

## **Junior International Tetrathlon** **Championships 2009**

In March 2009, a group of Junior Tetrathletes, from about 13 different pony club branches, gathered into a cold hall where we were greeted by John Flood, and from then our training had begun. This was a huge step for some, as it was the first time in their lives to pick up a gun! But under the care and guidance of John, we soon got the hang of it.

We had tremendous amounts of help and coaching from people such as Brendan Walsh, who improved our swimming techniques beyond recognition, and Peter Flynn, who had us running like hares within a few weeks!

There were two trial days held in May and June and almost all of the squad attended both days. The teams were decided and everyone was looking forward.

Unfortunately, due to injuries sustained after selection, not everyone was able to travel to Bedale, Yorkshire, where the 21-strong Irish squad would take part in the Junior International Championships. The boys that travelled were Donal Curran, Iain Brady, Brian O'Sullivan, Liam Landy, Patrick Duggan, Diarmaid Hickey, James Maher, William Flynn, Johnny Nolan, Pierce Fleming, Cian Aylward, Sam Pim. The girls that travelled were Louise Kent, Sara Rennick, Sive Brassil, Sionnan O'Reily Collins, Sara Dermody, Sorcha O'Connor, Aisling Weyer, Emily Keane, Katie Healy. Due to an injury sustained doing pony club games, Isabelle O'Meara was not able to travel.

On the 19th of June our horses arrived in Thornton Watlass, Bedale, North Yorkshire in the evening and we got them settled into their stables.

We enjoyed a lovely barbeque made by our parents and then we took part in the fun and games that had been organised for all the teams from England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Fun was had by all and a lot of new friends were made!

On Saturday morning, the boys kicked their competition off to a flying start with brilliant shooting scores all around. Iain Brady, as usual, had a particularly steady hand and managed to take second place in the boys shooting phase! The Irish girls matched this impressive performance in the shoot, with Aisling Weyer also taking second place in the girls shoot. The first two Irish girls and boys teams were lying in first position after the shoot with the second two teams lying not far behind.

The second event of the day was the swim. Each competitor had to swim as many lengths as possible within three minutes. The Irish boys did this in style with Diarmaid Hickey swimming a fantastic distance of ten lengths and eighteen metres, and Brian O'sullivan swimming ten lengths and sixteen metres. These two swims won first and second place in the boys division. These swims put both of our boys teams in strong contention.

The girls also swam very well but one name in particular has to be mentioned. Louise Kent, from the Waterford Hunt Branch, swam an outstanding Junior girl record swim of ten lengths and twelve metres, leaving everyone else in the pool in her wake! This brought the first girls team straight into the lead and the second girls team were chasing at their heels.

After a very successful day, we returned to exercise our horses and ponies and also to walk the challenging cross country course, with our course-walking experts , John Flood and Jimmy Dermody. When everyone had walked the course at least three times, we headed to the competition tent, where a night of serious fun was about to be had by all.

Outside the big white tent, in the middle of a field, three “X-Factor” judges had set up camp. Each region had to do a sketch and the judges were to decide who really had the “X-Factor”! Great fun was had and lots of great talent was shown with singing, dancing and even bag pipes! Ireland’s greatest talent for the evening had to be Sara Rennick. Her incredible gymnastic skills left everyone’s jaws hanging!

After the very entertainig talent show, all the teams were invited into the tent for some food and dancing.

Everyone had so much fun and I think it is fair to say that no other tetrathlon competition has such a fantastic social scene.

On Sunday morning, the second half of the competition got off to an early start with the cross country riding. It was a tricky course but both the girls and the boys did quite well.

Then came the last phase of the competition, the 1500 metre cross country run. The Irish boys ran their socks off, with William Flynn winning the run with a tremendous time of 4 minutes and 35 seconds, and James Maher coming second with 4 minutes and 41 seconds. These runs ensured that the first Irish boys team had won and the second team had shot into an impressive third place behind the Welsh team.

Next was the girls run, which was dominated by the scottish girls. The winning girls time was 5 minutes and 5 seconds, attained by Jo Muir of the Scottish team. The fastest Irish girls time was 5 minutes and 17 seconds and there were quite a few Irish girls to run under 6 minutes. The run had brought Scotland to within 5 points of first place but Ireland managed to hold the lead, with the first Girls team coming in fifth place and the second team coming in first place. The boys individual competition was won by Harry Ashworth from Wales. Brian O'Sullivan from the Kingdom Branch came second and Diarmaid Hickey from the Warrington Branch. The individual girl winner was Jo Muir of Scotland and Sive Brassil from East Galway came third. This was the third year in a row for the Irish girls and boys to win the Junior International Tetrathlon Championships.

We were all delighted with how the competition went, but most importantly we all had the time of life making new friends from all over Britain and even friends from Ireland who we would never have had the chance to meet if not for this brilliant competition. Once more, a big thank you to John Flood and all of our coaches and parents.

Squad selection is already underway for the 2010 Junior International. There will be an open trial day in early February. Contact John Flood if you are intersted.

I think I speak on behalf of the entire squad when I say that this was, far and away, the best weekend of our whole summer.

Written by Sive Brassil, East Galway Hunt Pony Club.