

Success for Birmingham athletes at the Olympic stadium

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The University of Birmingham Sport (UBSport) Athletics and Cross Country club made history over the weekend of 4-7 May as scholar Pippa Woolven became the first person to win and receive a gold medal at the Olympic Stadium in London.

The club were in the capital to compete at the British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) Visa Outdoor Athletics Championships, which was included as part of the 'London Prepares' – the official London 2012 testing programme – as the first competitive event to be held in the stadium.



Nick Crutchley takes pole vault gold at the BUCS Championships

UBSport Athletics club competed against 1,500 of the best student-athletes in the UK, and proudly came back to campus with two gold, two silver, and four bronze medals, placing them in an overall second place for the competition.

However, it was Pippa's triumph in the 2000m steeplechase that stole the show by not only making history in her victory over Edinburgh's Emily Stewart, but securing a personal best (PB) and a new BUCS record in her well timed 6.36.00 run.

Even though Emily had a commanding lead going into the last lap, a falter over the final barrier combined with perfect timing from Pippa saw the Sport and Exercise student claim her place in the Olympic Stadium history books.

The surroundings had clearly inspired 18-year old. Speaking after the race she said: *'It feels unbelievable, it's so exciting and I'm so happy – it actually felt like I was running in the Olympics. I told myself before the race that if I won I'd be the first athlete to win gold in the stadium, so that was a great incentive.*

'I literally ran my best and I felt absolutely fine going into the last lap, but then I didn't want to go too early in case she had a kick back, so left it to the last

minute to pip her on the line.'

It was a double medal event for UBSport as teammate Laura Riches placed third with 6.50.99.

The second gold came from UBSport scholar Nick Crutchley in the men's pole vault, who coolly broke the BUCS Championship record by clearing an astonishing 5.22m - 2cm higher than the vault that earned him gold at the BUCS Indoor Championships in February.

The BUCS outdoor pole vault record was previously held by alumni Andy Ashurst at 5.21m in 1986, the same year he won gold at the Edinburgh Commonwealth Games.

Silver medals came from Hannah Walker in the women's 5000m, and Harry Harper in the men's 1500m.

UBSport scholar Hannah fresh from her BUCS Cross Country triumph in February, excelled in the heats finishing in second place, shaved a massive 1.03.49 off her time in the final to cross the finish at 16.00.63.

Harry Harper entered the 1,500m in a strong position finishing first in his heat and second in the semi-finals with times of 4.02.07 and 3.50.48 respectively. In the final that took place the last day of the weekend's competition, managed to cross the finish line in an outstanding 3.47.50 to claim his silver. This will join the silver he won at the BUCS Indoor Championships this year.

He was joined in the final by fellow teammate and UBSport scholar Jonny Hay. The 2012 men's BUCS Cross Country Champion finished the race in a respectable 7th place with a time of 3.49.24.

UBSport had a strong presence in the women's 800m final, with three Athletics and Cross Country team members competing. Rebecca Linney claimed bronze in the women's 800m by running a PB in 2.06.96. The 19-year old narrowly missed out on second place by 0.6secs.

She was joined by BUCS Indoor 800m silver medallist Cally Read and Sarah McDonald who finished 5th with 2.08.49 and 7th with 2.09.29 respectively.

Rebecca was a double medallist at the Championships claiming third place in the women's 4x400m relay, along with Cally, Millie Clifford and Leah Barrow. Despite tough competition from seven other universities, the team got the baton across the finish line in 3.42.48.

The final bronze medal went to Niall Flemming for the men's 5000m race. Niall kept his cool, sticking with the leading pack in the final 1k, before pushing forward to finish with a PB 14.21.67 in third. Josh Gorecki was also racing in the 5000m to place sixth with 14.31.26.

Head coach, Mike Bull was understandably thrilled by the results: *'There were some sparkling performances underpinned by a strong and well prepared team. The BUCS records by Pippa and Nick we a real highlight - they had me jumping out of my seat and yelling at the top of my voice!*

'Given both the entry and organisational restraints imposed on the competition, the track and field captains and the athletes responded excellently to get the best team possible to attend.

'The team displayed a very professional attitude to the strict warm up and call room procedures that were being tested for the Olympics, and the Track and Field captains, Zak Saucedo and Jess Lawro, led the team well both on and off the track respectively.'