

An English Champion by Paul Brannigan

There's a been a buzz about the club since that 3rd place in the CWR. Standing around at the Rugby Club after the CWR talk turned to winning the Pennine Bridleway Relay. In the weeks that followed talk has turned to winning the FRA English Championship Team Title.

To stand at the top of the tree and see all below you is an achievement that fills you with awe. You took a number of raw materials and created something that no-one else did – there is only one winner.

Todmorden Harriers has 3 national champions (that I know of) in Andrew Wrench, Sean Willis and myself. Three people who know that it takes a hell of a lot to win a national title.

The raw materials of a champion consist of:

Commitment

There are 6 races and 5 to count in each race. 1st team gets 12 points, 2nd team 9 points and 1 point less for each position down to 1 point in 10th.

If you are a counter in any race, and we win the title then YOU are an ENGLISH CHAMPION in the eyes of the running fraternity.

If you never count, but you put yourself in front of our rival's 5th runner then in the eyes of Todmorden Harriers YOU are an ENGLISH CHAMPION.

To win the English Championship we MUST have 10-12 of our best runners making a commitment NOW to run at least 5 of the 6 races. That commitment means you are on the start line without having to be asked the week before to run – the motivation must come from within yourself.

Luck

This is a major factor. Many things can go wrong and without luck they will.

Wasdale

We must have 8 of the 12 runners out at Wasdale.

Self-belief

I know what is like to lose out on a British and a Northern Championship by a stride length. I learnt a lot from those silver medals, the major things being the need for a balanced confidence (neither over or under) and to truly believe you can win it. Given the chance again, I'd go into those races with more confidence and win them, but second chances come rare. Todmorden Harriers chance is NOW – it is up to us whether we take the chance. Our self-belief began with the CWR and should increase after the Pennine Bridleway Relay. The first English Championship race will be our biggest opportunity to discover a true sense of belief that we can win it.

Experience

There's plenty of that within the club – 3 national champions and in George Erhardt an international. Combine that with the years of fell running experience in

much of the squad and all we have to do is to ensure that experience is shared with those with less experience.

Physical Ability

It's alright having it, which we have, but it's what you do with it that counts:

- When the opportunity to train comes along, ALWAYS train.
- Structure your training; a balance of hill reps, interval work, races and most important the recovery runs that enable you to perform the 1st three to your full potential.
- Listen to your body, when it says back off then BACK OFF.

Sacrifice

If you want to be an English Champion then you have to re-prioritise and find ways of making more room for your running. This must apply for the next 10 months. There will be times when you have to make yourself unpopular at home or at work. You may have to make more room in the day to make room for training. **You get nothing without sacrifice.**

Dislike

You need to develop a healthy dislike for your rivals, a desire to demoralise and demotivate them. A rival team member comes into view, you can't let yourself be beaten by a lesser club runner, you close them down, sit behind them for a while to recover. So that when you go past running smoothly and head held high you look great and you quickly create a demoralising gap.

Run as a Team

Commitment is the raw material that starts the ball rolling, but running as a team will keep the ball rolling. This means getting to the club 3 out of 4 Wednesdays, building team spirit, feeding off each others enthusiasm and creating the opportunity for some swift training when needed and some banter runs for recovery.

Are You Committed to Being an English Champion?

Were you in the CWR A team? It is you I am talking about. With the notable exceptions from that team of Jon Wright and George Erhardt (who is at this moment booking his flights back from Italy for each of the Championship races). Were you on the fringes of the CWR A team? Are you improving and looking for a place in the best 12? Andrew Horsfall has done some canvassing of runners and the commitment seems to be there, but we need a SQUAD to win a team title. Andrew needs to know who is committed.

Todmorden Harriers, English Champions 2005–

How does that sound to you?