

DORSET ROAD RACE LEAGUE

STUR HALF MARATHON – RACE REPORT

The Stur Half Marathon was the eighth race of the Dorset Road Race League season and, with the championship campaign now moving into its critical phase, there was plenty at stake for clubs with aspirations of winning their division, gaining promotion or simply avoiding the drop.

After the Blackmore Vale Half Marathon, Twemlow Track Club had finally got their hands on a Men's First Division victory, but catching Poole AC at the top of the table was beginning to look like a very tall order.

Egdon Heath Harriers had prevented Poole Runners from making it three consecutive wins in the Ladies First Division at Blackmore Vale, although Poole Runners remained firmly in contention at the top.

There was also an intriguing battle developing in the Men's Second Division. Littledown Harriers had taken the honours at Blackmore Vale and that third win of the season had moved them to within touching distance of Poole Runners.

Bournemouth AC had also strengthened their promotion credentials with a fourth win of the season at Blackmore Vale. Purbeck Runners were still leading the Men's Second Division, with Verwood Runners also very much in contention.

Dorchester RIOT had inserted themselves firmly into that promotion battle after claiming their third victory of the campaign at Blackmore Vale, setting up what looked increasingly likely to be a fascinating three-way contest between themselves, Purbeck Runners and Verwood Runners.

Lytchett Manor Striders continued to dominate the Ladies Third Division, meanwhile, with their fifth win of the season leaving them seemingly unstoppable.

The Stur Half was always likely to be a tough proposition. Like Blackmore Vale, it was another baking hot day and, on a hilly half marathon course, the conditions were going to make life particularly uncomfortable. It was likely to be a battle of attrition and the runners who were prepared to dig deepest over the closing miles would be rewarded.

There was a particularly strong field assembled for the men's race.

Last year's winner Lester James of Team Bath was back to defend his title, having comprehensively defeated that year's men's individual champion Christopher Peck when he took victory twelve months previously.

Thomas Corbin had managed to get the better of Lester the year before that and was hoping to challenge for another victory, while 2023 winner Lewis Clarke was also in the line-up.

Jonathon Churchill of Egdon Heath Harriers was always likely to be somewhere near the sharp end, as was Rich White of Dorset Doodlers. Rupert Allison of Twemlow Track Club had been enjoying an excellent season and was showing plenty of form.

Stuart Nicholas of Bournemouth AC, runner-up in the North Dorset Village Marathon, added further strength to the field, while Louis Verdi and Mark Savage arrived with the added incentive of defending their positions at the top of the men's individual standings.

And then there was Lester James.

As it turned out, the Team Bath man was simply in a different class.

Lester powered away from the opposition to take another hugely impressive victory, crossing the line in 1:11:23. That was only just outside the time he recorded for victory the previous year and demonstrated just how strong he had been on the Stur course.

Tommy Corbin couldn't get anywhere near him this time around, but he was comfortably the best of the rest, finishing second in 1:14:57.

Poole AC teammate Darren Robinson completed the podium in 1:15:12, with Rich White of Dorset Doodlers putting in another strong performance to take fourth in 1:15:33.

Rupert Allison continued his fine season with fifth place in 1:15:41, while Lewis Clarke made it three Poole AC runners in the top six, finishing in 1:16:40.

Jonathon Churchill claimed seventh in 1:17:18, just three seconds ahead of Twemlow Track Club's Nick Reynolds, who took eighth and the first MV40 prize.

Bournemouth AC's Stuart Nicholas and Ben Collins finished ninth and tenth respectively in 1:18:08 and 1:18:41.

Alan Davies of Twemlow Track Club was 11th and second MV40 in 1:18:46, while Bournemouth AC's Jack Davis came home in 12th in 1:19:09, setting himself a new personal best in the process.

Jack Murphy was Poole AC's fourth scorer, taking 13th place in 1:19:45.

Unattached runner Charles Ford was 14th in 1:20:14, with Mark Savage of Wimborne taking 15th in 1:20:55 and third MV40.

David Penwarden of Poole Runners was the first MV50, finishing 16th overall in 1:21:12.

Christian Rodiger of Littledown Harriers was 17th in 1:21:43, with Egdon Heath Harriers' Steve Kellaway taking 18th in 1:22:18.

Gergely Arvay made it two Littledown Harriers in the top 20 when he finished 19th in 1:22:28, while Louis Verdi crossed the line in 20th in 1:22:34.

Bournemouth AC's Barry Dolman was 21st in 1:22:58 and second MV50.

Barry Miller was Poole AC's fifth scorer and completed their scoring team in 1:24:03, finishing 23rd overall.

That was enough to give Poole AC their fifth race victory of the season and, more importantly, put them beyond the reach of their rivals at the top of the Men's First Division.

Twemlow Track Club were now the only team who could mathematically equal Poole AC's points total, but they would have to win all four of the remaining races to do so.

Behind the champions-elect, Bournemouth AC and Twemlow Track Club were locked together on points in the battle for second place.

Sam Jackson led Twemlow Track Club home in 27th in 1:25:14, while Bournemouth AC's fifth scorer Jack Barwick finished 28th in 1:25:17. Luke Jackson then came home in 29th for Twemlow in 1:25:20.

The Men's Second Division was considerably more competitive.

Littledown Harriers secured their third win of the season and moved to within just a single point of Poole Runners at the top of the table, setting up a fascinating run-in.

Dorchester RIOT, meanwhile, took their fourth victory of the season in the Men's Third Division. That gave them some breathing space over Purbeck Runners and Verwood Runners, who occupied second and third respectively.

WOMEN'S RACE

There was also a strong field in the women's race, with Victoria Pye looking to consolidate her position at the top of the individual standings after competing in all eight races so far.

She faced stiff opposition from Abigail Jones, winner of the Purbeck 10k, as well as Bournemouth AC duo Katie Gunn and Kitty Cook.

But it was Abigail Jones of Poole Runners who came out on top.

Abigail ran a superb 1:29:20 to finish 42nd overall and win the women's race by a considerable margin.

Victoria Pye was second female in 1:33:04 and, with another strong performance, strengthened her grip on the women's individual standings.

Katie Gunn of Bournemouth AC took third in 1:33:16, but her hopes of overhauling Victoria for the individual title were beginning to fade. Katie finished 60th overall.

Gill Pearson of Yeovil Town RRC was 61st overall and fourth female in 1:33:27, although she did not count towards the league standings.

Louise Fox of Dorchester RIOT was fifth female in 1:33:43, while Sarah Genco of Littledown Harriers was sixth in 1:34:42 and first FV35.

Miranda Aldridge of Verwood Runners took seventh female and first FV45 in 1:35:02, with unattached runner Emily Kendall eighth in 1:35:41.

Lauren Baker-Little was ninth for Poole Runners in 1:37:15, with Bournemouth AC's Kitty Cook rounding out the top ten in 1:37:35 as their second scorer.

Dorchester RIOT's Sally Miller was 11th female in 1:38:02, while Vicky Rutter was Littledown Harriers' second scorer in 1:40:42, finishing 15th female.

Julie Wargent was Egdon Heath Harriers' second scorer in 1:42:39, finishing 18th female.

Littledown Harriers then completed their scoring team with Viktoria Dahill and Heather Khoshnevis, giving them their first Ladies First Division victory of the season.

Lara Hudson finished 21st female in 1:45:42, a performance which was enough to secure the ladies team prize for the race and give them first place in the Ladies Second Division.

With Josie Wait finishing 22nd and Teresa Green 25th female, Egdon Heath Harriers took second place in the Ladies First Division, while Poole Runners finished third.

Dorchester RIOT were second in the Ladies Second Division, with Verwood Runners taking third.

There was little to separate the teams in the Ladies Third Division, although none of the clubs managed to field a full scoring team. Lytchett Manor Striders and Bournemouth Joggers both had two runners, leaving Lytchett first and Bournemouth Joggers second.

For Lytchett Manor Striders, it was another important step towards what is now looking increasingly like an almost certain promotion to the second tier.

THE LEAGUE PICTURE

After eight races, Egdon Heath Harriers continued to lead the way in the Ladies First Division, with Poole Runners just ahead of Littledown Harriers in second.

Bournemouth AC strengthened their position in the Ladies Second Division with a fifth win of the season and now looked nailed on for promotion to the top tier. Verwood Runners were second and Purbeck Runners third.

At the sharp end of the Men's First Division, Poole AC had done enough to make the title race a formality. Their fifth victory of the season gave them an unassailable lead, leaving

Twemlow Track Club needing an unlikely clean sweep of the remaining four races even to draw level.

Further down the men's divisions, however, the picture was far less clear. Littledown Harriers were just a point behind Poole Runners in the Men's Second Division, while Dorchester RIOT, Purbeck Runners and Verwood Runners continued their fascinating battle for promotion from the Third Division.

With just four races remaining, every position and every point was becoming increasingly important.

The next race in the Dorset Road Race League season is the Round the Lakes 10k on 27th September, when the shorter distance should provide a very different test from the two recent half marathons.

Comments from DRRL

- *Many thanks to Richard Brawn of BAC for writing the article.*
- *To enter the next DRRL race (Round the Lakes 10k on 27th Sept) visit <https://racesignup.co.uk/entry/login.php?eventid=6288>*