derby) and B Jones (Coventry) 14:45; 9 R Ward 14:56; ... K O'Connell 'B' 15:34.

Stage 3

We were playing a stronger hand than bargained for at this stage of the race and Simon Jones pushed things along even more, pulling back two more places and keeping very good company with the likes of Andy Vernon (Aldershot) and Rob Birchall (Notts). National cross country champions Leeds City were now making the pace and were race favourites in the eyes of many but Bob Smith's Beagles were coming back - now in 11th.

If the Bels felt that bad luck had dogged them at all on this day, consider the sorry state of affairs for Bedford & County. Having lost a handful of runners before the race, a thief visited their tent and stole treasured items belonging to one of their number and as a result he lost the will to race. He was replaced by a reserve - who then badly pulled a calf muscle but somehow kept going to the end of the stage to hand over in 63rd and last place.

It was now obvious that the blustery conditions were having a huge effect. Not one long stage runner had gone below 26 minutes at this point.

1 Leeds C (+4) 1:07:54; 2 Coventry G (-1) 1:08:58; 3 Morpeth (-1) 1:09:04; 4 Altrincham (+5) 1:09:06; 5 Belgrave (+2) 1:09:08; 6 Aldershot F&D (+2) 1:09:10; 51 Belgrave 'B' (-2) 30:51.

Fastest: 1 D Webb (Leeds C) 26:16; 2 A Sutton (Preston) 26:23; 3 P Sly (Thames H&H) 26:24; 10 S Jones 27:09; ... M Byansi 'B' 30:51; M Kinnane (Swansea/2nd-CI Belgrave) 31:57.

Stage 4

Last man into the SEAA team at Milton Keynes, Pete Willis was raided from the Bs here at Sutton Park to plug the gap caused by the removal of Paul Freary from the line-up. Obviously we were expecting to go back here as Pete was dropped into a bubbling cauldron but, just as two weeks earlier, he raised his game accordingly. Only three positions were lost by the Belgravian and two of these were due to scorchers from Jackson (Sale) and Hepples (Newham & EB). Pete had done an absolutely brilliant job and the success of the Tom Osment coached squad was added to by eighteen year-old Joe van der Toorn who took the Bs up six places.

1 Leeds C (0) 1:23:04; 2 Sale HM (+5) 1:23:36; 3 Morpeth (0) 1:23:53; 4 Aldershot F&D (+2) 1:24:01; 5 Newham & EB (+6) 1:24:07; 6 Coventry G (-4) 1:24:33; 8 Belgrave (-3) 1:24:42; 45 Belgrave 'B' (+6) 1:32:48.

Fastest: 1 S Hepples (Newham & EB) 14:18; 2 E Jackson (Sale HM) 14:23; 3 J Mays (Kent) 14:30; ... P Willis 15:34; J van der Toorn 15:49.

Stage 5

At this point the 'B' team became disqualified as Paul Freary set out under the name of Stephen Zealey, taking them up 11 places. But eight minutes up the road Will Cockerell had played his Captain's role well, moving up to a long stage to let in the short stage reserve Pete Willis, and running

several seconds faster than his first stage effort of last year, run in more benign conditions. Well done Will!

Our problems had probably cost us 50 seconds - maybe a minute. We were 2 minutes 19 seconds behind the leaders - still Leeds - but more ominously 1:17 down on the Beagles; we had a great line-up to come but, frankly, so did they.

1 Leeds C (0) 1:50:15; 2 Newham &EB (+3) 1:51:07; 3 Altrincham (+7) 1:51:13; 4 Notts (+5) 1:51:18; 5 Sale HM (-3) 1:51:26; 6 Bristol &W (+1) 1:51:37; 9 Belgrave (-1) 1:52:34; 34 Belgrave 'B' (+11) 2:00:08.

Fastest: J Ward (Altrincham) 25:56; 2 N Talbot (Notts 26:04; 3 N Leighton (Bristol &W) 26:57; 10 P Freary (Belgrave 'B') 27:20; ... W Cockerell ('A') 27:52.

Stage 6

The wind was now atrocious; but as a club tent opposite our own was ripped from the ground and deposited in the branches of an obliging tree, Darren Gauson toured the short stage in our first of only two fastest stages of the day. By now aware of what the East London club had to come, most supporters had switched to backing the Beagles for the win (AW correspondent Martin Duff still persisted with the thought that it would be Leeds) but we pulled back half a minute on both of them thanks to Darren. All was not yet lost.

1 Leeds C (0) 2:05:32; 2 Sale HM (+3) 2:06:20; 3 Newham &EB (-1) 2:06:24; 4 Bristol &W (+2) 2:06:46; 5 Notts (-1) 2:07:09; 6 Aldershot F&D (+2) 2:07:11; 7 Belgrave (+2) 2:07:23; 33 Belgrave 'B' (+1) 2:16:24.

Fastest: 1 D Gauson (Belgrave) 14:49; 2 J Bailey (Sale HM) 14:54; 3 S Ablitt (Aldershot F&D) 14:55; ... J Webb ('B') 16:16.

Stage 7

It was Stephen Sharp's first attempt at a long stage and one would have liked to have thought that the extra distance to be covered by our speedster might give us the chance to recover some ground. Not so! Mark Warmby of the Beagles took nearly half a minute out of Leeds but he in turn was being chased down by Bristol's Rob Whalley. Still in 7th, it was going to be an almighty battle for the Bels to reach the medals.

1 Leeds C (0) 2:32:09; 2 Newham &EB (+1) 2:32:34; 3 Bristol &W (+1) 2:32:50; 4 Sale HM (-2) 2:33:02; 5 Altrincham (+3) 2:33:46; 6 Aldershot F&D (0) 2:33:52; 7 Belgrave (0) 2:34:08; 34 Belgrave 'B' (-1) 2:46:44.

Fastest: 1 R Whalley (Bristol &W) 26:04; 2 M Warmby (Newham &EB) 26:10; 3 A Norman (Altrincham) 26:15; 8 S Sharp 26:45 ... M Humphrey 30:20.

Stage 8

Long time leaders Leeds were under severe pressure now. Chris Thompson ran the fastest time of the day to bring Aldershot up into the frame for the first time but also pulling back ground, if only one place, Chris Moss ran our fastest short stage so far. The final top six had now been established and all of them went through the take-over zone in less than one minute - but which would be the three to gain the medals?

1 Leeds C (0) 2:47:38; 2 Newham &EB (0) 2:47:41; 3 Aldershot F&D (+3) 2:47:54; 4 Bristol &W (-1) 2:48:08; 5 Sale HM (-1) 2:48:12; 6 Belgrave (+1) 2:48:35; 33 Belgrave 'B' (+1) 3:04:39.

Fastest: C Thompson (Aldershot F&D) 14:02; 2 C Moss (Belgrave) 14:27; 3 D Robinson (Stroud &D) 14:31; ... R Poulter ('B') 17:55.

Stage 9

"Oh Yes!" shouted Mo Farah, unable to contain his exhilaration when the announcer indicated that the incoming runner from Newham & Essex Beagles was only 3 seconds down on the leaders. And his excitement was not in vain, for this was where the gold medals were decided. Also going into action, for the Bels, was Phil Wicks. Just 22 years of age and with only four years of running on the clock, Phil's 26:35 was superb - and again, in spite of the conditions, nearly half a minute faster than the previous year. Mo's was far and away the day's fastest long stage and the Beagles went into the last quarter of the race with over one and a half minutes to spare over Sale, who, together with Leeds, were now within striking distance of both Aldershot and Belgrave.

An interesting thought at this point: but for our team entry problem, Mossy might have given Phil the task of setting out alongside Mo Farah at the start of this stage!

1 Newham &EB (+1) 3:13:08; 2 Sale HM (+3) 3:14:41; 3 Leeds C (-2) 3:14:51; 4 Aldershot F&D (-1) 3:14:54; 5 Belgrave (+1) 3:15:10; 6 Bristol &W (-2) 3:15:44; 49 Belgrave 'B' (-16) 3:42:07.

Fastest: 1 M Farah (Newham &EB) 25:27; 2 G Cornish (Sale HM) 26:29; 3 P Wicks (Belgrave) 26:35; ... H Corbett M45 ('B') 37:28.

Stage 10

By now there was sleet and hail in the air. Kris Gauson may be 18 but he has some extraordinary racing times behind him, having in his two years of membership already relieved John Gladwin of his Youth club records for 800m and 1500m. His 15:15 cemented our position in the top four and now made medals a strong possibility. Newham's Stuart Major has had a patch of poor health and while not in the best of form, he was as solid as a rock and with Dave Mitchinson to come, nobody was going to get back to the Beagles.

A final brush with officialdom came when we offered an additional and final runner to the 'B' team's complement - D. Anderson. "Have you cleared this with the Referee?" came the retort when the name was declared. (A Belgravian of very similar name had just finished the 11th stage for the As.) "No. And we don't intend to! This is Don Anderson."

1 Newham &EB (0) 3:28:20; 2 Sale HM (0) 3:29:39; 3 Leeds C (0) 3:30:00; 4 Belgrave (+1) 3:30:25; 5 Aldershot F&D (-1) 3:30:52; 6 Bristol &W (0) 3:31:09; 50 Belgrave 'B' (-1) 4:01:24.

Fastest: 1 M Bond (Sale HM) 14:58; 2 A Osbourne (Leeds C) 15:09; 3 S Major (Newham &EB) 15:12; 4 K Gauson (Belgrave) 15:15; ... Don Anderson ('B') 19:17.

Stage 11

The gap to Leeds and bronze was 25 seconds; the gap to Sale and silver was a further 21 seconds. Anything could happen here.

Well, something did happen; yet another twist in an extraordinary day. David Anderson set out looking pumped up but when spotted by our supporters at the top of the hill they noted the lack of fluency in his running. David was in trouble. That calf muscle had almost immediately tightened and in trying to isolate the muscle and restrict its use to avoid further damage and pain, the hamstring and gluteal muscles also tightened. We've no doubt that pulling out was not an option in his mind - and somehow, David held the gap to Leeds and clocked equal fourth fastest on the stage. An heroic run - but now our man faces yet more rehabilitation before getting back to his athletic career.

1 Newham &EB (0) 3:55:08; 2 Sale HM (0) 3:56:31; 3 Leeds C (0) 3:57:24; 4 Belgrave (0) 3:57:49; 5 Bristol &W (+1) 3:58:25; 6 Aldershot F&D (-1) 3:58:38.

Fastest: 1 D Mitchison (Newham &EB) 26:48; 2 D Augustus (Sale HM) 26:52; 3 C Nicholson (Bristol &W) 27:16; =4 D Anderson (Belgrave) 27:24.

Stage 12

It had always been felt that the race for first place could be tight over the final stage. In fact it didn't turn out that way - but, for the first time in his road relay career at Sutton Park, Jonathan Blackledge set out in full cry with a runner in sight. One had to feel sorry for the Leeds City team. They'd led from stages 3 to 8 and then occupied third place for stages 9 to 11, only to have one of the country's most voracious young runners unleashed on their tail, eager to feed on the scraps left over by the Beagles.

Jonathan brought us into the bronze medal position and such was his pace that the smell of Sale blood was in his nostrils at the race end. He was fastest on his stage and third fastest of the day in spite of the worsening conditions; and but for those conditions we may have been close to only our third ever sub-14 clocking by a Belgravian.

Don't know about you - but this writer felt pretty shattered by the end of all this, until the realisation dawned: this young team had responded tremendously to the setbacks ... they have years of relay racing ahead of them in which some really exciting events should unfold ... our medal streak has extended to six years ... a young man had come along not dreaming that by the end of the day he'd be going home with a National medal ... we'd all received a jolt to remind ourselves what a tough job it is to get everything in winning order ... and we are even more hardened and determined to face the road battles ahead in Sutton Park.

1 Newham &EB (0) 4:10:08; 2 Sale HM (0) 4:11:39; 3 Belgrave (+1) 4:12:09; 4 Leeds C (-1) 4:12:31; 5 Bristol &W (0) 4:13:04; 6 Aldershot F&D (0) 4:13:55; 66 teams started, 62 teams finished.

Fastest: 1 J Blackledge (Belgrave) 14:20; 2 R Bugden (Bristol &W) 14:39; 3 A Robinson (Newham &EB) 15:00.

Fastest stages:

Long - 5.38 miles. 1 M Farah (Newham &EB) 25:27; 2 J Ward (Altrincham) 25:56; =3 R Whalley (Bristol &W) and N Talbot (Notts) 26:04; 5 M Warmby (Newham &EB) 26:10; 6 A Norman (Altrincham) 26:15.

Short - 2.995 miles: 1 C Thompson (Aldershot &F) 14:02; 2 S Hepples (Newham & EB) 14:18; 3 J Blackledge (Belgrave) 14:20; 4 E Jackson (Sale HM) 14:23; 5 C Moss (Belgrave) 14:27; 6 J Mays (Kent) 14:30.

Results Roundup

Road & Country

March 2006

- 19 **Clapham Common 10 km.** Men. 1 M Tuckett (?) 32:51; 119 P Cross M50 45:20; 310 finished.
26 **Frimley Park Hospital 10 km.** Men. 1 G Watkins (?) 33:51; 58 P Cross M50 45:41; 300 finished.

April 2006

- 1 **Scottish 6-Stage Road Relay Champs., Livingston.** 3.15 mile lap. 1 I R Toole (Kilbarchan) 15:39; 2 D Gauson (City of Edinburgh) 15:41.
1-2 **IAAF World Cross Country Champs., Fukuoka JPN.** Men's 4 km: a 1 K Bekele (Ethiopia) 10:54; 42 M Dent (Australia) 11:28. Men's 12 km: b 1 K Bekele (Ethiopia) 35:40; 45 M Dent (Australia) 37:36. U20 Men's 8 km. b 1 M Ndiwa (Kenya) 23:53; 80 K Gauson 27:32.
2 **Paddock Wood Half Marathon.** Men. 1 P Hasler (Paddock Wood) 1:11:07; 294 P Cross M50 1:36:46.
2 **Ackworth Half Marathon inc. Inter-County Champs.** Women. 1 O Kimaiyo (KEN) 1:15:36; 2 B Dagne (Surrey) 1:16:17 (CAU Champ). Team 1 Surrey 4:11:58.
2 **Kingston Breakfast Runs.** Men's 8.2 miles. 1 P Wicks 40:15 (record); 3 L Greatorex 45:06. Women's 8.2 miles. 1 A Emmerson (Sigma) 47:58; 18 C Eastham 58:50. Men's 16 miles. 1S Barrett (Serpentine) 1:29:45; 24 M Byansi 1:39:52; 37 S Zealey 1:43:26; 40 T Weeks 1:43:38; 341 L Rehn M40 2:03:08; 540 D Wilkinson 2:10:01. Women's 16 miles. 1 A Hibbs (unatt) 1:48:20; 4 E Fogg 1:50:42.
9 **Lexus Croydon 10 km.** Men. 1 I Lockett (Herne Hill) 31:24; 2 R Ward 31:59; 11 M Humphrey 35:00; 104 J Pritchard 42:13.
9 **Reading Half Marathon.** Men. 1 S Kasimili (Kenya) 1:04:51; 16 L Greatorex 1:13:14; 776 P Cross M50 1:33:45; 3287 D McMillan M55 1:50:55; 8837 finished. Women. 1 C Mutwa (Kenya) 1:12:10; 20 L Cooper 1:26:10; C Eastham 1:38:54.
14 **Maidenhead 10 miles.** Men. 1 P Wicks 48:34; 5 M Trees 1-M40 54:55; 7 J Wolf 55:21. Team 1 Belgrave.
14 **Southport Good Friday 4 miles.** Men. 1 R Berry (Southport) 19:29; 3 P Freary 20:10.
16 **Runcorn Bridge 5 miles.** Men. 1 P Freary 26:42.

Track & Field

April 2006

- 14 **Knoxville TN USA.** Men. 1500m: 2r1 T Bayley 1:50:23. Women. 1500m: 4r1 C Barry 4:23.43. 3000m: 1r1 C Berry 9:26.75.
14 **Herts Phoenix Open, Ware.** Men. 400mH: 1 C Minn 57.4.
15 **Scottish Universities Champs, Grangemouth.** Women. 1500m: 4 C Bertram 5:00.70. 3000m: 3 C Bertram 12:00.26. DT: 3 C Bertram 18.56. JT: 1 C Bertram 27.88.
17 **Norman Fowler Memorial Open, Tonbridge.** Men. 300m: C Minn 37.1.

From The Belgravian

75 Years Ago – 1931

April 11th, 1931 – the day appointed for the London to Brighton Relay – now one of the most popular sporting events in the South – proved to be a very fine day with glorious sunshine ... Our 'bus arrived at Westminster ... and was soon transformed into a combined dressing room and moving grandstand. Posters in Club colours invoked "Up the Bels," and the claret and gold rosettes, ties and scarves (not forgetting the beret of our Running Hon. Secretary's wife!) gave our 'bus a very colourful appearance. Several bells also made their presence known, and if it had been possible to transform the energy used by the ringers into running power, we should have been in Brighton before the other teams reached Crawley! Our 'bus left Westminster ... and we made for Clapham Common, where our first man Jack Flower would hand on to Alfred Kench.

... we had made a very good start for Jack was lying fourth ... and was only four seconds outside last year's record for this stretch ... Kench carried on and quickly found that he was running in the highest class ... his first appearance for the Club in an important race took the form of an "ordeal by fire" ... he lost places to men ... of far greater experience, but none surpassed him for plucky running. ... He arrived at Mitcham still fighting gallantly and almost "all-in" in tenth position, but well within striking distance of those in front, now led by Tipton H.

Duffett now ran for us, and ... our man picked up three opponents but had to sacrifice two positions and so handed over ninth ... Birchfield H had now taken the lead and ... were not to be headed again.

Our best men were still to run and those in front were spread out at intervals of twenty or thirty yards. This looked like helping Arthur Allum to smash the record for the fourth stage, and to bring us up to second or third ... but ... he had covered 2½ miles and picked up four positions when his ankle gave way, and from this point it was a case of gritting teeth and struggling on in pain ... we were now seventh ... he was unable to put his foot to the ground after finishing ... and later was prescribed a month's rest. Despite this accident, Allum had accomplished a very fast time compared with other runners over the stretch, and but for this unfortunate occurrence we should have been on the heels of the leaders.

Sid Warboys ... pegged back Hallamshire and Surrey AC and handed over fifth. Joe Flower carried on the good work, overhauling Highgate and Tipton and bringing us up to third.

Bert Footer ran next and although he ran faster than any other Belgrave man has done in the past over this stretch, he was forced to surrender places to Tipton H. and Surrey AC.

C. Mains, a young man of twenty, running his first race for us ... did very well over what is, perhaps, the most difficult stage of the lot ... the gradual ascent of the South Downs, culminating in the climb of Dale Hill. Only once has a Belgrave man beaten Mains' time, and ... we gained 19 seconds upon Tipton Harriers.

C.T. Carter, one of our first year runners, was entrusted with the last stage ... there was little to worry about ... we placed fifth, a creditable performance. Next year we may well be fighting out the lead ...

Some words of praise are due to our reserves, who continued to train conscientiously up to the day of the race in order to give of their best if called upon. This is just another little indication of the team spirit which is carrying us forward. ...

1 Birchfield H 4:48:58; 2 South London H 4:49:31; 3 Surrey AC 4:49:41; 4 Tipton H 4:51:15; 5 Belgrave H 4:53:27; 6 Hallamshire H 4:54:13.

Skipper's Corner

March 28, 2006 - This is sport - if there were no problems it would be too easy

Sunday [SEAA 12-Stage] was a day for reflection in many ways. The chaps and the dames who run Belgrave are forever looking ahead, in their attempts to keep the club in sound health, but to do this it often helpful to look to the past, where the fingerprints to the future lie. What were we doing 15 years ago – and 10 – and 5? Were we making mistakes - have we put them right? I was given a fine window into the past by travelling to the race with Alan's team letter and directions for not this year (that'd be way too organized), but from that of 2000. It is clear that he wrote his tub-thumping letter to the runners that year sensing that we were *finally* a club on the up, after years of false dawns and mediocrity. Our success on the track had arrived in the 90s, and now perhaps, we could strike it big on the road.

In his Milton Keynes letter of 2000, Alan speaks of how the team was looking 'rock solid', and that we had a real chance of winning. Rock solid turned into mass capitulation, as, after he wrote the letter, half a dozen runners bowed out with various excuses. The runner for leg 11 was hauled out of the B's the night before, and slung into the A's despite having only placed 235/253 the year before. Photos from the 2000 race show him sporting a spectacular comb-over, as he slugged it out with Shaftesbury's Nick Francis, a mere four-and-a-half minutes separating their 'pb's'. We ended up with a hard-fought bronze that day, and the leg 11 runner is the only survivor from the 2000 A-team to appear in the 2006 edition, minus sadly the comb-over.

It was bronze again the following year as only two relics survive (Me and Wardy – if you can call a 23-year-old a relic!) Surely no-one survives from the silver medal team of 1999 ... but one does – even if he did memorably break the two cardinal rules of relay-running: don't get lost, and don't walk. Dear old Hassan did both and was promptly sent to the naughty chair for a few seasons. But his return to the fold in 2003 has seen him become a highly valued member, striking National gold in all sorts of events: 10k, half-marathon, cross-country.

Four master-blasters

What our teams lacked in those pre-2002 days were three elusive things: youth – average age's veered the wrong side of 30; solidity – teams would bear little resemblance to the ones on the team sheet; and the 'X-factor': a lack of runners with that something 'a bit special' – who could turn a race on its head. We don't have an X-factor runner now, either. As it happens, we've got four. In SS, DA, Wicksy and Jon, we have four master-blasters who form the foundation upon which our teams are built, with an average age of just 25. Long may they continue.

Was Sunday an anti-climax because of our dominance? I don't think so! Not when you think of our support staff, who were there: The Halls, the Meads, Gordon, Don, Bill, Rex and the President, you can tot up nearly 400 years of dedicated Belgrave service between them. Seeing our team perform as such a magnificent, coherent unit owes a lot to their vision, belief, and determination. In the neighbouring tent we enjoyed Gerry North's company – the ultimate X-factor man.

April 10, 2006 - I've seen it all before

Well, I think my 146th race for a Belgrave team [National 12-Stage] was the one in which I felt the widest range of emotions... And one thing I do know – I've seen it all before. Do you recognize these words from the pen of the team manager?: "It was very quiet inside the Belgrave tent for a while. The shock of having the prize snatched away was

stunning. But this group of runners is much more than a team. There is a feeling for each other that rival clubs do not see when they look at Belgrave from the outside. Spencer Barden was soon upbeat: 'Don't worry. Next year we'll do it.' "

The words come from ARM's report of the epic National 12 of 2001 – of which 'relic Wardy' survives. [Wardy said that day he'd fancy 20 runs at this great event... Well - he's six for six. Surely he can't be serious!] Was Spen deluded with his optimistic chirrup? Er, not really, when you consider we won the next year by 6-and-a-half minutes, and then in 2003 as well. We've been through this before boys, and our average age has markedly dropped as well (27 years and four months in 2001, 25 years and one month in 2006). And both Tim and I like to think of ourselves as a young 32!

Far more good has come out of this race than bad: our young lions have been given a healthy dose reality – success in events like this don't come easy, first you must pay your dues. The "National 12" has its credibility and charisma back, as it attracted masses of good runners and six fine squads. Newham were more than good value for their win – that was a fantastic team – congratulations.

Here are my top five reflections on the day:

1) Alan and I kneeling by the recorders hut like two earnest schoolboys trying to crack a riddle on a treasure hunt. There were less than two minutes to the gun and we were desperately trying to reselect our team and construct a running order.

"What letter comes after E in the alphabet?"

"H"

"Are you sure?"

"Yep, no, maybe G."

"Ok cool."

"Put in Willis there...no O'Connell...no Willis...no O'Connell..." [They ended up firing identical times!]

"Put Blackledge on 8," I'd gabble.

"No way man – he doesn't move."

"Put me on 11," I'd suggest.

"But you're going short!"

"Yes, yes, but I *might* be going long."

"Put Gauson on 4."

"Which one?"

"The tall one with the curly reddish hair."

"Darren!?"

"No! Kris."

"Can't, he's just eaten..."

And on and on it went. I admit it, both of our fried little minds were in meltdown.

2) The look on my chum and training partner Stuart Major's face at prize-giving. Stui has trained week in, week out for a day like this since the mid-to-late 1980s. He's run 17 of the last 18 National cross champs and has won scores of races. Nobody deserves his medal more. Having barely run a session in five weeks due to a virus, he ran his stage on memory. "I've never seen one of these before!" he said, as he gazed at his nugget of gold. Marvellous.

3) Mo Farah's stage. The look of heartbreak on his face as he just failed to catch Spen at the National 6 in '01 is embedded in my memory palace. He just stood there afterwards, completely drained, despairing and shell-shocked. I also recall an unfit Mo fighting like a tiger at the Southern 6 in '02 – he was on the verge of collapse that day too – but slow down? Never! His triumphant tour on Saturday was five long years in the making. "Looks like he's out for a training spin," said the spectators on the first rise. "Yep, I don't think he's taking today too seriously," said another. "He's not even running in a straight line..." I desperately wanted to believe

these scraps from the peanut gallery – but deep down I knew we were dead.

4) The Blackledge-Roscoe duel on stage 12 was run between two hugely consistent and dedicated runners. Martin Roscoe has been in the scoring six for Leeds in every single one of the last nine National cross-champs, during which time they've been a cut above everyone else. Tremendously tough, he enjoys legendary status in Northern club athletics. Over 7 miles of Parly Hill bog, I think I know who I'd back... but over the macadam of Sutton Park, Jon's lithe stride was just too fluent – his nerve, as ever, ice cool.

5) A tie for the Bel man-of-the-match between DA's excruciating turn, and Paul's selfless and cheerful demeanour at being given the hammer blow news. If one has to take around 5,000 strides on a long stage, Danders must have died 2,500 times on his bad leg. And does Paul merely cruise round for the B's? No! he runs at 95% and hoists them a dozen or so places up the field... Belgrave couldn't wish for two finer elder statesmen in their squad.

A solid season

So mission 5-6 is over and if we look at my dispatch from September 7, it goes down as a solid season – three titles. But the club is in even better shape than when we set out seven months ago, and it won't be easy to wait until September to do it all over again. Meanwhile, have a great summer everyone, and thanks for the memories.

Welcome ...

... to the following new members who joined us in March and April ...

Nururdin Brown, 32, interested in road running and cross country.

Grace Cassandro, 12.

Oliver Dodd, 18, interested in middle and long distance running and cross country.

Krystal Galley, 12, interested in middle distance running.

Kiki Karayiannis, 10.

Kokoma Pownall-Kwaku, 11, interested in sprints.

Nikki Neale née **Haines**, 34, rejoining after a break and interested in long distance.

Lawrence Tijjani, 19, interested in sprints.

Eleanor Waterhouse, 19, interested in sprints.

Roger and out

Roger Alsop, a long time Belgravian, turned out for Herne Hill Harriers in the SEAA 12-stage and clocked a short stage time which would still have got him into our A team. Roger's switch of clubs was triggered by his desire to get into veteran team competition but he retained second-claim membership of the Bels. However, moving home to Edinburgh has caused him to reconsider and he has now resigned. So, 16 years of membership, during which time he became our Running Captain and Club Secretary, comes to an end. We thank you Roger for all you have done and wish you well.

Marty sends congrats

Marty Dent, fresh from his great run in the Commonwealth Games steeplechase, writes from Australia and sends congratulations on a fifth consecutive SEAA 12-Stage win. Marty, who tells us that he regularly checks the Belgrave website for news, has been selected to compete in both the short and long course cross country events at the World Cross in Fukuoka, Japan this weekend.

He also tells us that he may be over this summer for some races in Europe and would love to slot in a few warm-up races for the Bels.

Wicks the Wizard!

A fabulous breakthrough came from Phil Wicks, winning the Maidenhead 10 miles for the third consecutive year - in a time of 48:34. He went through 5 miles in 24:07 - a personal best - 6m in 28:55 and 7m in 33:49. A 15:10 was needed for the last three miles to enable him to crack 49 minutes (his pre-race target had been to break 50) and he turned on a magnificent 14:44.

Mike Trees was 5th (1st Veteran – and good to see him running again after a severe dental operation) in 54:55, Joachim Wolf 7th in 55:21 – and the Bels were first team.



Photo by Steve Wicks

Fixture cards

Fixture cards outlining the Summer's events will be posted out over the coming weekend. But, as ever, keep a check on the website for the latest information. For example, we hear that National Junior Athletics League match 3, will be held at Perivale, whereas our early information (as shown in the card) indicated that it would be held at Eton. If in any doubt, contact your team manager.

adidas Belgrave SPEED Grand Prix 2006

Dates are 17 May, 7 June, 28 June, 19 July and 2 August – all Wednesdays, starting at 7pm at Battersea Park. Each meeting will feature 100m, 200m and 5000m.