

## **BEAGLES QUALIFY FOR EUROPE - AGAIN!**

The most outstanding year in the long history of the club was completed with another victory, as our men's cross country team secured the British entry in the European Club's Cross Country Championships, which will be held in Bilbao on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2010. The run-off to decide the top British cross country club formed part of the European Cross Country Trials at Sefton Park, Liverpool on Saturday. Most of the top British cross country runners were there seeking selection for Britain in Dublin in two week's time, as well as the national club champions from Wales (Swansea Harriers), Scotland (Shettleston Harriers), and Beagles.

This was no run of the mill qualification for Beagles as Glasgow based Shettleston gave our guys their toughest examination of the year. Indeed, we needed super performances from our four scorers to prevail. It was competitive sport at its very best, and certainly one of the greatest performances ever by a Beagles team.

With Mo Farah already pre-selected for Dublin, we travelled to Liverpool with six runners, knowing that the top four only would score in a triangular match with Swansea and Shettleston. The six to travel were Moumin Geele, Kairn Stone, Sam Farah, Nathan Riding, Lee Merrien and Rory Chesser. The Scottish champions received a windfall 18 months ago, with the arrival of four Eritrean asylum seekers. They're all excellent runners and Shettleston have wisely assimilated them into their ranks and headed south of the border at every opportunity to test themselves against the best teams in Britain. All four - Tewelde, Mengisteab, Hagos and Woldemichael - were present on Saturday, with good standard back up. Swansea took pride in taking their chance as well, though their team looked less likely to cause a problem to us - at least on paper.

Sefton Park was part waterlogged and part bog with a deep leaf cover, and the weather on the day was cold but dry. The course comprised of one small lap and three large laps - 9.8km in distance. Our main chance of individual success lay with Moumin in his first race since mid October. Somali TV were on hand to record the race and to carry out pre-race interviews with Moumin and Mr Rob.

After the first small lap, our worries were confirmed with Moumin and Lee in the leading group of 15, with all four of Shettleston's Eritreans. We were in trouble, but after the first long lap, things were much tighter as Hagos had peeled off the back of the leading group to be caught by Rory. Moumin and Lee were in the hunt at the front of the field. Further back, Kairn had started sensibly, but Sam was struggling to come to terms with the conditions underfoot.

Most spectators were concentrating on the chase for individual honours amongst Britain's finest, but a serious race within a race was being played out, with the Shettleston lads being receiving copious amounts of support from around the course. Mr Rob was desperately trying to keep tabs on a rapidly changing team score, but with one lap to go we had our noses in front as Woldemichael began to slip back and Rory made ground. This was Rory's second race in Beagles colours, having fractured an elbow on the eve of

the national 6 stage road relays. One week previously he had finished 28<sup>th</sup> in the Irish trials, but a week is a long time for a decent athlete returning to form, and he was now turning the screw in our favour. Behind him Kairn had pulled in Hagos and was running a blinder.

So to the finish; Moumin made his bid for individual glory with 600 metres to go, dropping Wicks, Vernon, Tewelde and Whitby in the process. But Mike Skinner refused to let go, and grabbed a one second win in one of the tightest finishes imaginable. With Moumin second, and Shettleston's Tewelde 6<sup>th</sup>, we looked to Lee Merrien next. This is tempting fate, but when Lee turns out for Beagles, we win. He was disappointed to just miss out on a place in Dublin for Britain, but 9<sup>th</sup> was a good run and, most importantly from the team's point of view, he'd beaten Mengisteab by one place. Next home was Rory (26<sup>th</sup>), catching Woldemichael with 80 metres to go to take us close to our goal. Finally, Kairn closed the door on the gallant Shettleston team with a fine 48<sup>th</sup>, despite a fall on the last lap. Sam finished 88<sup>th</sup>, and Nathan ran nicely for 133<sup>rd</sup>.

It really couldn't have been much closer. Full marks to all at Shettleston - they must have been disappointed to miss out, but they were very sporting and dignified at the end, and we look forward to competing against them in the future. All that was left was a happy journey home, interspersed by Moumin's club record for pit stops on the way home from a race - he'd been drug tested after the race; it took a long time; he had to drink a lot to pee...once he started, he couldn't stop. Shame that Somali TV weren't on hand to see some of his sprints to the loos at the various motorway services we visited.