



REPORT: Ladies make up for lack of numbers with fighting spirit in opening UKWL fixture.

UK Women's League (JW, SW) - Division 2

Match 1 - Robin Park Arena, Wigan



Report by Robert Tan (Track & Field Manager)

Following an excellent season last year which saw Reading crowned as Division Three champions the fixture list was perhaps not kind to us for our opening fixture - a long trip to Wigan!

However, Reading AC ladies normally travel well and our ability to get out in numbers was part of the reason for our great success in last year's campaign. With popular and successful Team Manager Lee Richardson leaving us this summer Ladies' captain Shelley Bowen volunteered to put the team together and we were hopeful of a good turnout.

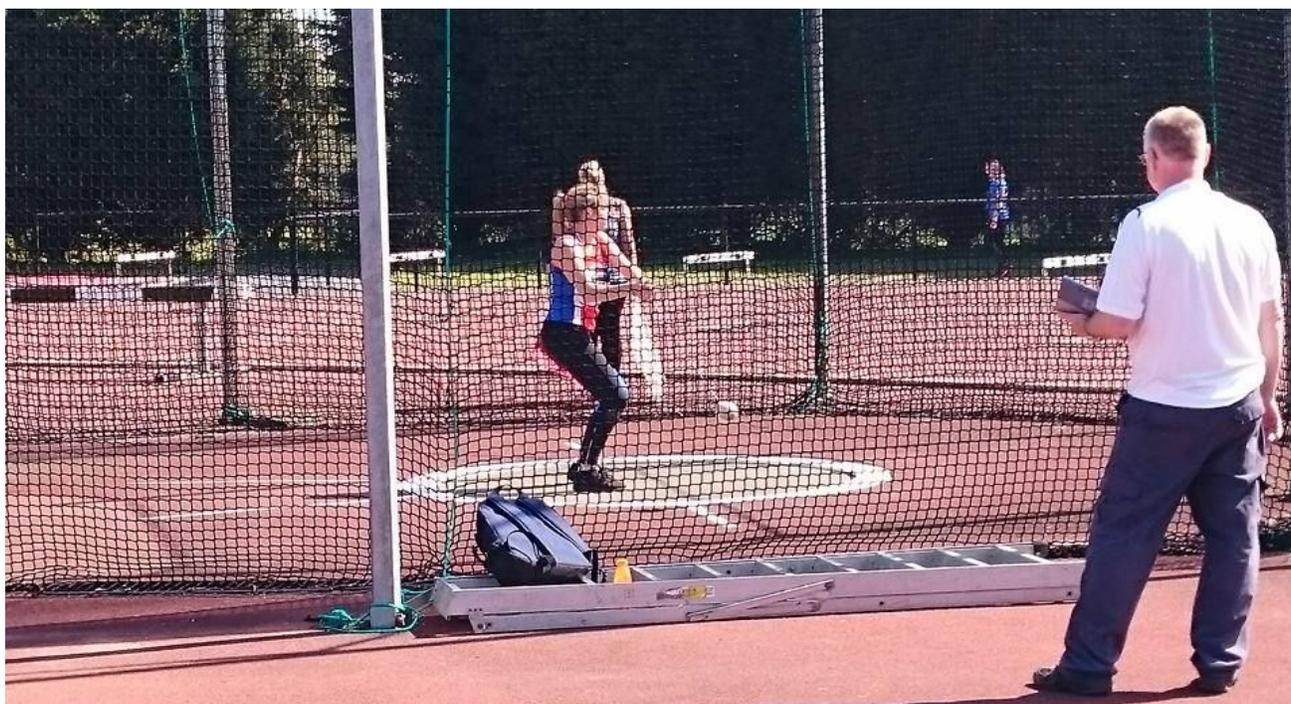
It was a disappointment then to have only nine athletes in total to travel for this match - despite Shelley's best efforts to rally the troops.

With such a low turnout our aim was to ensure that we covered 50% of the 36 events. Failure to do so would mean disqualification from the match, loss of our Division Two status and immediate ejection from the league. So the plan was quite simply to cover the necessary events and avoid picking up any injuries which might leave us unable to meet the 17-event target.

And so it was that our small group made their way up to Wigan on Saturday evening, in preparation for the match on Sunday.

With Shelley unable to travel up for the match Tim Richardson and Heidi Painting travelled up as team managers and Sarah Thomas and Alan Hatch accompanied the team to fulfil our required quota of four officials. Having been in Crawley for the BAL on Saturday I joined up with the team in Wigan on Sunday.

With this being a double match with Division Three there were a large number of athletes and spectators present - so it was a good atmosphere in the stadium and at points the cheers of a football crowd could also be heard from the DW Stadium next door where Wigan Athletic were taking on Leeds United. The weather was also very good, if a tad hot at times.



In action first were Chloe Zmuda (U20) and Julie Wilson (Vet) in the Hammer Throw. Both Chloe and Julie were competing with injuries, with Chloe carrying a leg issue and Julie with an arm injury - fortunately not her throwing arm! Despite this Chloe came 7th in the A-string and Julie 5th in the B-string, with throws of 21.01 and 19.57 respectively.

Up next was the Long Jump where Higher Claim athlete Caroline Parmenter represented us in the A-string, with Phoebe Thomas (U20) our B-string. Caroline came 6th with a jump of 4.63 and Phoebe was 8th with 3.68.

We then took a pass on 400m hurdles and our next event was the High Jump. Caroline again went out for us as our A-string joined by the returning Yvette White (U20) who hadn't competed for us for a while but answered the call at the eleventh hour and is eager to get involved again - welcome back Yvette! Caroline's 1.50m jump and Yvette's 1.45m gave us 7th and 5th places respectively.



Next up was the 800m with late addition to the squad Lynne Henderson-Nike (Vet) making her UK Women's League debut. Lynne picked up 7th place with 2.52 in an unfamiliar short distance!

Later in the afternoon Lynne would go on to run the 3000m coming 5th and picking up more valuable points for the team.

I know Lynne was a bit worried about being out of her depth in the UK Women's League but it just goes to show that it's always worth having a go. As our only distance runner on the day it was especially pleasing to see Lynne rewarded for her efforts with a solid points haul. Well done Lynne!

Meanwhile in the 100m we had Zara Bennett who is no stranger to the UK Women's League and she picked up a solid 4th place with 12.46. Zara followed up that performance later with another 4th place in the 200m with 25.78.

She was joined in the 100m by Phoebe Thomas, getting in another "warm up" event before her favoured event of Pole Vault later in the afternoon. Phoebe battled to 6th place with 13.55.



In the 200m Emily Glanville (U20) ran for our B-string, coming 7th with 30.61 - again Emily's favoured event is the Pole Vault and this was in fact her first ever 200m race.

In the discus Julie Wilson returned for the B-string taking 4th place with 26.31 and Caitlin Stacey (U20) took the same position in the A string with a throw of 37.49 for a new Personal Best.

At this point it's worth noting that Caitlin, Emily and Phoebe all travelled up to Norwich the previous week for our YDL match - which was also an overnigher. It really was great commitment from them to make a second long trip in as many weeks.

Triple Jump was unfortunately another pass, but following Lynne's 3000m (mentioned earlier) we had Caroline and Emily in the 100m hurdles. Caroline took 7th place with 17.17 and Emily was 4th in the B-string with 19.36.

At around this stage the standings were announced and whilst we were occupying last place in 8th we were actually not too far off of Havering in 7th.



We then had the Pole Vault where Emily and Phoebe would hit marks of 2.90 and 2.70 respectively. This would give Emily 3rd place in the A-string and Phoebe 2nd place on countback in the B-string. Both girls have cleared three metres and the exertions of their other events certainly won't have helped them here, but between them they still managed to take an impressive points haul.

Up next was Javelin where Chloe went A-string, joined by Yvette for the B. Chloe came 7th with 27.51 and Yvette was 6th with 19.27.



It was some time around this point that the standings were announced and we had jumped above Havering to 7th place, but with simply not enough athletes and restrictions on the numbers of events each could take part in we took another pass in the 400m and 1500m.

At this point the Track & Field Manager did say "If we don't come last I will buy everyone a meal on the way home!" - and at that point it certainly did seem like we had a chance of doing so.

Following the 200m mentioned earlier we had our final effort in the field with the Shot Put where Caitlin and Julie both picked up an extra point each with throws of 8.32 and 7.59.

Our final roll of the dice would be the 4x100m with Phoebe, Emily, Caroline and Zara bringing the baton round in 7th place, just short of 6th - but crucially ahead of Havering - by less than a second.



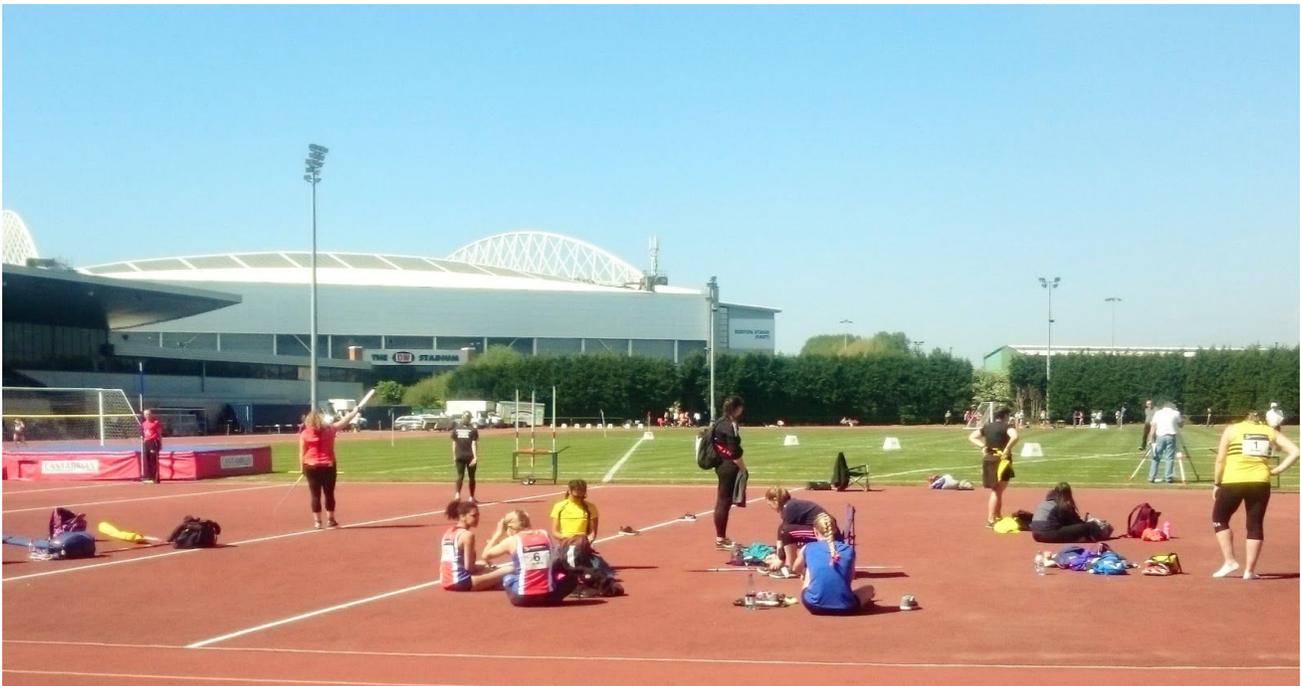
With all our athletes now shattered, the prospect of a long drive home and not many left to choose from due each athlete only being allowed to compete in a maximum of three events plus one relay we decided that it was time to call it a day and so we did not contest the 4x400 relay and prepared for the journey home.

By the time we packed up and took our team photo the final results were being announced over the PA system and we had indeed slipped to last place with Havering a full twenty points clear.

Having occupied 7th place at times during the day it was of course disappointing to finish last but no-one could say that the group had not given their best and we were still really proud of what they had achieved together.

Most importantly the club would remain in the competition and we would now have the opportunity to try to get strong teams out for our trips to Stevenage and Trafford to fight for the Division Two status that our ladies fought so hard for the previous year.

However, there was a twist in the tale...



The next day when the results were published there were some notable omissions...

We were missing both our Pole Vault results and we were also short on our bonus points for officials, having taken a full team of four as required by this particular league.

With the omissions corrected and the points adjusted we went from being twenty points behind Havering to four points ahead. What a reward for all our ladies' and officials' efforts!

That extra league point could be invaluable at the end of the season. It just goes to show that each and every person's contribution can make such a big difference to the outcome of a match.

Well done and thank you once again to all those that made the long trip, covered the events and kept us in the competition. Now let's get out in force for the next match and show the rest of the league why Reading AC were Division Three Champions last year!!

Thanks also to our officials and to Shelley for all her efforts in putting together the team.



(L-R: Heidi Painting, Julie Wilson, Lynne Henderson-Nike, Alan Hatch, Yvette White, Caroline Parmenter, Robert Tan, Chloe Zmuda, Zara Bennett, Phoebe Thomas, Emily Glanville, Sarah Thomas, Tim Richardson; not pictured: Caitlin Stacey)

DETAILS FOR THE REMAINING MATCHES:

Sunday 4th June, Ridlins Park, Stevenage

(hosted by Herts Phoenix)

Sunday 16th July, Leigh Sports Village

(hosted by Sale Harriers, Manchester)

(travelling up on Saturday 15th)
