

2015 Athletics Facts

Fact File 30

Cross Country numbers increase but at a cost to clubs

Preamble. In April 2009 ABAC published an article by Charles Gains which analysed the number of cross country runners participating in County, Regional and National Championships. He concluded that numbers had been declining for several years.. Since then a number of initiatives such as Parkrun and Run England have been introduced with the aim of increasing grass roots participation. There has been evidence this winter that the number of competitors in Regional Championships has increased. So we thought it time to find out what is happening.

Cross Country Numbers. As the National Cross Country Championships has just taken place at Parliament Hill (21st February) we have been able to compare participation levels with the 2009 event which was held at the same venue and was the subject of the earlier analysis. Here is what we found;

AGE	FEMALE			MALE			Total	
	2009	2015	%change	2009	2015	%change	2009	2015
U13	354	433	+22%	356	395	+11%	710	828
U15	315	379	+20%	398	371	- 7%	713	750
U17	184	235	+27%	285	280	- 2%	469	575
U20	109	130	+19%	173	190	+10%	282	320
Senior	546	865	+58%	1455	2005	+37%	2001	2870
Totals	1508	2042	+35%	2667	3241	+21%	4232	5283

The most striking figures are the large increase in numbers of senior men and women taking part. The increase in numbers of females of all ages is greater than the increase in numbers of males. It is noteworthy that whereas there is an increase in all categories of female competitors that is not the case for the males. The number of u15 boys and u17 men has shown a decline.

Have standards increased? In the 2009 study it was noted that over 70% of senior age group runners were veterans. The ECCU data for 2015 does not provide this breakdown. What can be deduced is the general standard of the runners to see if the increase in numbers has resulted in better overall standards. To make this comparison we have determined the number of runners finishing within 10%, 20 % and 50% of the time of the winner.

2009. In 2009 The women's National at Parliament Hill was won by Hattie Dean in 29:34. The field totalled 546 and 32 (5.9%) of the runners finished within +10% of the winning time. 107 (19.6%) of the runners finished within +20% of the winners time. 390 (71.4%) finished within +50% of the winning time.

In the men's race, won by Frank Tickner in 38:02, 59 men (4.06%) from the field of 1455 finished within +10% of the winners time. 224 men (15.4%) finished within +20% of the winners time. 978 men (67.2%) finished within +50% of the winning time

2015. The conditions for the 2015 races held over the same courses as 2009 were extremely bad resulting in slower times. The senior women's race was won by Lily Partridge in 30.07. Of the field of 865, 22

(2.5%) of women were within 10% of the winning time and 115 (13.3%) within 20%. 555 women (64.2%) finished within +50% of the winning time

In the men's race, won by Charles Hulson in 39:12, 83 runners (4.14%) finished within 10% of the winning time and 320 (19.4%) finished within 20% of the winners time. 1352 men (67.4%) finished within +50% of the winners time.

Going back to times before the jogging boom we note that in the 1985 English National 92% of women finished within +50% of the winners time.

Cost to the clubs. When the National is held at Parliament Hill travel and accommodation can be a big cost for clubs based away from London. In addition the cost of entering runners in advance is also a major cost to clubs aiming for complete teams.

This year entries closed on the 7th January – some 7 weeks before the event. A lot can happen in this period and not surprisingly clubs enter as many athletes as possible in order to cater for drop outs. For example NEB entered 20 athletes for this year's race but on the day only 3 made the start line. Team sheets are published by the ECCA one week before the race. From these we determined that for all of the races a total of 9355 runners were entered but only 5283 actually run.

That means that 4072 entry fees at £7 each were wasted by clubs. **In total the money wasted by clubs was £28,504.**

Comments. This analysis shows that there has been a significant growth in the numbers of senior cross country runners over the last six years. The only age groups where numbers have declined are the U15 boys and the U17 men. The increased number of senior women in 2015 has not been matched by improved performances compared to 2009. There has been a reduction of strength in depth.

Senior men achieving times within 10% of the winner's have remained similar over the last 6 years but there has been an improvement in the percentage of men achieving times within 20% of the winner.

The high cost of entering runners early and then finding they do not compete is enormously expensive to clubs.

ABAC recommendation. The ECCA is not short of funds so we make the following proposal.

ECCA to provide clubs with a notional rebate of £5 for each entered runner who does not compete. The monies due to each club would be used to offset the following year's entry costs.

ABAC urges clubs to lobby the ECCA to adopt this proposal.

If this were implemented clubs would be able to increase their entries for 2016 in line with the rebate due. Everyone would benefit including the ECCA which could well see the actual number of entries rise as a result of the rebate.

End