

Claire, Brian & Dan Take Top Awards

Claire Phelan, Brian Kelly and Dan Mulhare took the top awards in the Laois Credit Unions cross country championships in Ballyroan on Sunday last. The three race programme along with the six juvenile relays were held on a well set out course on the Blandsford Estate with the underfoot conditions being exceptionally good.

In the junior men over 3K Colin Maher from Ballyfin made sure it was a lively contest from the whistle and broke up the field early on with Brian Kelly being the only one able to stay close. Over the final kilometre Brian overtook a game Colin and went clear to win. The battle for the bronze was equally intriguing with Stephen Lawler (son of former Leinster champion Seamus) getting the better of Danny Aylsbury over the final 400 metres.

Claire Phelan the defending champion made it obvious from the start that she was in top form and immediately opened up a lead that she continued to extend to the finish coming home well clear. The battle for the minor positions was a close affair between the St. Abbans duo of Ailish Brennan and Eileen Cantwell with the track speed of Ailish pulling her clear at the end. St. Abbans retained the team title from Portlaoise who fielded a mother and daughter (Breda and Catherine McDonald) among their team.

The senior men saw all Portlaoise singlet's at the front from the off with only Colm Burke, Ciaran Fitzpatrick and Riobard Miller prepared to go with them. After 3K Colm was a casualty having to withdraw with a calf injury. At this stage the Mulhare brothers had drawn clear of the field and were taking turns at leading. Tony O'Reilly was settling into third while Martin McDonald, P.J. Carroll and Aengus Burke were locked in battle with Riobard and Cormac. Over the next couple of laps Dan and Michael drew further and further away and went out on the last lap locked together. Michael got to open a small gap of 3 to 4 metres and appeared on his way to his first senior title. Brother Dan had other ideas and tackling the hill to the finish gave it one last effort that brought him level and just 60 metres from the line Michael caved in and thus Dan retained his crown for another year. Tony finished in isolation in third with Martin coming out of the pack to take fourth. Portlaoise easily retained the team title from Ballyfin.

The juvenile relays held during the senior programme on a very fine morning generated its own excitement with Portlaoise, Emo/Rath and St. Abbans sharing the medals. The National Masters indoor championships and the senior relays will take place next weekend in Nenagh, with the Leinster senior cross country on the following Sunday in Tymon Park, Dublin.