



English Schools Championships Birmingham 12th & 13th July 2024

There were three individual medals and a club record for Havering's six representatives at the English Schools Championships in the Birmingham Commonwealth Games Stadium with the two of the medallists adding relay podium places.

Ruby Tillson has been in superb form this season, having won the South of England title and having twice improved her club Under 20 and senior high jump record, and she was a strong favourite to add English Schools senior high jump gold to her intermediate silver last year. Ruby did not disappoint and led throughout, with first time clearances at 1.66m, 1.69m, 1.72m and 1.75m, which gave her the edge over Hampshire's Mia Judd who had an earlier failure before her 1.75m clearance equalled her personal best. The bar was raised to 1.78m, which was higher than either of them had cleared before, and both failed at the first time of asking before Ruby's superb second time clearance set a new PB and club Under 20 and senior record, to win her gold as Mia was unable to go clear. Ruby now returns to the Birmingham venue next Sunday and hopes to add an England Athletics medal to her collection.

Joel Ajayi was another athlete who travelled to Birmingham as a hot favourite for Intermediate 100m. Joel also delivered on the national stage, improving through the rounds with a heat win in 10.82s and semifinal victory of 10.75s, winning the 100m title by a huge 0.4 seconds margin with his 10.61m clocking into a headwind as his challengers were unable reproduce their sub-11 seconds times from the early rounds. Joel now steps up to compete for the GB team in his 100m speciality at the European Under 18 Championships in Slovakia where he faces a heat and possible semifinal on Thursday afternoon and evening, and - if he qualifies - the final on Friday evening.

Steph Okoro travelled to Birmingham as the defending champion in the senior 400m hurdles, but injuries and A level studies had affected her season to date and Surrey's Arabella Wilson topped top of the UK Under 20 rankings. Both athletes won their heats on Friday afternoon and lined up for the final on Saturday morning where Steph made all the early running until Arabella overhauled her round the second bend. But Steph did not give up her title easily and her strong finish pushed Arabella all the way to the line as Steph set a season best of 59.79s while the Surrey athlete improved her best to 59.06s, with the others adrift. Both will again lock horns at the England Athletics Under 20 Championships in the same stadium this weekend.

The medal tally was enhanced as Ruby and Steph combined with hurdler Jodie Self and 200m sprinter Callia Downey for silvers in the 4x100m relay.

Alicia Fairmaner had been in good form coming into the championships and had equalled the club long jump record dating from 2004 which put her among the medal contenders in a closely matched field in the intermediate long jump. A second-round leap of 5.52m saw Alicia among the potential medallists and although she registered some big no jumps, which might have secured her a medal had she been on the board, it was not to be and she had to settle for sixth place overall in a close contest which saw just 14 centimetres covering second to sixth places.

Freddie Rowe had also been in good form this summer and had opted for the 3000m. A strong run in his heat on Friday saw him clock a new season best and his second fastest time ever of 8m 43.60s, to qualify for Saturday's final where he placed ninth in a time of 8m 51.05s.

The sixth club competitor was Findlay McLaren, last year's junior 800m champion, who had improved his 800m best to achieve the national standard, too late for selection. He received a late call up from the selectors on Wednesday to fill a gap in the Intermediate 400m caused by a withdrawal and he made the trip worthwhile by clocking a new PB of 51.57s in his heat.



