

Iffley Miles 2013 and BMC 50th Anniversary Nike Grand Prix

Saturday 20th July 2013, Iffley Road, Oxford

OUCCC helped host a high profile athletics meeting at Iffley Road track on Saturday which culminated in not one but two sub-4 minute miles being ran.

The British Milers' Club (BMC) Nike Grand Prix attracted athletes from as far afield as Australia, Canada, Kenya and the Caribbean though perhaps the biggest name in attendance was Britain's very own Nicola Sanders, a former world silver medallist over 400m.

The meeting saw a variety of distances from 600m to 5000m contested, and the centrepiece was the elite mile races.

The stadium fell silent as the highly anticipated men's elite mile got underway. The athletes did the first two laps on target in two minutes exactly, but a sub-four clocking was by no means certain when the field slowed and got to the three lap point at 3:01. Richard Peters then pulled out all the stops and ran a blistering last lap to win in 3:58.70, half a second faster than Sir Roger Bannister's record-breaking run 59 years ago. He was pushed all the way by Jonny Mellor, who ran 3:58.76. Third placed Steve Mitchell was agonisingly close to four minutes in 4:00.49. Peters' run was the fastest at Iffley Road in nine years, and it was only the second time in history that two athletes have broken four minutes at Iffley in the same race.

The women's mile race was won by Blackburn's Alison Leonard in 4:42.39, with cross country international Stevie Stockton close behind in 4:43.59. Leonard's Birmingham university team-mate Sarah McDonald took third place. All the elite women ran under 5 minutes, a mark that not a single woman had achieved at the time of Bannister's run in 1954.

A pair of invitational mile races for some of the UK's most talented under-17 athletes, named after famous British coaches Peter Coe and Frank Horwill, was won by George Elliott of Chelmsford and Sophie Tooley of West Suffolk respectively. Sophie's performance was particularly remarkable considering that she is still an under-15 athlete competing with girls two years older.

Other noteworthy performances included 50-year-old Belgrave Harrier Mike Trees setting a new British Record as he destroyed Guy Bracken's M50 best of 4:37 with a 4:32.05 performance. Surrey schoolboy Tom Holden ran 4:15.79 to break his county's under-17 mile record, which had stood for 49 years and 314 days, and Keith Gerrard bettered the Isle of Mann mile record by two seconds, running 4:08.23.

Lee Riley, an ex-marine and one time holder of every world record from 400m to the marathon for running whilst carrying a 40lb backpack, was a frustrating half a second shy of his own world record of 5:17.7.

A series of open mile races were held beforehand and proved popular with local athletes and Oxfordshire school competitors.

The warm sunshine was favourable for 800m running and Kenya's Abraham Kiplagat just saw off a strong challenge from Windsor's Rory Graham-Watson in the A race, in 1:49.59 to 1:49.68. Graham-Watson, 23, should take heart from being so close to Kiplagat, who won bronze at the Commonwealth Games in 2010.

The women's 800m A race was a high-class affair. Brit Shelayna Oskan-Clarke, who took bronze at last week's UK Championships in Birmingham, again finished third, this time behind Canada's Diane Cummins (2:03.6) and American Chanelle Price. 400m star Nicola Sanders struggled over the longer distance of two laps and finished eighth in 2:05.8, still a credible performance for a one-lap specialist.

The longer distances saw local interests aroused as Oxford man Steven Naylor took on former university student Dave Bruce. The men battled hard in heat that, whilst beneficial for shorter races, can prove strength-sapping over a 12.5 lap race. Naylor came out top in the Oxford battle, finishing ninth to Bruce's 12th in a race won by Kent's Nicholas Torry in a personal best time of 14:18.38.

The women's 5000m had attracted considerable attention beforehand. An international field saw former European Cross Country Champion and 5000m bronze medallist Jessica Augusto toeing the line alongside Spanish and Swiss athletes as well as English competitors. In the event Judit Pla of Spain took the win, in a solo front-run of 15:42.80. Scot Emily Steward, who has competed for Great Britain and took silver in the National Championships in the steeplechase event this year, managed to push Switzerland's Valérie Lehmann into third place.

The event was co-hosted by Oxford University Athletics/Cross Country Club, Oxfordshire Athletics Association and the British Milers' Club. The meeting also marked the 50th Anniversary of the BMC's founding in 1963. The BMC has been credited with leading the revival of British middle-distance running in the early 1980s. Coe, Ovett and Cram all competed in BMC races as youngsters, as have the vast majority of the current crop of British internationals.

Meeting organiser Chris McGurk commented,

"We are very pleased to have been able to attract so many high quality athletes to Iffley Road track. We hope that today's results will go some way towards establishing Oxford as a prime venue for athletics meetings in the future."

The meeting is only in its third year, but with its ever-increasing popularity the organisers plan to make it into annual fixture.

37 races were held altogether, and full results can be found in the results section of the British Milers' Club website, <http://www.britishmilersclub.com>.