

The Welsh Schools National Track & Field Championships – 50 years ago!

The first of the Welsh Schools' national track and field championships – for boys only – was held in June 1947, at Taff Vale Park in Pontypridd and, with the exception of 1984, they had been held each year up until 2019, which was the 72nd staging.

Because of the current coronavirus pandemic regulations, the 2020 'nationals' have rightly been cancelled. To give pupils, parents, teachers and volunteers a flavour of how things 'used to be', we provide an outline of what happened at the event 50 years ago – in 1970

The Date – not the first weekend in July

Most of us associate the date of these 'national' championships with the first weekend in July but, for many years, they were held on the second weekend in July.

In 1970, the event was held on Saturday, July 11th.

The Venue – not Brecon or Cardiff

Since 2001, the 'nationals' have been held either in Cardiff or at Penlan in Brecon. Prior to that year, the venue rotated around Wales.

In 1970, the event was staged at Eirias Park in Colwyn Bay, Denbighshire – the fifth time that the event had been held there. This was a facility with a six lane cinder track.

The venue on the north Wales coastline meant that competing teams from the south took nearly all of the Friday before the event to travel north in the team coach (or coaches) on roads not designed for high speed travel.

Teams travelling from the south could not get to Colwyn Bay and back in a day, so they were 'hosted' by local residents and families in the area surrounding the venue. That could mean that pupils ended up being hosted in places across Anglesey, Caernarvonshire, Denbighshire and Flintshire.

In 1970, some of the Glamorgan boys were hosted on a caravan site far away on Llangefni in Anglesey while some of Brecon & Radnor boys ended up billeted in a local 'remand centre' in Colwyn Bay.

The Number of Competing Teams

From the first 'nationals' in 1947 to 1974, competition was based on teams from the twelve affiliated counties.

These were:

Anglesey, Brecon & Radnor, Caernarvon, Cardigan, Carmarthen, Denbigh, Flintshire, Glamorgan, Merioneth, Monmouth, Montgomery and Pembrokeshire.

With only six lanes available on the track, this meant that separate heats and finals had to be held for track events up to and including 400 metres, and for the relays.

A top ranked sprinter could find that they were competing in a heat and final of the 100 metres, the 200/150 metres and the relay – so they had to be fit as well as fast!

The Age Groups and the Events contested

Because the 'nationals' had started in 1947 as a competition for senior, middle and junior boys, they were well catered for in terms of events. When competition for girls was first included in 1955, only a small number of events had been held for senior and juniors but that list had been expanded and the 'middle' section had been added in 1967.

Five new events were held for the first time in 1970, and the distance of the junior boys' hurdles was altered from 75 to 80 metres. The events contested were:

Senior Boys: 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 1500m, 5000m, 110m Hurdles, 400m Hurdles, 2000m steeplechase, 4 x 100m relay, High Jump, Pole Vault, Long Jump, Triple Jump, Shot, Discus, Hammer, Javelin

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Middle Boys: 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 1500m, 100m Hurdles, 400m Hurdles, 1000m steeplechase (new event), 4 x 100m relay, High Jump, Pole Vault, Long Jump, Triple Jump, Shot, Discus, Hammer (new event), Javelin

Junior Boys: 100m, 200m, 400m, 800m, 80m Hurdles (distance altered), 4 x 100m relay, High Jump, Pole Vault, Long Jump, Triple Jump (no limitation on length of run-up), Shot, Discus, Hammer (new event), Javelin

Senior Girls: 100m, 200m, 800m, 100m Hurdles, 4 x 100m relay, High Jump, Long Jump, Shot, Discus, Javelin

Middle Girls: 100m, 200m, 800m, 80m Hurdles, 4 x 100m relay, High Jump, Long Jump, Shot, Discus, Javelin

Junior Girls: 100m, 150m, 800m (new event), 75m Hurdles, 4 x 100m relay, High Jump, Long Jump, Shot, Discus, Javelin

Only 'the walk' and the junior 1500 metres is missing from the boys' events while the girls did not have a 300/400 metres, 1500 metres, 3000 metres (seniors and middles) plus the walk on the track and they also missed out on three field event - pole vault, triple jump and hammer!

The Event Programme

A very detailed and professional programme was produced with athletes listed with their standard county number (from 1 for Anglesey to 12 for Pembrokeshire) and the name of their school/college – all at a cost of only two shillings/10 pence.

The timetable of 108 events (including heats and finals on the track) started at 10.30 and continued through to the finish at 5.45 pm – with no break for lunch, which was included in earlier years.

On the track, heats were pre-drawn while the programme also included the track draw for endurance events and the competition order in field events.

As was the standard practice at the time, pupils were listed with an initial instead of their full Christian name and, as will be seen from the copy of the results (which is available as a download), there were a number of substitutions made by county team managers on the day, which has resulted in details of the pupil's school being missed out.

Championship Bests or Records?

Championship best performances were included in the programme with the event timing.

Athletics had gone 'metric' in 1969, so the vast majority of track events had only been contested once over the 'new' metric distance and the 1969 winner was listed as the championship best.

There is also a puzzle over some championships bests in sprint and hurdles events because a number of the winning times at the 1969 championships in Brecon, which are published in the association's 1969 report, do not appear as event bests in the 1970 programme!

The Awards – No Medals!

The winner of each individual event plus any individual who achieved the event standard was due to receive 'the association certificate'.

These were presented immediately after the last relay at the end of the day.

In addition, there were three special awards:

The Guto Nyth Bran Cup: awarded to the Boy or Girl achieving the best individual performance

The Welsh Academicals Cup: awarded to the boy achieving an outstanding performance

Major CR Tucker Bowl: awarded to the girl achieving an outstanding performance

Points Scoring

Although not as important in 1970 as they have been since 1980, team competitions have been scored since the early days of the 'nationals'.

Pupils could gain points for their county in one of two ways:

- (a) The top six ranked pupils in each individual event or top six ranked counties in relay events were awarded points on the basis of 6 points for first down to 1 point for sixth, and

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- (b) With the exception of pupils competing in the 100 metres events, each individual or team achieving the 'event standard' was awarded 2 points for their county.

This was in the days before computers became available, so everything – results, certificates and team scores – had to be worked out and produced by recorders! There are seven listed in the programme.

The Competition

One of the benchmarks used to indicate how successful a meeting has been and how tough the quality of competition was is the number of new championship bests set on the day.

In 1970, in addition to the inaugural bests set in the five 'new' events, there appear to be 22 new individual bests, and teams from Glamorgan established new 'relay' bests in four of the six age groups – all three boys' sections and in the junior girls' competition. Details of the new bests are listed at the end of this outline.

What else can we say about the competition and the pupils taking part?

The weather was dry and warm.

The track judges and the timekeepers had some very difficult calls to make. There was no photo finish to fall back on. Decisions had to be made as the events were held. A glance at the attached results (and some of the listed championship bests at the end) will show that there were very tight finishes in four of the 100 metres – senior, middle and junior boys plus senior girls – plus both the senior and middle boys' sprint hurdles, the junior boys' 200 and 400 and the junior girls' 150 metres.

In the senior boys' section, three of the 'defending champions' had to settle for second place.

In the 100 metres, Adrian Thomas (Cynffig CS, Glamorgan) – now a respected member of the Welsh Athletics Board of Directors - was beaten by Clive Rees (Llaneli GS, Carmarthen), though they were part of a trio with Kedric Thomson (Friars, Caernarvon) who set a new best of 10.8 seconds.

At 400 metres, Stuart Jones (Holywell, Flintshire), who dipped under 50 seconds in 1969, had to settle for second behind Michael Lewis (Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire) while, in the 5000 metres, HD Edwards (Grove Park GS, Denbigh), hacked nearly 14 seconds off his 1969 winning time but was still beaten by his Flintshire rival Martin Russell (Deeside HS).

Three seniors retained titles that they had won in 1969 at Brecon – Brynmor Williams (Cardigan) in the high jump, Graham Price (West Mon GS, Monmouth) in the discus and John Roberts (Holywell HS, Flintshire) in the javelin. Graham also claimed the shot win. Brynmor and Graham are perhaps better known for their exploits on the rugby field!

In the 800 metres, Richard Yarrow (Whitchurch GS, Glamorgan) added a senior boys' championships best to the middle title and record that he had claimed in 1969.

In the middle section, there was a horizontal jumps double success for the Chepstow based David Rees (Monmouth) but perhaps the most impressive individual was Joe Hughes from Friars school in Bangor, who won the shot and discus, breaking the 50 metres mark in the discus, and claimed fourth in the hammer. With the standard points that he gained in all three events, that meant that he had earned 21 points for the Caernarvon team!

At junior level, another young thrower is listed as a double event winner – Kevin Jones (Maes Garmon, Flintshire) in the shot and javelin – while the Caernarvon sprinter IH Roberts was involved in blanket finishes in both the 100 and 200 in new event quickest times. He is credited with winning the 100 but had to settle for second in the longer event behind Steve Kohut (Coleshill SM). If there were a 'Most Valuable Competitor' award at these championship, Steve would have been a contender – but behind Joe Hughes! He won the 200 metres and the long jump, both with new event bests, and finished third in the 100 metres. With his standard points in the 200 and long jump, he contributed 20 points to the Carmarthenshire total.

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In the girls' competitions, there were double sprint successes in all three sections - Averil Jones (Ferndale GS, Glamorgan) in the seniors, Marva Connikie (Duffryn HS, Monmouth) at middle level and Sheila Richardson (Elfed HS, Flintshire) in the juniors. Marva had won the junior 100 in 1969.

Two senior athletes gained double successes in the field – Elizabeth Kay (Atlantic College, Glamorgan) in the two jumps and Janet Beese (St Julian's HS, Monmouth) retained her shot and discus titles, with a new championship best in the discus.

In the middles, the Blackwell family gained two titles, both in championship bests, with Gaynor winning the 80 metres hurdles and Katrina the 800 metres. Both were pupils at Glanfan CS in Glamorgan. In the discus competition, there was a win and new championship best for Delyth Prothero (Brecon GS, Brecon & Radnor), who had won the junior title the previous year. Not only a talented thrower, Delyth went on to make a huge contribution to athletics in Wales as a team manager.

There were new championship bests on the track in the junior girls' section for B Antrobus (Elfed HS, Flintshire) in the sprint hurdles, for Anne Morris (Cynffig CS, Glamorgan) in the 800 metres and for the Glamorgan relay squad while Lyn Langdon (Ysgol Gruffud Jones, Carmarthen) won the shot with a new event best but the star performer in this section was Susan James. The Afon Taf (Glamorgan) pupil had won the javelin event – 600g in those days - in 1969 with a new best of 30.92 metres but she went over two metres further at Colwyn Bay, with a best throw of 32.94 metres.

Results

There is a full paper copy of the results of events but there are only details of the first six athletes in each event – no details of track heats and no details of athletes beyond the first six in endurance and field events.

Only names and counties have been included, and there are no details of wind readings, though there are officials listed as wind gauge operators in the programme.

Some details of pupils who achieved event standards were also missing.

The attached listing of results has been prepared from the paper results, names in the programme and separate listings of standards. The team points scores have been produced from the results.

Post Event Report by the Championships Secretary

The hugely influential north Walian, Charlie Hughes (Denbighshire) – a legendary figure in Welsh Schools' circles for the huge contribution that he made to schools athletics in Wales from the sixties until his death in 1999 – had been appointed as Championships Secretary in 1968 and this is what he contributed in the 1970 association report:

The twenty fourth Championships held at Colwyn Bay attracted 770 competitors in 79 events. 270 competitors gained standards in their individual events.

New events in the Championships were the 800 metres for Junior Girls, the hammer and steeplechase for Middle Boys and the hammer for Junior Boys, and the distance of the sprint hurdles for Junior Boys was increased from 75 to 80 metres.

The thanks of the Association are due to the Denbighshire Schools AAA, the Colwyn Bay Local Committee and the Colwyn Bay Borough Council. The Civic Reception accorded the 260 officials and friends of the Association on the night preceding the championships set the tone for what proved to be a happy and successful Championship Meeting. We are very grateful to the Schools' Athletics Associations in Anglesey, Caernarvonshire and Flintshire for assisting with the accommodation of visiting athletes.

We are again indebted to all those who give up their weekend to officiate at these Championships; their efforts make for the smooth running of the meeting; I hope that they all derived some pleasure from the athletics and will be prepared to assist us at our future championships.

[The 1971 championships were staged at Haverfordwest in Pembrokeshire while Glamorgan were the 1972 hosts at Cardiff's Maindy Stadium.]

Recipients of the three 'Special Awards'

Please have a look through the list of new championship bests (below) and decide who you think might have been the recipients.

(They are listed at the bottom of attached the results file.)

Championship Bests

Senior Boys

100 metres – new championship best

1	Clive Rees	Llanelli GS	Carmarthen	10.8
2	Adrian Thomas	Cynffig CS	Glamorgan	10.8
3	Kedric Thomson	Friars, Bangor	Caernarvon	10.8

previous best 10.9 (w/a) (1969)

200 metres – equal championship best

1	Clive Rees	Llanelli GS	Carmarthen	22.4
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previous best 22.4 (w/a) or 22.9? (1969)

800 metres – new championship best

1	Richard Yarrow	Whitchurch GS	Glamorgan	1:56.3
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previous best 1:57.0 (1969)

1500 metres – new championship best

1	Brian Donovan	Cathays HS	Glamorgan	4:11.4
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previous best 4:14.3 (1969)

5000 metres – new championship best

1	Martin Russell	Deeside HS	Flintshire	16:13.4
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previous best 16:30.4 (1969)

110 metres hurdles – new championships best

1	Les Prince	Grove Park GS	Flintshire	15.1
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previous best 14.6 or 16.1 (w/a) in 1969

2	Michael Fell	Barry GS	Glamorgan	15.1
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4 x 100 metres relay – new championship best

previous best 43.8 (1969)

Glamorgan	43.6
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Middle Boys

400 metres – new championship best

1	Malcolm Gibson	Duffryn HS, Newport	Monmouth	51.4
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previous best 52.2 (1969)

1500 metres – new championship best

1	Gareth Morgan	Lewis Sch, Pengam	Glamorgan	4:18.4
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previous best 4:19.0 (1969)

1000 metres steeplechase – new event best

1	Billy Snowdon	Cantonian HS	Glamorgan	2:52.8
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first time held

100 metres hurdles – new championship best

1	P Kerrigan	Mostyn HS	Glamorgan	14.4
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previous best 14.8 or 14.3 (w/a) in 1969

2	JD (Jon) Owen	Friars, Bangor	Caernarvon	14.4
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4 x 100 metres relay – new championship best

previous best 45.8 (1969)

1	Glamorgan	45.5
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High Jump – new championship best

1	Ron Owen	Maesydderwen CS	Brecon & Radnor	1.78m
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previous best 1.76m (1965)

Discus (1 kg) - new championship best

1	Joe (JEM) Hughes	Friars, Bangor	Caernarvon	50.06m
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previous best 49.46m (1963)

Hammer (10lb) - new event best,

first time held

1	DA Jones	Denbigh HS	Denbighshire	38.08m
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Junior Boys

100 metres – new championship best

1	IH Roberts	Sir Hugh Owen	Caernarvon	11.7
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previous best 11.8 (or 11.7) (w/a) in 1969

2	A Edwards	Narbeth	Pembrokeshire	11.7
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200 metres – new championship best

1	Steve Kohut	Coleshill SM	Carmarthen	24.3
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previous best 24.8 or 24.4 (w/a) in 1969

2	IH Roberts	Sir Hugh Owen	Caernarvon	24.3
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3	D Bowden	Dynevor GS	Glamorgan	24.3
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800 metres – new championship best

previous best 2:09.7 (new event in 1969)

1	Tony Dyke	Bishop Gore	Glamorgan	2:08.0
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80 metres hurdles - new event best

1 A Robinson Llandrindod GS

4 x 100 metres relay – new championship best

1 Glamorgan 47.3

Long Jump – new championship best

1 Steve Kohut Coleshill SM

Shot - new championship best

1 Kevin Jones Maes Garmon

Hammer - new event best

1 WMJ Jones Queen Elizabeth GS

75 metres hurdles in 1969

Brecon & Radnor 12.1

previous best 48.4 (1969)

previous best 6.01m (1959)

Carmarthen 6.08m

previous best 14.26m (1966)

Flintshire 15.57m

first time held

Carmarthen 35.80m

Senior Girls

Discus – new championship best

1 Janet Beese St Julian's HS

previous best 33.70m (1966)

Monmouth 34.38m

Middle Girls

Discus – new championship best

1 Delyth Prothero Brecon GS

previous best 29.44m (1968)

Brecon & Radnor 30.02m

Javelin – new championship best

1 Margaret Rainbow Mynyddbach CS

previous best 32.66m (1967)

Glamorgan 34.11m

Junior Girls

800m – new event best

1 Anne Morris Cynffig CS

first time held

Glamorgan 2:30.9

75m Hurdles - new championship best

1 B Antrobus Elfed HS

previous best 12.7 (1969)

Flintshire 12.3

4 x 100 metres relay – new championship best

1 Glamorgan 51.9

previous best 52.4 (1969)

Shot – new championship best

1 Lyn Langdon Ysgol Gruffydd Jones

previous best 9.59 (1967)

Carmarthen 9.64m

Javelin – new championship best

1 Susan James Afon Taf HS

previous best 30.92m (1969)

Glamorgan 32.94m