

Touch of magic conjures fourth Trotters victory

Naylor and Hallowe'en wands light the way

DOUG GILLON

IN typically eccentric style, with each of their team carrying a Hallowe'en magic wand in lieu of a baton, Hunters Bog Trotters cast a spell over rivals to conjure a dramatic win in the 36th Allan Scally road relay.

Just seven seconds covered the first three at the start of the final stage of the 4x4.8-mile odyssey through Glasgow's east end, but Don Naylor had pulled the Edinburgh club 22 seconds clear as he finished in 1hr 35min 43sec. Ronhill Cambuslang, two seconds down at the final changeover, were second in 1:36.05, with Shettleston, the hosts, third in 1:37.05.

The novelty wands boasted flashing lights, and at the touch of a button delivered an electronic swooshing noise. Welsh internationalist Naylor was delighted by his club's magical third victory in four years, and only their fourth ever.

Steve Cairns, an Irish internationalist, had come off police duty in the Borders at 3am, but was still alert enough to lead the Boggies home on stage one. Dave Wright surrendered one place as Cambuslang's Jamie Reid briefly gave the Lanarkshire men a 10-second lead, but Al Hart and Naylor were more than equal to the challenge.

Shettleston had hoped to crown their centenary celebra-

tions, but having been seventh, 77 seconds down after the opening leg, did well to put themselves back in the frame.

Seventy-five teams started, healthier than in recent years, no doubt influenced by sponsorship from Watt's, the Glasgow drapers, whose club connection is Allan Watt, a member of Britain's Olympic sprint relay squad 56 years ago.

Despite benign conditions, the winning time was the third slowest ever. Last year's was the slowest, after the first, in 1969.

It will take potent sorcery to reverse declining standards which this race, with its unchanged course, is uniquely positioned to chart.

When Shettleston set the record of 89.18, all four of their team clocked 22.30 or better. None of the winning Trotter quartet managed that. Indeed the fastest this year was "AC" Muir, who helped Edinburgh University to the Scottish Universities' title, clocking 22.59.

Given Nat Muir's course record (21.26, in 1985), this is modest. Muir has five of the six fastest times, and 22.30 or better has been logged 83 times. Yet only two runners (Glen Stewart and Tom Hanlon) have done so in the past six years.

Muir, a 31-year-old business management lecturer, entertains Commonwealth marathon ambitions for 2006, and

seems capable of achieving the Melbourne standard (2:17), but is disappointed at lack of dialogue over ways of achieving it between January 1 and September 30 next year.

"Given that marathoners tend to race the distance just twice a year, it seemed reasonable to include this autumn's marathon season, with the proviso of showing form next year, closer to the event," he said.

This would match current Olympic, IAAF, and UK policy. With Geoff Wightman and Liz McColgan both international marathoners, and respectively chief executive and president of Scottish athletics, he expected a sympathetic hearing. Yet neither they nor the Commonwealth Games Council seem prepared to discuss the matter.

Two years ago, after having won the British inter-area 10k title, Muir says he sought advice on the 2006 Games from the Scottish performance director, without success. "I'm not asking for financial resources, just some direction and dialogue."

If weather conditions are bad on race day, a marathoner can't race the next week, whereas a sprinter can. Jumpers and throwers, in a modest 10-consecutive annual programme would have six attempts at each, 60 chances to qualify.

Results, Digest, below

DIGEST

ATHLETICS

Allan Scally Memorial 4x4.8-mile relay, Shettleston

1 Hunters Bog Trotters (S Cairns 23.27, D Wright 24.38, A Hart 23.50, D Naylor 23.48) 1hr 35min 43sec; 2 Ronhill Cambuslang (R Gilroy 23.46, J Reid 24.09, J Brown 24.03, C Thomson 24.07) 1:36.05; 3 Shettleston Harriers (S Gibson 24.44, W Coyle 23.51, R Montgomery 23.27, M Graham 25.03) 1:37.05; 4 Arbroath 1:40.36; 5 Edinburgh Uni 1:41.62 (Scottish Universities' champions).
Veterans: 1 Shettleston (P Carten 26.17, D Crowe 25.44, A Little 24.42, D Williams 26.40) 1:43.23; 2 Cambuslang 1:45.25; 3 Giffnock North 1:54.30.
Fastest lap: 1 AC Muir (Edin Univ) 22.59; 2 A Adams (Clydesdale) 23.15; 3 Cairns & Montgomery 23.27; 5 Gilroy 23.46.

Women 1 City of Glasgow (J Thomson 28.26, S Kettlewell 29.13, C McCracken 27.55) 1:25.34; 2 Bellahouston RR (S Stewart 33.39, A Smeaton 31.18, D Ferns 29.42) 1:34.39; 3 Aberdeen Uni (J Thomson 30.07, E Stuart 29.38, N MacGowan 35.52) 1:35.37 (Scottish Universities' champions).
Fastest laps: 1 McCracken 27.55; 2 Thomson

BASKETBALL

McIntosh to the fore as Rocks roll into semis

Steve Swanson, the Scottish Rocks coach maintained his love affair with the BBL Cup last night as last season's beaten finalists booked a place in the last four of this year's competition by ousting Thames Valley Tigers 94-82 at

and Brighton into the hat for the draw for next month's semi-finals.

In the Scottish League, pacesetters Falkirk Fury extended their unbeaten start to the campaign to seven games with a hard-fought 104-87 victory at East Lothian Peregines to stay ahead of second placed Edinburgh. Honours in the Glasgow derby were taken by the Storm who beat rivals City 64-59 while Grampian Flyers gained their first top flight win by whipping Buddies 84-54.

ATHLETICS

Susan Partridge, having quit Spain to return to Scotland, boosted her European championship hopes with fourth at Saturday's Reebok Cross Challenge in Birmingham, writes Doug Gillon. The Commonwealth marathon contender is now seeking