

DORSET ROAD RACE LEAGUE

Blackmore Race Report

Cole Conquers the Heat to Claim Blackmore Vale Victory

For the second successive season, the Blackmore Vale Half Marathon found itself postponed from its traditional February slot, with competitors instead facing a completely different challenge as the race took place under blazing sunshine on a sweltering July afternoon.

The Blackmore Vale Half is never an easy assignment. Its relentless hills make it one of the toughest tests on the Dorset Road Race League calendar at the best of times, but when combined with soaring temperatures, it promised to be an even sterner examination of strength, pacing and resilience.

With athlete welfare understandably the priority, organisers ensured there were ample water stations around the course, while cold sponges were available to provide welcome relief during the race and wet towels awaited runners at the finish. The conditions may have been far from ideal, but with valuable Dorset Road Race League points up for grabs, there was never any shortage of determination.

The quality at the front of the field was once again extremely high. Poole AC pair Thomas Corbin and Lewis Clarke had arguably been the standout performers in the Dorset League throughout the season and were always likely to feature prominently.

Josh Cole returned looking to improve on last year's fourth-place finish, while Wimborne AC's ever-consistent duo of Louis Verdi and Mark Savage, who occupied first and second places in the men's individual standings after completing all six previous league races, were once again on the start line.

Twemlow Track Club also arrived with an impressive squad including Nick Reynolds, Steven Rigby, David Jones and brothers Luke and Sam Jackson, while the women's race featured league leader Victoria Pye alongside Egdon Heath Harriers teammates Ellie Laird and Teresa Green. Bournemouth AC, meanwhile, fielded Katie Gunn, Kitty Cook and Helen Beddoe as they sought another strong Ladies Second Division performance, while Poole AC's Dawn Andrews continued her impressive campaign after her runner-up finish at the Purbeck 10k.

Mindful of the mistakes made twelve months earlier, Josh Cole was determined not to get carried away by the fast downhill opening miles. Along with Lewis Clarke and Tommy Corbin, the early pace was noticeably more measured than might have been expected, with the leading trio even chatting comfortably as they settled into the race.

Everyone knew what was waiting for them.

The opening five kilometres may be largely downhill, but every runner is acutely aware that every metre lost in elevation has to be climbed again during the closing stages. That brutal uphill finish is what gives the Blackmore Vale Half Marathon its fearsome reputation, particularly when the summer heat adds yet another layer of punishment.

Cole had clearly learned from last year's experience.

Judging his effort to perfection, he gradually asserted himself at the front before making the decisive move. Once clear, he never looked like surrendering the advantage despite sustained pressure from two of Dorset's finest distance runners in Clarke and Corbin.

Cole crossed the line to claim an impressive victory in 1:18:58. While that may not be considered a quick half marathon time on paper, it underlined just how demanding the Blackmore Vale course becomes in such oppressive conditions.

Lewis Clarke secured second place in 1:19:39, with Thomas Corbin completing the podium in 1:19:55.

Twemlow Track Club's Nick Reynolds produced another excellent run to finish fourth in 1:20:27, while Dorchester RIOT's Adam Woollard rounded out the top five in 1:21:55.

Mark Savage's remarkable consistency continued as the Wimborne AC man claimed sixth place in 1:22:04, sharing the same finishing time as unattached runner James Sayers in seventh. Dorset Doodlers' Ed Rees came home eighth in 1:22:21 ahead of Poole Runners' Davis Penwarden, who recorded 1:23:25 for ninth.

Christian Rodiger led Littledown Harriers home in tenth place with 1:24:10, narrowly ahead of Twemlow's Steven Rigby in 1:24:18. Poole Runners' Mark Peddle was next over the line in 1:24:23, followed closely by Twemlow's David Jones in 1:24:29.

Adam McCrea completed Poole AC's scoring quartet with 14th place in 1:25:24, just ahead of Bournemouth AC's Jack Barwick, who clocked 1:25:29.

Mark Packers continued Littledown Harriers' strong afternoon by working steadily through the field to finish 16th in 1:26:07.

Luke Jackson provided Twemlow's fourth scorer in 17th with 1:26:21 before unattached James Nicholson finished 18th in 1:26:33.

Barry Miller completed Poole AC's team in 19th with 1:27:12, while Louis Verdi maintained his perfect attendance in the league by taking 20th in 1:27:15. Steve Goodman finished 21st for Littledown Harriers in 1:27:22.

Twemlow then produced an eye-catching sequence as Sam Jackson, Ed Davies and Richard Swindlehurst crossed the line in 22nd, 23rd and 24th respectively, posting times of 1:27:32, 1:27:42 and 1:27:50.

That depth ultimately proved decisive as Twemlow Track Club edged out Poole AC to take victory in the Men's First Division. Wimborne AC claimed third place with Bournemouth AC finishing fourth.

Littledown Harriers secured an important victory in the Men's Second Division to continue applying pressure to leaders Poole Runners, who had to settle for second place on this occasion.

The women's race produced another significant result in the race for the individual title.

Victoria Pye demonstrated once again why she leads the standings, producing a superb run to take the women's victory in 1:33:02, placing 34th overall.

Her performance prompted an equally impressive response from Bournemouth AC's Katie Gunn, who finished second female in 1:34:15 and 39th overall. With Gunn likely to be Pye's closest challenger for the individual crown, every point could prove crucial as the season progresses.

Egdon Heath Harriers' Ellie Laird secured third place in 1:38:46, just nine seconds ahead of Bournemouth AC's Kitty Cook.

Sarah Genco was fifth female for Littledown Harriers in 1:41:00, with Teresa Green completing Egdon Heath Harriers' scoring trio by taking sixth in 1:41:30.

Miranda Aldridge led Verwood Runners with seventh place in 1:42:04, narrowly ahead of Poole AC's Dawn Andrews, who continued her fine campaign by finishing eighth female in 1:42:13.

Emily Kendall claimed ninth place before Littledown Harriers' Vicky Rutter rounded out the top ten women in 1:42:54.

Dorchester RIOT's Sally Miller continued to strengthen her position near the top of the individual standings by finishing 11th female in 1:43:39, while Purbeck Runners' Jenny Marshall completed the leading dozen in 1:44:50.

Only Egdon Heath Harriers and Littledown Harriers fielded complete scoring teams in the Ladies First Division, with Egdon Heath once again coming out on top. It was their third victory of the campaign and further strengthened their position at the summit of the standings ahead of reigning champions Poole Runners.

Bournemouth AC continued their excellent season in the Ladies Second Division by collecting a fourth victory of the year, ahead of Verwood Runners and Purbeck Runners. Although Purbeck still lead the overall standings after seven races, Bournemouth AC are steadily closing the gap and the title race remains very much alive.

Dorchester RIOT emerged as the leading Men's Third Division side, finishing ahead of Verwood Runners and Purbeck Runners. With all three clubs separated by only the finest of

margins in the overall standings, the promotion battle is shaping up to be one of the most fascinating contests of the season.

Lytchett Manor Striders were once again the only club able to field a full scoring team in the Ladies Third Division, securing their fifth victory of the campaign and taking another significant step towards promotion.

Despite being narrowly denied on the day by an outstanding Twemlow Track Club performance, Poole AC retain top spot in the Men's First Division standings as the Dorset Road Race League season heads towards its closing stages.