

## 14 ATHLETICS

# It's a family affair as Hawkins claims gold

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IT may have taken 32 years, but the Hawkins family have finally completed the match set of Scottish cross-country championship gold medals. Derek Hawkins filled the gap in the trophy cabinet by taking the senior title at Falkirk on Saturday. At 21, he's the youngest winner since endurance legend Nat Muir claimed the first of a record eight senior golds in 1979.

On the day on which the iconic Muir, Scottish 5000m record-holder for the past 30 years, won that 1979 Scottish cross-country title, Derek's father, Robert, took the under-15 gold, and launched what has become a dynasty.

His sons, Derek, Callum, and Scott, have followed in their father's spike tracks, claiming gold in all the other age groups, capturing seven titles between them until finally, at Callendar Park, Derek ran off with the senior crown over a yielding 12,000m trail.

The Glasgow University sports science student had hoped to end Muir's reign as youngest champion last year, but any prospect was dashed when he fell in a ditch, and finished third.

This was the eldest son's fourth title. He took the under-15 gold in 2003 and 2004, and the under-20 in 2009; Scott won the under-13 title in 2003 and the under-17 in 2007; while Callum won the under-17 in 2009, and under-20 the next year.

The Stewarts-backed championships was a day of runaway victories, but lacking in down-to-the-wire finishes in which the sport revels. In 10 races, the narrowest winning margin was four seconds, and most were by 10 seconds or above.

Hawkins had 37 seconds to spare when he crossed the line ahead of Chris Mackay. Sharpened by an indoor 3000m victory the previous weekend, Inverclyde's Mackay held off defending champion Alistair Hay, bidding for a third successive senior crown, by the thickness of his singlet.

Despite his prodigy, Hawkins was almost lost to the sport. "Athletics took a back seat from time to time," Derek admits. "There was the idea that there is more to life than running – all your pals are out partying, so I stopped a good few times."

He got back on track when he joined Lawrie Spence's training group, and was in Britain's junior squad at the European championships in December. A sub-four-minute miler, Spence was multiple Scottish five and 10k champion in the 1980s, and is uniquely ranked in the Scottish all-time top 20 from the mile to the marathon, but his best in this race was silver.

"My aim is to prove that Scots can make it without going abroad, or down south," said Spence. "We're working towards the 10k for 2014, but I think the marathon will be Derek's best distance."

He also coaches 21-year-old dentistry student Elspeth Curran, runner-up for the women's title. The honours there went to Freya Murray



Freya Murray won her fifth title in six years yesterday. Picture: Steve Cox

for the fifth time in six years, by the widest margin of the day, 64 seconds.

Murray is now one victory short of the record six in 12 years, by Dundee's Chris Haskett-Price (1971-82).

Last year Murray won by 1min 44sec, the biggest ever, but this winter she has suffered a succession of injuries, and this was the first time she'd worn cross-country spikes since last year's world championships. "I'd like to think I can still qualify for this year's world cross," she said, delighted to put her problems behind her.

However, with stringent criteria in place, the 24-year-old Murray may have to finish in the first three at the trial in Birmingham on March 5 to book her place.

Despite fifth in the Commonwealth 10k final in Delhi Murray has no medical support from UK Athletics. "But Scottish athletics have given fantastic backing," she said.

Curran, in finishing second, claimed the Stewarts cross-country grand prix title and a £750 prize. The men's went to Hay, who ran the 1500m in Delhi, and put a brave face on defeat by Hawkins. Further

consolation was that he led his club, Central, to the senior title for the first time. "Derek was a worthy winner," said Hay.

There were also particularly noteworthy victories from Beth Potter (under-20 women), back to her best after a stress fracture which wrecked any hope of Delhi selection last year, and the prodigious Ahmed Hassan who defended the under-15 boys' title. Central also won the AT Mays Trophy for the best overall male club, while Victoria Park City of Glasgow took the female equivalent, the Pat Spence Memorial Trophy.

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