

Gold a rush for Thongskul

Whanganui athletes chipping away at personal bests at North Island Schools meet

ATHLETICS INSIGHT



Alec McNab

Despite returning with only five podium places, there is much to be excited about with Whanganui

performances at the North Island Secondary Schools Championships in Hamilton.

Whanganui, the second smallest of the 11 regions, fielded the fifth largest team in Hamilton with 51 athletes joining 675 from throughout the North Island over the weekend.

The inexperienced Whanganui team set 50 personal bests with another three athletes running their fastest 400m legs in the 4 x 400m relay.

Whanganui entered nine of the 10 relays contested by the 11 regions, gaining a third, three fourth, three fifth and two sixth placings.

Anguz Thongskul (Whanganui High School) came of age as an athlete, winning Whanganui's only gold medal, in the long jump. He backed this up with a third placing in the 100m and was the lead-off runner of the intermediate boys relay team that finished third.

Thongskul first came to notice as a long jumper when he took bronze in the junior boys as a Year 9 athlete at New Zealand Schools in Christchurch in 2023.

He struggled early this season with run-up issues and finished one place shy of the podium in the junior boys at the New Zealand Schools championships.

At the Athletics New Zealand Championships in March, after four fouls, Thongskul snatched bronze with a new personal best.

He took his jumping to a new level in Hamilton with an outstanding series of jumps, winning the intermediate boys title on his last jump (6.47m). He added an outstanding bronze in the 100m, stopping the clock at 11.17s, surpassing his earlier personal best of 11.36s in the heat.

Thongskul rounded off an outstanding championships performance in the 4 x 100m. The all-Whanganui High School team of Thongskul, Ethan Wells, Reiley Thomas and Charlie McBride took third with 45.81s.

The High School team had finished second at New Zealand Secondary Schools in December with a slightly faster time but were without Hayden Stead in Hamilton (ranked fourth in the Athletics Whanganui ranking), highlighting the depth of sprinting in that age group at Whanganui High School.

Whanganui's other podium places came in the 2000m steeplechase with a second place in the under-17 girls from Hannah Byram (Whanganui Collegiate School) and a third from Olivia Gilbertson (Collegiate) in the seniors.

Byram was unusually anxious before her race, having decided not to run the 3000m on the Saturday and making herself unavailable for the 300m hurdles to concentrate on the steeples. For the first time, she had the pressure of being a known and ranked athlete and specialising in only the steeplechase.

She ran a personal best of 7m 18.22s, finishing fourth across the line in the combined race (second in the under-17 division). Byram again demonstrated excellent technique over the barriers and at the water jump and looks capable of further progress as she moves into the senior grades.

Year 13 athlete Gilbertson, who the previous day set a new personal best over 800m, was rewarded for her perseverance with her first placing at a major event. Gilbertson was only a second shy of her Whanganui Schools performance where she had the benefit of male steeplechase pacemakers.

Emma Johnson (Whanganui Girls' College) was third in the intermediate girls hammer on debut.

Whanganui should be encouraged by the three fourth places gained in relays. The decision to keep a

Whanganui High School intermediate boys team together allowed Kopere Mairi Walker (Whanganui City College) to join Collegiate sprinters Lucas Bishop, Nate Burke and Angus Allpress in the seniors. They should be pleased with their performance.

Burke, Allpress and Bishop were joined by Collegiate teammate and 400m finalist Oliver Toohey to come very close to a podium place in the senior 4 x 400m. Anchor runner Allpress, in his first 400m, narrowly missed closing the gap on Walkato-Bay of Plenty.

The other Whanganui relay team to finish fourth was the intermediate girls 4 x 100 team of Kaylee Bischoff (High School), Cassidy Mathews (Cullinane), Lulu Duffy (High School) and Aania Paranihi (Cullinane).

Earlier in the meet, Bischoff finished fourth in the 80m hurdles with a personal best (12.34s). Grace Fannin (Girls College) was sixth in the same final.

Fannin finished fourth in the 300m hurdles and ran a personal best for eighth in the 400m (1m 02.22s).

Lucas Howard (High School) took fourth in the intermediate boys 300m hurdles ahead of teammates Charlie McBride (4th), Bruce McGregor (6th) and injured James McGregor (8th).



Anguz Thongskul prepares to lead off the Whanganui intermediate boys 4 x 100m relay team.
Photo / Faith McGregor