

Birmingham & District Invitation Cross-Country League

Midland Women's Cross-Country League

Betley Court Farm, 13/11/21

Meeting Manager's and Referee's Report

Introduction

It was good to be back with League competition after the break last season for the CoVid pandemic. It was also the first time since 2015 that the men's League had run a combined race for all Divisions.

This report covers both the women's and men's races since they were held on the same day at the same venue.

Venue & facilities

The venue was Betley Court Farm in north Staffordshire, the same venue as used for men's Divisions 1 & 3 and women's Div.2 in 2019. Many thanks are due to the local farmer who made his land and some of his buildings available for the races (not to mention his tractor to pull out a motor coach that was stuck in some mud and would have partially blocked the course!).

There was ample car parking and the farmer made a barn available for registration of athletes and officials. There was a small café on site and portaloos were hired in.

The car park marshals had been told to report at 12 noon but cars started to arrive well before then. We suggest that at least one marshal is on duty from 11 a.m. The car park was cleared very quickly at the end of the day because there was a marshal at the exit onto the main road waving cars out when the road was clear. This was an excellent initiative by the host club.

The area for club tents needed to be better delineated; a few tents were too close to the course a little way from the start of the lap.

Overall it is a good venue, though at the very extreme of the Leagues' area.

Host Club Officials

The Clerk of the Course was very good and responded quickly when required to do so but put himself under unnecessary pressure by having other responsibilities and having to look after the site. I suggest that the Clerk of Course should have no other responsibilities on race day. The Chief Marshal should handle the course marshals and brief them. There should also be another person appointed as Site Manager to look after the infrastructure.

Communications proved to be difficult because on three occasions the Meeting Manager tried to `phone the Clerk of Course but there was no `phone signal. Consideration should be given to using radios in future.

Prior Information

Clubs were circulated by the Leagues with details of the arrangements for the fixture, travel directions and a course map. Since this was such a large fixture, officials were also sent details of the allocation of duties and registration procedures.

Weather

It was dry, mainly cloudy, relatively mild and with only a little breeze.

Course

It is an undulating grassland course across fields; three laps totalling 6.4 miles for the men's race and two laps totalling about 4.2 miles for the women. We carried out a preliminary inspection of the course and facilities in September with Kevin Hendricken (City of Stoke AC), who was the Clerk of the Course, and met the farmer. On inspection on the morning of the races the surface was reasonably firm with only two short patches of mud through gaps between fields. The course had been marked out with stakes, tape, cones to mark hazards and arrows. Only a few minor adjustments were needed to give a better running line and to ease corners. City of Stoke AC had done a good job. The course was well marshalled and all Marshals were identifiable by high viz yellow jackets. No runners were reported as going off course.

The start line and an assembly line in its rear were marked and long enough for the large numbers of competitors; there were no problems at the start. The finish area arrangements for the chip timing and dispersal were satisfactory.

Officials

The Leagues and the clubs provided the large number of officials required for races of this size. All clubs in the men's League provided at least one official, so no penalty points had to be applied under that League's Rules. Indeed, so many volunteers from clubs attended that we were able to release some to assist as Course Marshals. All officials and their clubs must be thanked for their work in making this, one of the largest cross-country races in the country, such a success.

Some officials did not report at the correct time, despite instructions circulated in advance; this was probably due to poor communications within clubs. As was to be expected, some officials had become unavailable since nominations were received and so some last minute switching of roles had to be done but in the end all duties were covered.

Officials were given free refreshments by the Leagues.

First Aid

First aid was in attendance with 5 people and an off-road vehicle. Some were stationed near the finish and some out on the course. All Course Marshals had been issued with a mobile

'phone number to summon first aid if needed. There were no serious injuries, just a few of the usual soft tissue ones.

The Races

The races proceeded smoothly; there were no disqualifications or protests. There were 342 finishers in the women's race and 656 in the men's. Both these numbers were substantially down from the previous season's figures when adding all divisions (464 for the women and 721 for the men). It will be interesting to see whether this is a trend over the whole season or was just because of this being the first race after a long break or the greater distance to the venue for many clubs.

The winner of the women's race was Amelia Quirk (University of Birmingham) and the men's was Omar Ahmed (Birchfield H.), both of whom had clear leads by the finish. The University of Birmingham won the team events in both men's and women's races by good margins. A club performance to note was Western Tempo's in the men's race; only recently formed from athletes formerly with Cheltenham & County and newly admitted to the League, they had the best possible score within Division 3, though to the detriment of Cheltenham's score in Division 1. Droitwich AC (Division 3) failed to close in a team. The full results are on the Leagues' web sites.

The results finalisation and certification did not go as smoothly or as quickly as normal. Chip timing was used and it was hoped that the Chief Judges would have the computer results on the day shortly after the races so that any discrepancies between the results from the computer and those from the Judges sheets could be identified and resolved. However, the results from the chip timing company were not available until later that night and an analysis by the Chief Judges the next day showed several discrepancies. It became apparent that there were several errors in the chip results, particularly in the men's race, so a close check had to be made using video evidence before the results could be issued with confidence. The women's chip results had fewer queries and were more easily resolved using the Judges' sheets.

Noel Butler, Meeting Manager

Rob Mulgrue, Referee

21/11/21