

34th British and Irish Masters Cross Country International

Saturday 11th November 2023

Tolcross Park, Glasgow.

Having missed the BIMCCI for the last 3 years, two because of you-know-what and one because of injury, I was pretty excited to qualify in Derby last month to compete for England in the 2023 event at Tolcross Park in Glasgow. Better still, good friend and increasingly formidable athlete Fiona Jeffries was selected as reserve in the W55 age group giving her her first England vest for the open race which follows the Masters age group races.

The Home International is a great chance to join the best of Britain in a sport that demonstrates the raw strength, speed and power of the best Masters (35+) athletes of the day so to be selected was a thrill for both of us and I believe we represented the whole of Sheffield at the event.

Tolcross Park is a pretty, undulating park on the north east of the city. The day dawned frosty and cold with little wind and a cloudless sky. By the start of the five races the sun shone, the frost had all but gone and the piper was in place to call us to order for a minute's silence for Armistice Day.

My race was the first of the day, women and men 65+. The green, blue, red and white vests of the home nations lined up across a broad space on the lower field. An absence of mud, rain and howling winds made it feel decidedly un-cross country like. Someone joked that it felt like cheating to be running in sunny warm conditions in the middle of November in Scotland.

The course is less daunting than Norfolk Park or Longley Park but still packed a fair bit of elevation in the 2k course with two notable hills and a series of zig zags in the middle. Women and men over 65 ran 6k over 3 laps and men 35-64 8k over 4 laps. Although I still balk at the gender inequality I'm generally pretty relieved to stagger over the line after three laps in a challenging off road race and admire those who push themselves to the limit in four before collapsing, retching in agony at the funnel. Am I selling this?

My team of four included the remarkable Yuko Gordon, Olympic marathon runner who set a personal best of 2:38:32 hours in 1987 and broke the W60 world record in 2019 with 3:19:37 at age 68. I was very lucky to have her, Maggie Statham-Berry and Jane Georghiou with Margaret Thompson also a champion marathoner from the 1970's as reserve.

We ran our best and gave every bit of ourselves in that race. I managed to overtake champion W70 Anne White, Scotland, (28.11mins) briefly before she changed gear and left me panting behind. In the final lap Margaret Glavey, Ireland, (28.17) sped past leaving me trying to hold off Eileen Kenny, Ireland (28.25 mins) for 3rd place. Eileen my rival and friend came through valiantly and pipped me with her chest right on the line, apologising for demoting me to fourth in a nanosecond. Notably only 16 seconds separated the first four W70 runners which means we have everything to fight for next time we meet. I had done my best 6k time of the year in 28.25 mins and was first for England. I couldn't have done more. England W70 earned the team bronze after Ireland, gold and Scotland, silver.

Fiona, making her debut for England ran the Open race later in the day and came in first in her age group and ninth of twenty four women overall in 26.09 minutes, a promotion to 34th British and Irish Masters Cross Country International

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Fiona, making her debut for England ran the Open race later in the day and came in first in her age group and ninth of twenty four women overall in 26.09 minutes, a promising start to her international career.

Final overall team scores: 1st England (72 points), 2nd Ireland (63 points), 3rd Scotland (62 points), 4th Northern Ireland (28 points) and 5th Wales (20 points).

England won the overall event and Ireland won the womens title for 2023.

Full Results can be found on www.bmaf.opentrack.run

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