

UBSport stars shine at the European Cross Country Championships

Posted on Wednesday 14th December 2011

University of Birmingham Sport (UBSport) athletes travelled to Velenje, Slovenia for the SPAR European Cross Country Championships on December, 11, and helped the Aviva Great Britain & Northern Ireland (GB&NI) top the medal table for the fourth consecutive year.



Alumnus James Wilkinson came away with both an individual and team silver in the U23 men's race, which was the result of a well timed at mature performance.

The 2011 Sports and Exercise graduate crossed the line of the 8km race in 23.47, just three seconds behind gold medallist Florian Carvalho from France, leading Aviva GB&NI men's team to their silver medal after missing out 12 months ago.

Speaking after the race James, who was clearly delighted after having to withdraw from the 2010 event due to illness, said: 'I don't think I've run so well since the Trials in Liverpool in 2010, and it was a quality race too.'

In the men's senior race, alumnus Frank Tickner received a team silver for GB&NI.

Over in the women's U23, Hannah Walker (second year Human Biology) finished 7th crossing over the 6km race finishing line at 20.21, a fantastic result for the year in this age group. Not far behind was fourth year Medic Lauren Howarth who placed 13th with a time of 20.34. Their impressive performances helped the GB&NI team win the gold team medal for the age group.

Fifth year medic Sara Treacy raced in the women's U23 for Ireland placing 18th, the first for her country across the line.

In the junior men's race as Jonny Hay placed 8th and Niall Fleming came in at 11th to make them the second and third scorers for the GB&NI team, meaning they also went home with team gold for their age group.

First year Chemistry student Jonny put in a fine display on the 6km course by running with the front pack for most the race and finishing with a time of 18.09, whilst Niall (second year Maths and Sports Science) also had an excellent race, significantly improving on his trials performance by coming in just nine seconds behind his team mate.

Overall, the GB&NI team won six gold (two individual and four team), five silver (three individual and two team) and one bronze (individual).

Athletics and Cross Country head coach Mike Bull said: 'It's great to see all of the athletes step up and perform in the international arena, some for the first time, and others bettering previous outings in a GB vest.'

'I'm sure they all view this as a stepping stone, albeit a very important one, to better performances in 2012. There are still some key cross country events coming up in the next few weeks and such a high level of performance bodes well for club at the BUCS Cross Country Championships in early February.'

He added: 'I would also like to mention Bud Baldaro and his massive input into the success of the athletes – he has provided unparalleled leadership of the endurance programme in the club for many years, which has also been dedicatedly supported by Bob Ashwood and, more recently, Sally Straw.'

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