

DORSET ROAD RACE LEAGUE

Sturminster Newton Half Marathon Race Report

With just five races left of the Dorset Road Race League season left, the competition for promotion and relegation places was hotting up like never before, with the new three division format coming into play in 2024.

What happens from now on in could prove crucial in determining the future of the clubs, meaning the latest fixture, the Sturminster Newton Half Marathon, would be all important.

It was effectively a last chance saloon for perhaps the league's most successful club, Bournemouth AC. They were both languishing at the foot of their respective league tables and would likely need to dig out a result in all the remaining fixtures to give themselves a chance of survival. It looked a tall order and with only yellow and blue vest turning out for the race, that was not going to help their cause.

The Stur Half was an event that Bournemouth AC had been very successful in in the past, yielding the race winner 13 times in the last 29 years.

Looking to have taken up the reigns as the dominant force now though, it was Egdon Heath Harriers who are were in pole position and with five wins and two 3rd places, they looked to have already wrapped up the Men's First Division title.

They were without Christopher Peck this time round though and he'd won the previous five league races and looked unstoppable. They did still have Charlie Williams though who was 3rd in the standings for the season so far, along with Matthew Underhill and Giles Heaman.

In Christopher Peck's absence, Lewis Clarke of Poole Runners was probably favourite to take the race win. He'd been 2nd to Christopher in each of the last three fixtures so this looked like it could well be his time get some glory of his own.

With four wins and three 2nd places in the first seven races, Egdon Heath Harriers were edging it over Poole Runners in the Women's First Division. They had Alex Door, Hannah Martyn and Julie in their lineup. Poole Runners had Vicki Ingham though and she was favourite for the win. They also had Lauren Baker-Little as well who was a very consistent performer.

It was indeed Lewis Clarke who picked up the race win, clocking a very impressive time of 1:14:33. That was almost a 20-minute PB for him and put his average pace for the run at a staggering 5:40 per mile. That's despite the 500ft of elevation.

Putting him close to a minute and a half ahead of his nearest rival, Stuart Holloway of City of Salisbury, it was a resounding win for Lewis. Stuart got round in 1:15:55 to take the runner up spot, five seconds in front of his teammate Aaron Wilson who was 32nd in exactly 1:16.

Of course, City of Salisbury aren't in the Dorset Road Race League, so their placings didn't count toward the points, meaning it Charlie Williams of Egdon Heath Harriers who was 2nd scorer, finishing 4th in a time of 1:16:10.

A couple of other runners who didn't run for Dorset Road Race League clubs finished 5th and 6th, with Gwylym Gibson of South West Road Runners taking 5th in 1:16:33 and Lester James coming 6th in 1:16:44. That meant Matthew Underhill was 3rd scorer for the league when he arrived in 7th place in a time of 1:17:52.

Nick Reynolds of Dorset Doodlers was 8th in 1:18:05 which made him the highest placed vet ahead of Giles Heaman of Egdon Heath Harriers who was 9th. He was 1st in the 45-49 category for the league and was Egdon's 5th scorer in 1:18:15. With three of the first five scorers, it was beginning to look like another good day for Egdon men.

Benjy Williams of Poole AC was the first Under 21 Male, finishing in 1:19:25, and John Bassinder, also of Poole AC was the first Male 50, taking 13th place in 1:19:38. He's in the 55-59 category for the league.

Luke Terry was Poole AC's third scorer, finishing in 1:20:08 which put him 15th. Dave Hicks was their fourth man in, clocking a time of 1:21:25 which saw him claim 17th place and he was 1st in the 50-54 category.

With Steven Noble finishing 26th in 1:25:07 and Brandon King taking 30th place in 1:25:30 that was a wrap for Egdon Heath Harriers and their scoring team of five was complete. That meant they'd won yet another fixture, finishing comfortably ahead of Poole AC who were 2nd. Poole Runners finished 3rd in the Men's First Division for the Stur Half.

Unsurprisingly, it was Vicki Ingham who took top spot for the women, clocking a time of 1:22:40. That put her in 19th place in the overall standings and she was six minutes ahead of her nearest female rival. That was Charlotte Ingram of City of Salisbury who came 49th in 1:28:39.

Alex Door finished as 3rd female in 1:30:35 and she was second scorer for the league behind Vicki, since City of Salisbury aren't in it. That put Alex in 59th place overall. Her teammate Hannah Martyn was the next lady of the line, registering a time of 1:13:58. She was 1st in the 30-34 category and came in three seconds ahead of Lauren Baker-Little of Poole Runners who was next over the line in 1:32:01.

Juliet Champion of Poole AC was 6th female in 1:33:29, putting her 75th overall. Then Julie Wargent completed the scoring team for Egdon Heath Harriers, crossing the line in 1:34:47, earning her 1st prize in the Female 45 category. That meant Egdon had won the fixture in the Ladies' First Division.

Abigail Barnes of Egdon Heath Harriers was 1st in the 18-20 category and 6th female in a time of 1:37:49. Jenny Walker-Leach of Lytchett Manor Striders came 1st in the 45-49 category and 7th lady in 1:37:56.

Eleanor Rollett of Dorchester RIOT was 1st in the 55-59 category and 9th scoring female in 1:38:40. Poole Runners finished as 2nd in the Women's First Division for the fixture, with Littledown Harriers in 3rd.

Alan Barnett of Poole AC was 1st in the 60-64 category for the league, crossing the line in a time of 1:30:49. John Cook of Egdon Heath Harriers topped the standings in the 60-64 division, completing the course in 1:39:46.

Having now transferred her first claim status to Littledown, Heather Khoshnevis finished first in the Female 55+ category in 1:40:13 which put her 18th out of the ladies in the race. After making the switch to Wimborne AC, Helen Ambrosen was 1st in the 65-69 category for the league with her time of 2:03:22.

Westbourne won the fixture in the Men's Second Division, ahead of Wimborne AC and Dorset Doodlers. It was an extremely close call in the Women's Second Division with Wimborne AC emerging victorious by one point over Westbourne, with Royal Manor of Portland taking 3rd.

It was a very good day for Egdon Heath Harriers as they increased their lead at the top of the standings with their wins in both the Men's and Women's First Division. Poole Runners are still their closest rivals in both the Men's and Women's leagues, with Poole AC currently in 3rd in the Men's First Division and Dorchester RIOT 3rd in the Ladies.

Westbourne are just ahead of Wimborne AC and Dorchester RIOT in the Men's Second Division, where the top three will join the bottom two in the First Division to form the new Second Division. It's looking like that will be Bournemouth AC and Lytchett Manor Striders.

Despite a no show in the last two races, Dorset Doodlers are still leading the Ladies Second Division ahead of Wimborne AC, with Purbeck Runners currently occupying third. Again, they could join Bournemouth AC and Lytchett Manor Striders who look like going down from Division One.

In the individual tables, Christopher Peck is still top of the standings, with Lewis Clarke in 2nd and Charlie Williams 3rd. Dave Hicks is 4th with Adam Davies of Egdon Heath Harriers 5th. John Bassinder could soon take that spot though.

Vicki Ingham tops the standings for the ladies with four race wins. Georgine Povall of Egdon Heath Harriers is 2nd with three 2nd place finishes and one 3rd. Alex Door is 3rd and Hannah Martyn is 4th at this stage in the proceedings.

The next Dorset Road Race League fixture is Round the Lakes which is on 24th September. That was a fixture the Bournemouth AC men dominated last year with Harry Smith, Rob McTaggart and Rob Spencer securing a BAC top three. Whether they can muster up a strong team again this time round remains to be seen but whatever happens, it promises to be another fiercely competitive contest.