

# DORSET ROAD RACE LEAGUE

## **Blackmore Vale Half Marathon Race Report**

Usually staged on a freezing cold Sunday morning in February, the 2025 edition of the Blackmore Vale Half Marathon had a very different feel to it. With the original event being postponed due to flooding on the course, a new date had to be found and that culminated in a rescheduling of the event to a weekend in July. It just so happened that on that weekend, it was destined to be swelteringly hot.

It probably wasn't what most of the runners would have wanted in an ideal world but it was now a Dorset League race so they had to get on with it and manage as best they could. The Blackmore Vale Half Marathon is already the toughest, hilliest half marathon in the county, with over 900ft of elevation and some long steep hills. In fact, the race is famed for having a killer last mile, which predominantly uphill and on a fairly steep gradient.

The field was a little light in comparison to most of the league fixtures so far but there were still some big names in the mix. Egdon Heath Harriers had brought quite a talented team to the table, with Charlie Williams, Matt Underhill and Jonathon Churchill amongst their arsenal.

Bournemouth AC man Josh Cole was also in the starting lineup. He'd also finished in the top ten in three out of the four Dorset League races he'd participated in so far this season and was effectively in third place in the men's individual table for the season so far behind 2024 champion Chris Peck and Tommy Corbin of Poole AC.

The Jackson brothers, Sam and Luke, were there representing Twemlow Track Club, as were Wimborne AC pair Mark Savage and Louis Verdi.

Hannah Martyn, Teresa Green and Julie Wargent were in action for the Egdon Heath Harriers ladies and Vicky Rutter from Littledown Harriers was also in the line up in a slightly thinned out women's field.

With the heat as it was, it was going to be war of attrition out there and the athletes would need to ensure they kept well hydrated and perhaps tempered the pace somewhat in comparison to what they would have done in cooler conditions.

The race didn't start till 11am so it was already 27 degrees before it started. That would then rise as the race progressed. It didn't stop Jonathon Churchill and Charlie Williams from making a fast start as they bolted down the hill at breakneck speed.

Josh Cole went with the Egdon pair, forming a lead group of three. At first it was Charlie Williams who was driving the pace. Then Josh took over and began to push on, building up a lead of around 150 to 200 metres.

Holding the lead until mile eight, Josh finally got reeled in by the Egdon Heath Harriers pair. This time it was Jonathon Churchill who went into the lead looking extraordinarily strong and fresh.

Josh was suffering at that point and was unable to keep pace with the Egdon guys. Then Charlie Williams started feeling dizzy and had to stop for bit, just before the 11th mile, meaning Josh moved back up into second place.

Then Dorset Doddlers man Rich White came out of nowhere and overtook Josh ahead of the final, brutal climb in the last mile.

Meanwhile Charlie Williams had managed to get going again and caught Josh on the final hill to take third position.

Jonathon Churchill had finished strongly in spite of the conditions and the elevation and got to the line in 1:17:37 to take a brilliant victory. His average pace for the run was 5:54 per mile.

Perhaps the surprise performance of the day was Rich White's magnificent charge to take the runner up spot. He got over the line in 1:18:36, so a minute after Jonathon. His average pace was 6 minutes per mile.

Charlie Williams registered a time of 1:20:41, which was an average pace of 6:07, despite the stoppage, so a very good effort, all things considered.

It had been a real rollercoaster of a race for Josh Cole and he must have thought at one stage he was coming away with a big victory but it wasn't to be in the end.

He still came away with 4<sup>th</sup> place and a 1 hour 21 minute time though and that was a good performance on that course in those conditions.

Matt Underhill was Egdon Heath Harriers' third man home when he arrived in 1 hour 22 minutes to take fifth place. Ed Rees of Clapham Chasers came 6th in 1:23:19 but he wasn't running for a Dorset League club so didn't count in the scoring.

Sam Jackson ran well to get round in 1:24:50 which put him in 7th place. He was first in the 45 to 49 category for the league. Unattached runner Oliver Edwards took 8th in 1:25:18. Wimborne AC man Mark Savage finished 9th in 1:25:23.

Lytchett Manor Striders man Robert Churchward took 9th place in 1:26:48 and Luke Jackson got round in 1:27:10 which put him in 11th place. Westbourne man Pete Doughty took 12th in 1:27:31 and Wimborne AC star Louis Verdi came 13th in 1:27:58.

Steve Kellaway was fourth man home for Egdon Heath Harriers when he arrived in 15th place in a time of 1:29:02. Matthew Bosanquet was the first over 50 man to reach the line taking 16th place in 1:29:25. He was Twemlow Track Club's third man home.

Charlie Lawson sealed the win for the fixture in the First Division for Egdon Heath Harriers, crossing the line in 1:29:39. Littledown Harriers pair Mark Packer and Christian Rodiger were 18th and 19th in 1:29:58 and 1:30:06 and Mark was first in the 55 to 59 category for the league.

David Jones was fourth scorer for Twemlow Track Club, taking 20th place in 1:30:38 and Julian Critchlow was first over 60 finisher in 1:31:05, which put him 21st overall.

Haydan Clarke was one of the latest spate of runners to make the switch to Twemlow Track Club as they attempted to bolster their squad in a bid to improve their league standings.

He rounded off the scoring team for Twemlow Track Club, finishing 22nd in 1:31:20, with his teammate Edward Crawley getting over the line in 1:32:17. That meant Twemlow Track Club had taken second place in the First Division for the race, behind Egdon Heath Harriers.

Poole Runners were the only other team in the First Division to get five finishers so they took a valuable third place which will help their bid to avoid relegation. It is currently looking like it could be Bournemouth AC who are heading for the drop.

Vicky Rutter was first female over the line, taking 42nd place overall in 1:37:10 and that was exactly five minutes quicker than Hannah Martyn who was second in 1:42:10. She came 53rd overall. Teresa Green arrived shortly after to take third female spot in 1:43:36 which put her 57th overall. She was first in the 45 to 49 division for the league.

Heather Khoshnevis finished as fourth female in 1:45:50 and that put her in 66th place overall. She was the first over 50 woman to finish and topped the standings in the 65 to 69 category for the league.

Julie Wargent was 8th lady in 1:50:39 which put her 78th overall and she was first in the 50 to 54 category for the league. Josie Wait wasn't hanging around and she completed the course in 1:52:49 to round off the scoring team for Egdon Heath Harriers and give them the win in the Ladies First Division.

That meant Poole Runners had to settle for second on this occasion, with Littledown Harriers, the only other club to get four women out, taking third. Poole Runners still sit top of the table for the season so far though, with three firsts and three second places. Egdon Heath Harriers are currently second in the table.

Wimborne AC picked up their sixth win out of six in the Men's Second Division and after narrowly missing out on promotion to Bournemouth AC last season, they looked certain for it this year. In fact, they could seal it at the Stur Half which is the next league fixture.

Littledown Harriers took second at the Blackmore Vale Half Marathon, with Westbourne in third and Dorset Doddlers fourth. That's mirrors where they are in the current league standings for the season so far.

No clubs got a team out in the Ladies Second Division but by virtue of having two runners, Westbourne got the win, with Dorchester RIOT having the highest placed singular runner ahead of Wimborne AC and Purbeck Runners.

Wimborne AC are top of the table in the Ladies Second Division but with three wins so far, Dorchester RIOT look like they could potentially be the strongest outfit.

The only team to get three scorers out in the Men's Third Division were Royal Manor of Portland so they got the win by default. Dorchester RIOT and Weymouth St Pauls were actually level on scoring places with their two runners each.

Although they didn't get a team out at Blackmore Vale, Lytchett Manor Striders top the table for the season so far having won all the other fixtures. They still looked odds on the promotion to Division Two.

Verwood Runners were the only club to get a team of three out in the Ladies Third Division so they came away with the win. In fact only two other clubs in the division even had one runner out. That was enough to give Royal Manor of Portland second place and Weymouth St Pauls Harriers third.

Verwood Runners top the standings for the season so far though and look prime candidates for promotion to Division Two.

Wimborne AC pair Louis Verdi and Mark Savage are top of the standings in the men's individual table for the season so far at the halfway point in the season. Steve Kellaway of Egdon Heath Harriers is currently in third.

After not appearing at Blackmore Vale, Tommy Corbin is just ahead of Josh Cole out of the runners who have done five of the six races so far, with Rich White third, Chris Wood of Twemlow Track Club fourth and Adam Colbert fifth.

Chris Peck of Egdon Heath Harriers will still be favourite to top the standings come the end of the season though with his four second place scores so far. Charlie Williams will also be in the picture after his second third place finish of the season at Blackmore Vale. He also has a fourth and seventh to his name.

The win at Blackmore Vale lifted Egdon Heath Harriers above Poole AC at the top of the Men's First Division after they failed to field a team of four so that could prove a crucial twist in the title race. There's still a lot to play for yet though and could be many more twists and turns as the season unravels.

The Stur Half is the next race in the calendar as the second half of the season commences and with the race also being the designated county Half Marathon Championships, it was bound to be hotly contested.

