Birmingham & District Invitation Cross Country League

Chair's report

Centenary Season 2025-26

The league's centenary season had much that was not planned as well as a great centenary race.

Before the season started, the league discovered that it had made a big error in awarding Telford AC the team gold medals in division three. Because they had failed to finish a team in three of the four fixtures the previous season, they were not eligible for team trophies or promotion in 2024-25.

This was the league's mistake and as Chair I took full responsibility for it. I take this opportunity to apologise once again to Telford and the other three teams involved Bournville Harriers, Kenilworth Runners and Northbrook AC.

The season started on a positive note with a joint race at Newbold Comyn in Leamington with all three divisions running together to celebrate the league's centenary. It was a wonderful celebration of cross country running over an excellent course and we had over 800 finishers. We were joined by the Midland Women's Cross Country league whose two divisions ran together and had over 500 finishers.

Our President Carolyn Franks addressed the athletes at the start of the race and pointed out that West Bromwich Harriers were the only founder member of the league still competing in the league. Since then, it has been pointed out that a number of founder members are still competing in the league as part of a merged club. It was ironic then that the race to celebrate our centenary was won by Jacob Cann, an athlete from our newest club Weston Tempo. Finally, we had a distinguished guest in Ian Stewart who had competed in the league and is the only male Briton to have won the World Cross Country Title. It was a truly memorable day.

In December I went to Betley to officiate at the division 1 fixture which went off very well. It was a true cross-country course with sheep on the course to add authenticity.

In January we had the unprecedented situation where all three fixtures were postponed due to the bad weather.

In February, I refereed the division 3 fixture at Coombe Abbey Park which was the first time the league had a race that had a scheduled morning start. Despite heavy rain in the week prior to the race, it went off very well. Again, there were sheep on the course so it appears they were following me around!

Subsequently, a number of clubs asked if the league were planning more morning starts as their athletes had liked it. West Bromwich Harriers have submitted a proposal to change our rules to allow morning starts and this will be considered at the AGM.

I want to thank all the host clubs who contribute so much to the league by putting on races but in particular I would mention Spa Striders, Telford AC and Black Pear Joggers for their efforts to rearrange the cancelled fixtures.

The league would not run smoothly without the work done by the divisional secretaries so thanks to Bryan Mills (Division 1). Joel Freeland (Division 2) and Ian Clarke (Division 3). There is a change this year because Joel's club CLC Striders were promoted to division 1 and Bryan Mills has generously suggested that he move to look after division 2 so that Joel can be with his club.

We could not put on our fixtures without the splendid officials who come out in all conditions to ensure the races are safe and properly organised and I include in this the club volunteers you are invaluable in completing the officials teams at fixtures. So a big thank you to you all.

Again, the officials for all the fixtures were appointed by the Joint Sub-committee with the Women's league and I would like express my thanks to Steve Webb for his work on this sub-committee and Mary Hodges who was the Women's league representative. I am not sure clubs realise just how much work goes into getting the officials in places for the fixtures.

Our finances were in good hands again last season so my thanks go to our Treasurer Martin Ludford for all his hard work looking after the accounts. Its at this point I must record our thanks to Coventry Runner Sports Shop for once again sponsoring the athletes numbers for all three divisions.

The accounts that will be presented to the AGM will not have been audited because we were unable to find anyone who would volunteer for the role. A request for a volunteer was sent to all club contacts and every athlete who registered directly with the league but we got three expressions of interest but could not fill the role. I find it disappointing that with over 1,000 people connected with the league there is not one person willing to volunteer to do this important role. This will be discussed at the AGM and it may be that we will have to employ a professional to conduct the audit which in turn will increase the clubs' affiliation fee.

Finally, I must thank our Secretary Carolyn Franks who was also our President for the centenary season for all the work she does to ensure the league runs smoothly.

It is with regret that I record that Dudley & Stourport who failed to close a team in one of the fixtures last season and so had to reapply for membership has decided not to do so and will not compete next season. This is very disappointing, not only losing a well-established club but D&S incorporates one of our founder clubs Dudley Harriers. I trust their absence will be short and hope to see them back in the league in the near future.

The good news is that two clubs have applied to join the league namely Wolves TRX and Evesham Vale Running Club. Their applications will be considered at the AGM.

At the AGM there will be motions to introduce morning races and change the rules that apply when clubs fail to close a team. Please ensure you are represented at the AGM to vote on these and other important issues.

To have a successful league we need to have 12 clubs who are prepared to host fixtures. So, I appeal to those who haven't hosted before to consider whether they can.

There is plenty of expertise available to assist clubs to set out a course and with the planning of a fixture so you will have plenty of support.

Noel Butler
Chair
14 May 2026