**NICHOLA & BILLY CROWNED 2023 UKA FELL CHAMPIONS AT SEDBERGH**

**Race Report/Championship Round-up**

**Sedbergh Hills:** 20th August 2023

**Distance:** 22.5 km; **Climb:** 1,830 metres

Sedbergh hosted the fourth and final race in the 2023 UK Athletics Hill and Fell Running Championships. Despite being one of the shorter ‘long’ races, running in the Howgills can pose serious challenges particularly when the weather/visibility is poor. For this reason, it was likely that many of the runners were checking the weather forecast (rain showers and gusty wind) in the days before the race.

In recent years, the last race has been an anti-climax because it has been the second race at a particular distance and many medal positions have already been settled. However, this year all runners who were in search of a medal had to be on the start line. Even those who had been victorious in the previous three races, Nichola Jackson (Keswick), Mel Price (Mercia) and Steven Hebblethwaite (Keswick) still needed to put in an excellent performance to win their championship category as their rivals, Sara Willhoit (Mercia), Lou Osborn (Ambleside) and Rob Jebb (Helm Hill) respectively were ready to pounce if they were not on top form.

Over 350 runners started the race, no doubt many of these being relieved that the visibility was good, and they would not need navigational skills. Most of the medal contenders were on the start line, notable absentees being, Sara Willhoit (Mercia), who would be as running in the Challenge Stellina in Italy the following weekend, as well as Chris Richards (Helm Hill) and under 23s, Finlay Grant (Dark Peak) and Eve Pannone (Eden).

At the first checkpoint (Arant Haw), which was shrouded in mist, the leader of the Male championship, Billy Cartwright (Matlock) was in a leading group of four, which also included Brennan Townshend (Keswick), Chris Holdsworth (Clayton-le-Moors), and Grant Cunliffe (Rossendale) with Billy’s club mate, Daniel Haworth striving to stay in touch. Tim Lamont (Helm Hill) and Ben Rothery (Ilkley) were less than twenty seconds adrift. Three minutes later, Nichola Jackson was the leading female runner over Arant Haw, a minute ahead of her five nearest rivals, Catherine Taylor, and Lizzie Browne (both Black Combe), Rose Mather (York Knavesmire) and the two leading F40s, Sharon Taylor and Vic Wilkinson (Ilkley).

By Castley Knott, Tim and Ben had closed the gap with the leading seven runners being separated by fifteen seconds whilst Nicola had extended her lead over Catherine to nearly two minutes who in turn was nearly a minute ahead of Rose. Sharon was ten seconds behind Rose and a few seconds ahead of Vic.

Checkpoint three, Black Force saw a group of four, Billy, Daniel , Grant, and Brennan, nearly twenty seconds ahead of Ben whilst Chris and Tim were a minute in arrears. The gap between Nichola and Catherine stayed the same, but Rose had lost another minute with Sharon and Vic around forty seconds further back.

Billy and Brennan were locked together through the next three checkpoints, Bowderdale, Calf and Winder but gaps to the chasers started to appear particularly between Bowderdale and Calf, where the visibility had improved and Daniel, Grant and Ben were over a minute behind the two leaders; Ben did the fastest split between Calf and Winder, taking back twenty second on the leaders and opening a gap of over a minute from Daniel and Grant. Meanwhile, with fastest splits on the two sections between Bowderdale and Winder, Catherine caught Nichola whilst Sharon took over two minutes out of Vic between Calf and Winder thus ensuring victory in the F40 category. However, the race for first male and female came down to the descent off Winder and along the road to the finish. Billy recorded the fastest spilt to finish the race in 2:04:23, nineteen seconds ahead of Brennan with Ben Rothery in third place just over a minute further back. Nichola had the fastest split of the female runners, finishing in 51st place overall in 2:28:04 just over a minute ahead of Catherine; Rose was third in 2:33:42.

These results meant that Nichola, ten years after the first of her three under 23 titles, with victories in all four championship races and Billy with two victories were the 2023 UKA Hill & Fell Running Champions. Silver medals went to F40 Sharon Taylor who was the fourth female finisher and Ben Sharrock (Ambleside) who finished in seventh place and was first M23. Two places behind Ben in the race and one point behind overall was his club mate, Matthew Elkington who therefore had to settle for the bronze. The battle amongst the tenth, eleventh and twelfth female finishers for the bronze was even closer with the tenth place for F50, Lou Osborn (Ambleside) giving her a total of sixty points for the season, which was just one point behind eleventh placed, Sarah Hodgson (Carnethy) and F50, Mel Price (Mercia) in twelfth who each receive a bronze medal.

Edward Corden (Dark Peak) was second M23 in twelfth place followed by Lewis Bowness (Helm Hill) in 21st; Ben Sharrock with two victories won the M23 title with Alex Mason (Dark Peak) taking silver and Nicholas Peat (Helm Hill), the bronze. Alice Gamble (Sheffield University) was the only F23 finisher and was the F23 champion.

Leading M40 in tenth place was Rob Jebb (Helm Hill) ahead of Steven Hebblethwaite (Keswick) and Andrew Fallas (Carnethy); Rob, who had previously won three M40 championships, had to settle for second place behind Steven whilst Andrew took bronze. Although unable to hold on to Sharon Taylor, Vic Wilkinson was second F40, followed by leading F50s, Lou Osborn and Mel Price. Sharon, the 2021 F40 champion, regained the title ahead of two time champion (2015 and 2018), Mel, and Lou, who has won the F40 title on three occasions (2016, 2017 and 2022). Sara Hodgson (Keswick) was third F50 behind Lou and Mel, closely followed by Rhian Probert (Mynydd Du). Mel took the F50 championship by one point from Lou, the 2022 champion, with Rhian Probert in third place.

Gavin Mulholland (Calder Valley) was first M50, over four minutes ahead of Kenny Richmond (Helm Hill), with Gavin’s close friend and club mate, Karl Gray, four minutes further back. Karl, who had led the M50 championship throughout the season, retained the M50 title, two points ahead of Kenny Richmond (Helm Hill), with another Calder Valley runner, Shaun Godsman, third. Dave Prosser (Keswick) was first M60 ahead of Colin Donnelly (Cambuslang) and Paul Cornforth (Ambleside). Colin added the M60 title to his six earlier British titles with Paul Cornforth taking silver and the bronze going to David Griffin (Helm Hill), one point ahead of Adrian Davis (Lomond Hill Runners).

Keswick, with five finishers in the top twenty won their sixth consecutive Male team title. Helm Hill’s second place guaranteed the silver medals whilst a fourth place finish for Dark Peak was sufficient for them to take the bronze medals, ahead of third-placed, Ambleside. Helm Hill and Calder Valley filled the first two places in both the M40 and M50 teams with Keswick third M40 team and Dark Peak third in the M50s. First place for Helm Hill in the M40s gave them the gold medals with Calder Valley taking silver whilst the positions were reversed in the M50s in which Calder Valley took their third consecutive title.

The leading Female team was Black Combe followed by Dark Peak and Helm Hill. After strong performances at the Meall an t-Suidhe and Maesgwm Detour races, fifth placed Mercia took the gold medals, whilst the silver medals went to sixth placed Carnethy, ahead of Helm Hill. Carnethy and Helm Hill had equal points, but the Scottish club had a lower aggregate score than the English club. Mercia made it three wins out of three to take gold in the F40s, Dark Peak took second place ahead of Helm Hill; both teams had equal points, but Dark Peak’s final counter finished ahead of Helm Hill’s third finisher, Helm Hill took silver medals in the M40 championship. Only two teams completed at least three races, one at each distance, to be ranked in the W40, M40 and M50 championships so bronze medals were not awarded in these categories.

*On behalf of the British Athletics Mountain Running Advisory Group Sub-Committee (MRAG), I would like to thank Vic Wilkinson and her team for hosting the championship race and their excellent organisation on the day.*