

Tonbridge Athletic Club Chairmans Report 2025-26

I thought I had a fairly good understanding of the way TAC functions after 13 years as a member, however I have learned a lot more since taking over as chairman last February.

In June we had a visit from England Athletics where they revealed that TAC is the largest England athletics club in the country. Reflecting on how the club has grown to this stage, it is down to the hard work and vision that many people have contributed over the last 15 years. Being prepared to evolve / change systems and positively approach issues as they arise. This continues.

This year we are particularly aware of the need to have succession plans in place as a number of the core admin team get older together. With this in mind, we have been able to instigate the proposed payment system for coaches, officials and some committee members that was passed by members at the last AGM. Whilst the amounts we are able to pay are relatively small, we hope that it will encourage younger people to get involved. The uptake of these payment options is very close to what was projected when it was approved at the last AGM. With 56.25% of Coaches, Team managers and Committee officers eligible for payment claiming it. Please note the majority of the management committee are still volunteers. We must all thank those that have and continue to put in massive amounts of time away from the actual sport and the club is very grateful to them for running OUR club.

Challenges ahead are:

Introduction of the new age group categories

Staying in the National Athletic league premiership

Introducing more coaches and volunteers

Securing sponsorship to help fund travel costs for TAC teams, to reduce or even wipe out athlete contributions.

Achieving higher parent involvement

The Community share agreement under which Tonbridge and Malling Council and Tonbridge school shared the initial cost of building the track and TAC are priority user will be coming up for review and we have started to plan for potential issues re how much funding is likely to be available

Being new to the club and athletics is not a barrier to getting involved with the club. We will always welcome fresh input and being new is often the time to speak up, based on your experience as a new person to the club. I came through the parent pathway and still appreciate the confusion re all the different events etc. Competing and volunteering was the best way for me to learn and get known. We continue to need more officials and coaches. Please come forward to discuss how you can get

involved, regardless of whether you have very little or loads of knowledge and experience in athletics. We have roles for all of you.

The TAC Minibus use was cut short in September when the catalytic converter was stolen whilst parked at Tonbridge Sports centre. A frustrating repair process through the insurance resulted in a four month spell without being able to use it. However, we do now have a more secure place to park it and we have it back in action.

Communication to the members was something I wanted to improve and I hope that the introduction of the monthly newsletter is appreciated and read. It helps to ensure that all members are able to keep abreast of news throughout the club regarding performances, opportunities and facility issues.

We need to continue to diversify those involved to ensure there is club wide input, Luciana Anderson (Welfare Officer) has put in place a junior forum to hear what the younger athletes want from their club. Perhaps something similar for parents could be developed?

The Mid summer relays were a great success and grew from the previous year. A junior race and a corporate challenge will be added this year for Wednesday 24th June at Penshurst Place.

There were many athletic performance highlights both individual and as a club. These are listed below (apologies for not being able to list everyone). These encompass all age groups. It is particularly pleasing to see how the pyramid of junior team performances continues to contribute to wins at National Senior level. Promotion to the National Athletics League premiership for the first time tops out this pyramid and I hope will provide the ambition and inspiration for junior athletes to aspire to be part of.

Mark Pitcairn-Knowles
Chairman

XC / Road / Middle distance

January

Senior Men Kent Cross Country Champions

February

National Cross Country Championships – u20 men 1st, James Kingston 2nd senior men
UK Indoor Champs 800m 2nd Jack Higgins, 3000m 2nd James West, both selected for GB team for European Indoor Championships

March

UK Inter Counties Cross Country – Senior Men 2nd James Kingston
European Indoor 3000m – 5th James West, 800m Jack Higgins
Southern 12 Stage Road Relay – Men 1st

April

London Marathon – Cole Gibbens 2.16.52 TAC record

May

BUCS Championships – 800m 1st Ben Gardiner

Berlin Marathon – Verity Hopkins 2.33.31 (2nd fastest TAC)

Loughborough International – Rae Le Fay and Asha Root in England team. Lucy Tallon in GB u20 team

June

TAC host 2nd Penshurst Relays

July

English Schools Championships – steeplechase 2nd Rae Le Fay

Ben Gardiner represents GB at World University Games over 800m

England Championships – senior men steeplechase 3rd Lewis Mills, u20w 3rd Rae Le Fay

Jack Higgins sets TAC 800m record with 1.45.33

TAC retain UK Youth Development League u13/15 Premier Division South status

August

TAC win Southern Counties Veterans League Kent Division , Men and Women

TAC u17/20 team promoted in UK Youth Development League

TAC win National League Championship Division and promoted to Premier Division

September

James Kingston sets TAC Half Marathon record of 64.35 at Great North Run

TAC win Southern Counties Veterans League, Men and Women

October

TAC men 2nd at National Road Relay Championships

Verity Hopkins runs 71.43 at Valencia Half Marathon, 2nd fastest TAC ever

James Kingston represents England at Belgian Cross Country Meeting

November

TAC men win National Cross Country Relay Championships

Jack Higgins wins mile at GB trial for European Cross Country Championships

December

Jack Higgins wins relay bronze medal with GB team at European Cross Country Championships

Kent Veterans Cross Country Champs – team win for m60s. Ben Reynolds and Elle Baker win individual titles.

Verity Hopkins runs 2.31.19 at Valencia Marathon, 2nd fastest ever TAC.

TAC men and women win Kent Cross Country Leagues

TAC men win South of Thames Cross Country title. Alex Howard wins individual championship.

Ted Higgins wins Southern Indoor 3000m title and sets Lee Valley track record of 7.57.31

James Kingston sets TAC 5 miles record with 22.53.3 at Battersea

Ted Higgins sets TAC 5k road record with 13.37.1 at Battersea

Senior / U20 / U18 Track and Field

Lewis Church won heptathlon in Sweden in Feb 2025, with club record of 5831 points, included club record shot 15.67m..

2.07m high jump at Easter open

April 2025 39h Decastar meeting, Brescia, Italy, World Tour Decathlon won with 8067 points, first time over 8000 and first UK athlete to win the competition.

June 2025 50th Hypomeeting, Gotzis, Austria 13th with 8093 points

Ended 2025 as 13th overall on the World Combined Events Tour

Ranked 8th of all time in UK, only 9 UK athletes have broken 8000 points.

January 2026 won the National heptathlon championship, Sheffield by almost 400 points.

Potential Commonwealth selection for Glasgow this summer.

Stephen Simmons 7520points - British Decathlon bronze medalist, England indoor Heptathlon bronze medal. He has also been awarded the EA Alan Barlow Combined Events trophy, that goes to a multi event young athlete.

Toby Gwinnell - English schools Octathlon champion a year young! with a club record. 5443 points

Samuel Newton - England championship u20 champion with a new club record in the decathlon - A year young! 7061points

Asha Root - England representation at the Loughborough international - finishing 2nd in her 400m

Men's 400m battles - Henry Marshall, Kieran Eland + others all battling for 4x400m spots - a very dominant 4x400m squad at the NALS

Lucy Tallon - European u20 silver medal in relay and 200m + invited to the British futures programme.

Matilda Secker - England international Sweden for indoor pentathlon

Kieran Eland - indoor 400m record - faster than the outdoor one at the Keely classic 47.42

Junior Leagues

It was a solid season for the track and field U13's and U15's. In the YDL we had good results in each match resulting in retaining our status in the premier league for another season. Lots of participation in the Kent League too with some athletes trying new events for the first time. Overall we ended in 4th place as a club. Club records this season were broken by Lily- Elle Addy in 75m, 100m and 150m, Freddie Keem 150m and 200m and Florencia Munoz 75 m hurdles. Plus the relay team of Freddie Keem, Pierre Espirit-Tabiowo, Etienne Menard-Jones and Teddy Adkin breaking the club record multiple times resulting in being county champions and the number one ranked club team in the country at 51.10!

In the U15's Tiffany Oyewale represented Kent Schools in the Pentathlon and part of the winning team at the nationals. Also Osarode Oviawe came 2nd in the Hammer at the English Schools.