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2013 Denise Lewis Athletics Academy

Last week saw the 7th in the series of Performance Running athletics training camps for aspiring young athletes looking to emulate their 2012 Olympic hero's. It was held at the Hillingdon Sports and Leisure Complex, near Uxbridge and again had a dazzling array of international athletes and coaches putting the kids through their paces throughout the week including two former Commonwealth Games champion's; GB 4 x 400m relay international Adrian Patrick and 4 x 100m and individual sprint star Laura Turner.

Athletes aged 8 to 18, from beginners to junior internationals, were invited to attend the camp and after being a previous guest on the camp in 2011 we were very fortunate to have former Olympic heptathlon champion and a regular BBC sports pundit Denise Lewis OBE as our new patron.

We re-named the camp "The Denise Lewis Athletics Academy" and Denise gave a fascinating interview with the BBC's Paul Dickinson offering words of wisdom for the attending young athletes and stayed on to help coach some of the kid's throughout the afternoon as well as patiently posing for photos and autographs from all the admiring kid's as well as many of the parents and other coaches too!

(A DVD of the week's camp including the interview with Denise is available).



There were other talks during the week too, including Matt Furber on nutrition, motivational talks from the "Fix Up" team, sports injuries from Dr. Dominic Bostock as well as another fascinating interview with rising heptathlon star Morgan Lake, the new U17 National record holder for both the heptathlon and individual high jump.

The camp, which was also open to coaches and teachers, gave the athletes an opportunity to specialise in a particular event or they could try many events throughout the week, including sprints, middle-distance, jumps, throws, hurdles and even pole vault along with a separate multi-events group.

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It wasn't all work, though and the residential athletes attending this year's academy had some great evening entertainment too, including a trip to the cinema, bowling and even an amazing illusionist (Robert Fox) who entertained the kid's with some impressive table magic while they were eating and followed this up with a terrific magic show after.

On the Thursday we held the World Marathon Challenge; a spin off from the Save The Children World Marathon Challenge, where the kid's, running in a relay had to see if they could break the men's world half marathon record. We had 4 teams of around 30 kid's each running 200m long reps until they completed a half marathon or just over 104 x 200m! Tadese's record was a tough one at 58:23 for 13.1 miles which meant the kid's had to average just over 33 seconds per 200m, but the boys and girls gave it a go in extremely hot and humid conditions.



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All 4 teams ran inside Paula Radcliffe's women's world record and the winning (red) team not only beat Tadese's record running 57:29, but in doing so set a kid's half marathon relay world record themselves!



On the final day of the academy, athletes were able to pit themselves against each other in a "Mini Olympics" with trophies, supplied by Citroen in Slough being presented to both the best boy/girl and hardest working boy/girl in each group.



To round off the week there was a barbeque and an inflatable obstacle course race between the kids and coaches

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Esa Berqvist from the Swedish based sports clothing company Craft, not only supplied all the kit for both the coaches and T shirts for the kids, but has even gone on to support some of the individual athletes who have come from previous camps such as Shelayna Oskan-Clarke, 3rd in this year's senior National Championships over 800m in 2:03.59 and Rory Graham-Watson, 4th in this year's senior National Championships with a best time of 1:47.79. This year Craft have gone even further supporting marathon runner Samantha Amand, 3rd in the English Marathon Champs, as well as up and coming 1500m star Melissa Courtney, British university indoor and outdoor Champion and Jo Rowland currently (with Jess Ennis out of action due to injury) the UK's No.1 heptathlete all of whom have come back on the academy to coach and or help the kid's this year!

It was a truly fantastic week of athletics with state-of-the-art training facilities, international athletes and coaches, educational talks, superb evening entertainment, great prizes and of course our new patron Olympic Champion Denise Lewis OBE whose own daughter Lauryn also attended the academy.

Event organiser Rodger Hughes from Performance Running Ltd. said: "The aim of the academy is to try to attract people into the sport. I want to make it fun and exciting and with the London Olympics still fresh in the mind, we need to get as many kids interested in sport as possible as we may never have another opportunity like this to fire the imagination of children to the same degree. "Sport is so important on so many levels and I want to help as many young people as possible realise their potential, enjoy sport and make friends.



Rodger went on to say "this year's academy was our biggest and best yet with over 120 young athletes attending, with 54 of them opting to take advantage of the residential option and were coached by some of the best athletes and coaches in the UK". "We had kids from all over the country and even abroad this year too including 5 from Dubai, along with Jersey, Geneva, Italy, France and Spain". "We had athletes of all abilities and from all backgrounds, all of whom worked incredibly hard all week on the academy, but we cannot continue without the help and support of a major sponsor or sponsors so if anyone knows of a company or organisation who would love to work with us and support this great project, please get in touch".

"Lot's have been said about the Olympic legacy, well here's a great chance to get behind one and help even more kid's realise their potential".

FOR more information on the next athletics academy, please call Rodger Hughes 07734-731238 or email: rodger.hughes@performancerunning.co.uk

(Photos supplied by D.E. Photos)