

# DORSET ROAD RACE LEAGUE

## Bournemouth Bay Half Marathon – Race Report

The Bournemouth Bay Half Marathon has long been a familiar fixture on the local running calendar, but its inclusion in the Dorset Road Race League for the first time gave this year's race a noticeably sharper edge.

With the start line situated on the west side of Bournemouth Pier, the course offered a scenic but testing tour of the coastline. Runners headed along the promenade to Durley Chine before tackling the first climb, then made their way along the Overcliff, down through Alum Chine and back onto the seafront. From there, it was a long stretch out towards Hengistbury Head, followed by a loop on the roads, the climb up Southbourne Coast Road, and the gradual drag along the Overcliff before descending at Boscombe Pier and returning to finish near Bournemouth Pier.

Conditions were unusually favourable. With very little wind and plenty of sunshine, the exposed sections of the course were far less punishing than they can often be. Even so, the climb up Southbourne Coast Road and the long, slightly uphill return along the Overcliff remained the decisive sections of the race.

Given the race's new league status, a strong turnout from across Dorset clubs was to be expected. Bournemouth AC, on home ground, were well represented, with Rob McTaggart and Luke De-Benedictis leading their challenge. McTaggart, of course, has previous form on this course, having won both the 10k and half marathon on the same morning in 2023.

Poole AC arrived with a particularly strong line-up, spearheaded by Charlie Collins, whose recent cross country results marked him out as a leading contender. With solid support from Thomas Corbin and Lewis Clarke, they looked well equipped for both individual and team honours. Egdon Heath Harriers had Jonathon Churchill in their ranks, while Twemlow Track Club fielded a well-balanced quartet.

At the front of the race, Collins quickly took control and never looked in danger of relinquishing it. Running strongly throughout, he secured victory in 1:10:39, improving significantly on his previous performances over the distance.

Behind him, McTaggart produced another impressive run. Fresh from his win at the Lytchett 10 — also completed as part of a longer training effort — he again used the race as part of his preparation, finishing second in 1:12:35.

Lewis Clarke completed the podium in 1:13:06, with Corbin taking fourth in 1:14:36. Twemlow's Rupert Allison (1:14:48) and Egdon's Jonathon Churchill (1:15:17) rounded out the top six, with Nick Reynolds close behind in seventh.

Further down the field, there were a number of important scoring performances. Mark Savage led Wimborne AC's charge with ninth place in 1:16:35, while Luke De-Benedictis placed 13th in 1:17:44, just behind Steven Rigby. Dave Hicks, finishing 17th in 1:18:24, was the top M50 and an important contributor for Twemlow.

Consistency through the scoring positions proved decisive in the team competition. Poole AC's strength in depth, with Gareth Hale (20th) and Tim Rooke (26th) completing their scoring team, was enough to secure first place on the day, narrowly ahead of Twemlow Track Club. Bournemouth AC, despite solid runs from McTaggart, De-Benedictis and Karl Welch (23rd in 1:19:52), had to settle for third.

Elsewhere, notable performances included Julian Critchlow, now competing for Poole Runners, who took first place in the M60 category in 1:19:53, and Damian Huntingford was Wimborne AC's third scorer, finishing 18<sup>th</sup> in 1:19:08. Louis Verdi was second scorer for Wimborne, finishing 14<sup>th</sup> in 1:18:03.

In the women's race, Lizzy Allison delivered a commanding performance to take the win in 1:26:06. Becky Neal was second in 1:27:14, with Victoria Kirschner-Heavens third in 1:28:41.

Victoria Pye continued her consistent league form with fourth place in 1:30:18, maintaining her position at the top of the individual standings. Lauren Baker-Little (1:33:29) and Hannah Jardine (1:33:37) completed the top six, while Abigail Barnes provided a key scoring run for Egdon Heath Harriers.

Poole AC took minimum points in the Women's First Division, finishing ahead of Egdon Heath Harriers and Littledown. In Division Two, Verwood Runners came out on top, while Bournemouth AC were unable to register a team score.

Verwood Runners got the best score out of the Men's Third Division teams and Bournemouth Joggers came out on top in the Ladies Third Division.

Across the divisions, the results reinforced the patterns emerging over the season so far. Poole AC continue to lead the Men's First Division with three wins from three, ahead of Twemlow Track Club and Bournemouth AC. Egdon Heath Harriers maintain their lead in the Women's First Division, while Dorchester RIOT have drawn level with Bournemouth AC at the top of the Women's Second Division.

Purbeck Runners top the standings in the Men's Third Division for the season so far, just ahead of Verwood Runners. Lytchett Manor Striders are currently top of the Third Division table.

Individually, McTaggart's consistency sees him leading the Men's standings, with Corbin and Clarke close behind, and De-Benedictis also well placed. In the women's competition, Egdon Heath Harriers occupy the top three positions, with Pye leading Jardine, while Barnes sits level on points with Miranda Aldridge of Verwood Runners.

The Bournemouth Bay Half may have been a new addition to the league calendar, but it quickly established itself as a meaningful and competitive fixture. With testing trajectories, favourable conditions and strong fields across all divisions, it proved to be a valuable and well-contested stage in this year's Dorset Road Race League.