

HISTORIC WEEKEND EXCEEDS EXPECTATIONS

NEW FORMAT

The 2009 national Minimus championship which took place this weekend in Kilkenny was in many aspects an historic event. With over 450 under 12 competitors taking part, the event has established itself as the largest and most popular event on the pony club calendar. In addition to this, a brave move by the tetrathlon committee resulted in a change of format this year with the riding phase now taking place on the Saturday. Feedback proved to be extremely positive and the difficulties envisioned in accommodating for the unprecedented number of competitors failed to materialise with the weekend's events running smoothly. The riding and running phase of the competition both took place in Bramblestown farm owned by father and committee member Kevin O'Donnell. The riding took place amidst sunshine on Saturday and attracted a number of spectators including local racing legend Mr. Paddy Mullins and His wife Maureen. The cross country course was inviting for the young competitors but also succeeded in having a profound impact on the weekends overall winners and results.

GIRLS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

Both the team and individual components of the 2009 girl's championship were hotly contested. The eventual honours in both competitions were not decided until the final phase and the margin for error was extremely slim. The proceedings were largely dominated by three teams who accounted for the gold, silver and bronze positions in both the team and individual competitions. These were: the Meath Silver team of Laoise Flemming, Caoimhe Eivers, Nina Simpson and Catherine Brady, the Limerick Lassies comprising of Aishling Finucane, Brigitte Murphy, Emily Murphy and Meadhbh Noonan and the Westmeath Pink team of Eleanor Waldren, Roisin Fagan, Eilish Harken and Rebecca Kelly.

Following the riding phase on Saturday morning there were five teams tied for first place with all four riders achieving perfect clear rounds. These teams were the Meath silver, Kildare Orange, Tipperary Yellow, Killinick Yellow and the Limerick Lassies. This meant that there were a number of counties in contention heading into the next two phases. The swimming took place early on Sunday morning at the wonderful new facilities in Kilkenny city. The best swim of the girl's competition and of the day came from the Westmeath's Rebecca Kelly who achieved an incredible 6 lengths and 5 metres in just 2 minutes in the pool. Laoise Flemming from Meath was second best with 5 lengths and 23 metres. With both of these competitors achieving clear rounds on Saturday the individual title was all to play for heading in to the running phase with only 36 points or 4 seconds separating the two. In the team competition the Meath Silver team held a strong advantage carrying 7608 points into the final phase. The next team, the Limerick Lassies with a combined tally of 7192 points had a lot of running to do to if they were to make up the ground between them and the Meath leaders. The importance of the riding phase also became evident. The Westmeath Pink team whose swimming scores were the second best of the competition trailed in third place following problems that occurred across the country on Saturday.

A slightly shortened running track meant that a large number of athletes broke the 4 minute mark, widely recognised as the desired standard of running in the girls' competition. There were a number of extremely good running performances on Sunday with over 20 girls

running inside 4 minutes. The accolade for the fastest run went to Sinead Flynn of West Waterford who completed the track in a blistering 3 minutes and 25 seconds. The race for the 2009 girl's national title was set to finish dramatically with Laoise Flemming and Rebecca Kelly running in close proximity. The former managed to finish the running course in 3 minutes and 43 seconds, a time that would be noted by Kelly and all the Westmeath supporters. Kelly, running soon after, stopped the clock in 3 minutes and 53 seconds. However it was not enough to hold on to her position at the top of the leader board with Flemming's run proving enough to promote her to first place by exactly 10 points. Flemming's victory ensured a Meath clean sweep in the girl's section with both the individual and team honours going to the Meath Silver team. Her teammates Eivers, Simpson and Brady provided three more solid times to claim the 2009 team title in a convincing fashion with 10,602 points. The Limerick Lassies who were able to complete the running phase earlier in the competition and away from the concentration of pressure produced an impressive team performance to remain in second place with 10372. This was mirrored individually by team member Brigitte Murphy whose run of 3 minutes and 26 seconds was the second best of the competition and vital in elevating Murphy to individual third place. The Westmeath team, like Kelly, were forced to settle with their team finishing in third place and with 10,080 points.

BOYS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

The boy's national championship saw a rivalry emerge between the Tipperary Gold and Warrington Black teams. The Tipperary's who won the boys competition last year were keen to defend their title. This defence began on Saturday afternoon when the team produced four clear rounds around the cross country course. This was matched by only one other boy's team, the Warrington Blacks. With both teams finishing Saturday with unblemished scores all was to play for in the swimming and running phases that were to follow on Sunday. Pathfinder for the Warrington's, Mike Healy, Younger brother of international tetrathlete Edward, lived up to family name when producing the best boys swim of 6 lengths and 4 metres. His teammates, Loughlin Hogan and Brothers Ethan and Leon Butler capitalised with three commendable swims giving the Warrington's the edge facing the final phase of the competition. Their combined swimming score of 3304 was comfortably ahead of the Tipperary boys whose tally came to 2952. Healy also held a firm advantage over the next best individual boy, Robert Kent from the Waterford Sharks who swam 5 lengths and 12 metres.

The boys running phase which saw the conclusion of the 2009 championship went ahead on Sunday afternoon. Individually the best run of the boys section and of the weekend came from Cork and Rory Purcell of the Golden Vale gangsters. Purcell finished the track in just 3 minutes and 18 seconds with Robert Bateman from the Limerick Stags finishing just a second slower in 3 minutes and 19 seconds. Despite the standard of the running in the boys competition Mike Healy was untouchable in his ranking. A run of 3 minutes and 40 seconds was more than enough to secure Healy the individual honours by more than 100 points. His nearest rival, Jack Savage, came up the table with a run of 3 minutes and 31 seconds to finish with 3,614 points to Healy's 3752. Michael Foley from the Tipperary Gold team demonstrated the advantage of consistency across all three phases securing third place after top ten finishes in both the swimming and running. Similar to Foley his team fought hard to close the gap on the Warrington Blacks in the running phase. With the Warringtons completing the competition before them, the Tipperary team knew what was needed to move

up the leader board. However despite brave running from Foley and teammates Christian Casey, Eoghan Kelly and Ben Murray the Warrington lead proved to be too great. The Warrington team based in Kilkenny, who show great promise for the future managed to reverse last year's placing and take the 2009 title in an impressive fashion. The Golden Vale Gangsters, Tom Hayes, Rory Purcell, Michael Purcell and Gavin Dunne, who lost over 300 points in the riding phase finished strongly to earn eventual third place with 10,322 points.

The Golden Vale branch received some compensation when claiming first place in the mixed team competition. The team of Niamh Hayes, Jordan Lyons, Killian Ryan and Mark Purcell completed with a score of 9456 to win from nearest rivals the mixed team from Sligo and Roscommon who completed with 9368 points.