DORSET ROAD RACE LEAGUE

Race Report for the Wimborne 10:

Egdon Heath Harriers Crowned Ladies First Division Champions in Soggy Showdown

There was plenty at stake at the Wimborne 10, the penultimate fixture of the Dorset Road Race League season, with promotion, relegation and divisional titles all hanging in the balance as the clubs descended on Wimborne for what proved to be a rather soggy affair.

With just two races remaining, the pressure was beginning to mount, particularly for those clubs whose season-long ambitions were about to reach a decisive crossroads. And with the Boscombe 10k looming as the final opportunity to settle any outstanding business, the Wimborne 10 promised to be a significant afternoon in the grand scheme of things.

Perhaps nowhere was that more apparent than in the Ladies First Division, where Egdon Heath Harriers arrived full of confidence following their tremendous victory at the Weymouth 10. That result had brought them within touching distance of the title, but there was still work to do if they were to finally extinguish Poole AC's championship aspirations.

In the Men's First Division, Poole AC had already been crowned champions, leaving Bournemouth AC and Twemlow Track Club to slug it out for the runner-up position. The two clubs were virtually inseparable in the standings, making every finishing position potentially significant.

There was also plenty of intrigue towards the bottom of the table, where Egdon Heath Harriers' maiden victory of the season at Weymouth had breathed fresh life into their survival hopes. Wimborne AC were now firmly in their sights, although they would have the considerable advantage of racing on home territory.

The Men's Second Division was proving equally fascinating, with Poole Runners and Littledown Harriers separated by a solitary point at the summit. Meanwhile, Westbourne, Dorset Doddlers and Lytchett Manor Striders were locked in their own battle to avoid relegation.

Bournemouth AC had already secured promotion from the Ladies Second Division, meaning attention was concentrated on the other end of the table. Dorset Doddlers had given themselves a fighting chance with a surprise victory at Weymouth Bay, although they still had a four-point deficit to overcome if they were to climb out of the relegation places.

There was further uncertainty in the Men's Third Division, where Dorchester RIOT and Verwood Runners were both harbouring realistic hopes of finishing top. With the two races remaining set to determine their respective fortunes, the Wimborne 10 was always going to be a pivotal encounter.

By contrast, Lytchett Manor Striders were enjoying something of a procession in the Ladies Third Division, having already finished first in seven fixtures.

A formidable field assembles

There was certainly no shortage of quality in the individual competitions either.

The leading pair in the men's standings, Thomas Corbin and Lewis Clarke, were both present, forming part of an imposing Poole AC contingent that also included Fred Harris, Brian Underwood, Callum Wadlow and Josh Smith.

They would face a stern challenge from Bournemouth AC's Josh Cole, who had already demonstrated his ability to mix it with the very best by defeating both Corbin and Clarke at the Blackmore Vale Half Marathon.

Another Bournemouth athlete attracting attention was Rob McTaggart, who had won the race on his last appearance in it, back in 2021.

The women's field was equally impressive, with Madeleine Johnson of Egdon Heath Harriers arriving in particularly fine form after victories in the previous two fixtures at Round the Lakes and the Weymouth 10.

Gill Pearson of Yeovil Town RRC was also among the contenders, having finished second at Weymouth, although she wasn't representing a Dorset League club.

The leading four in the women's individual standings – Victoria Pye, Dawn Andrews, Miranda Aldridge and Sally Miller – were all in attendance, as were Bournemouth AC duo Katie Bentley and Kitty Cook.

Helen Henderson of Poole Runners and Becky Neal of Poole AC added further strength to an already competitive line-up.

In short, there was plenty of quality on show, and the stage was set for an intriguing contest.

Unfortunately, the weather had other ideas.

Cole storms to victory in the deluge

Conditions were hardly conducive to fast running, with sporadic torrential downpours making their presence felt throughout the morning. It was, in truth, a decidedly soggy affair, with competitors having to contend with some decidedly unpleasant conditions.

That didn't appear to trouble Josh Cole in the slightest.

The Bournemouth AC man produced a commanding performance, taking the race by the scruff of the neck from the outset and never relinquishing his advantage. He was simply too strong for the opposition, crossing the line in a superb 52:38.

Tommy Corbin was the nearest challenger, but even he was unable to make any meaningful impression on Cole's lead, eventually finishing 1 minute 42 seconds adrift in 54:20.

Rob McTaggart completed the podium, arriving just 30 seconds later in 54:50 to make it an impressive return for him.

Brian Underwood was next home, clocking 55:09 to take fourth place and top the 50-54 age category. He was also the first of an extraordinary procession of Poole AC runners that would follow him across the line.

Lewis Clarke came home in 55:12, with Fred Harris recording 55:45 and Josh Smith stopping the clock at 55:58 to complete Poole's scoring five.

Callum Wadlow was next, taking eighth place in 55:59, meaning Poole AC had six athletes inside the top eight. An emphatic demonstration of their considerable strength in depth.

Matt Underhill of Egdon Heath Harriers was ninth in exactly 56 minutes, with Bournemouth AC's Stu Nicholas completing the top ten in 56:02.

And Poole AC weren't finished there. Benjiy Williams made it seven athletes from the club inside the top eleven, crossing the line in 56:07, while unattached runner Matthew Burge followed in 56:11.

Mark Savage of Wimborne AC was next in 56:15, with Bournemouth AC’s Luke De-Benedictis recording 58:26.

Rob Parker of Bridport Runners took 15th in 58:32, followed by Egdon Heath Harriers' Steve Kellaway in 58:51.

Louis Verdi of Wimborne AC was 17th in 58:58, before Tom Casson completed Bournemouth AC's scoring five in 59:11.

That was a significant result for Bournemouth AC, giving them second place in the fixture and providing a boost in their battle with Twemlow Track Club for the Men's First Division runner-up position.

Indeed, by the time Bournemouth had completed their scoring team, Twemlow hadn't even registered a finisher.

Lee Dempster eventually led the Twemlow challenge home in 20th place, recording 59:15.

Joe Cherrett had crossed the line for Wimborne AC in a chip time of 59:11, with Damian Huntingford arriving in 59:22 to become their fourth scorer in 21st place.

Wimborne needed just one more athlete to complete their scoring team and secure third place, but it wasn't to be.

That honour ultimately went to Egdon Heath Harriers, who once again demonstrated that their recent resurgence was no flash in the pan.

Giles Heaman finished 23rd in 59:24, with Adam Davies coming home 31st in 1:00:31 and Elliott Parsons completing their scoring team in 33rd place in 1:00:41.

It was another hugely significant result for Egdon, who drew level on points with Wimborne in the battle to avoid relegation from the Men's First Division.

The two clubs will now go into the Boscombe 10k knowing that everything will be decided there. It doesn't get much tighter than that.

Johnson makes it three in a row

While Josh Cole was busy dominating the men's race, Madeleine Johnson was continuing her own impressive run of form in the women's competition.

The Egdon Heath Harriers athlete made it three consecutive victories, crossing the line in 1:00:53 to secure another thoroughly convincing win.

She was comfortably clear of Gill Pearson, who finished second in 1:02:30, although her performance wouldn't contribute towards the Dorset League team standings.

Becky Neal of Poole AC took third place in 1:04:02, with Helen Henderson of Poole Runners recording precisely the same chip time to finish fourth.

Susie Hill of Lonely Goat was fifth in 1:04:54, taking the honours in the 45-49 category.

Egdon Heath Harriers were looking particularly strong, with Ella Allford finishing sixth in 1:05:43, while their leading woman Johnson had already given them a tremendous platform.

Dawn Andrews of Poole AC was seventh, followed by Dorchester RIOT's Louise Fox in eighth place in 1:07:25.

Victoria Pye, the leader of the women's individual standings, came home ninth in 1:07:56.

Bournemouth AC's Katie Bentley and Kitty Cook finished tenth and eleventh respectively, recording 1:08:02 and 1:08:09.

Ellie Laird then completed Egdon Heath Harriers' scoring team in 1:08:53, finishing twelfth female.

That was enough to seal the deal.

Egdon had secured their fifth victory of the season in the Ladies First Division, and, more importantly, they had finally done enough to confirm themselves as divisional champions.

Their Weymouth 10 triumph had put them in pole position, but this was the performance that brought the title over the line.

Poole AC finished second in the fixture, but it wasn't enough to keep their championship ambitions alive. Egdon had delivered when it mattered most.

Further down the results, Sally Miller of Dorchester RIOT was 13th female in 1:11:05.

Claire Kremer of Poole AC topped the 50-54 category, recording 1:11:34, the same time as Donna Pearce of Lytchett Manor Striders.

Miranda Aldridge of Verwood Runners was 16th in exactly 1:12:00, with Vicky Rutter of Littledown Harriers taking 17th in 1:13:12.

Poole Runners finally get the job done

There was also a significant development in the Men's Second Division, where Poole Runners produced another impressive team performance to secure their sixth victory of the campaign.

That was enough to mathematically guarantee promotion, meaning they had finally put Littledown Harriers beyond reach with one fixture still remaining.

It was a thoroughly deserved reward for a season of consistency, and they can now approach the Boscombe 10k knowing that their place in the Men's First Division is assured.

Littledown finished second in the fixture and will also finish second in the final league standings, having been unable to quite match Poole Runners' relentless consistency.

Behind them, Dorset Doddlers produced another encouraging performance, finishing third to put themselves firmly in the driving seat in the battle for survival.

Westbourne finished fourth, with Lytchett Manor Striders fifth.

Interestingly, that was precisely how the three clubs were positioned in the league standings going into the final fixture. The Boscombe 10k will therefore be a particularly important occasion for all three, with relegation still very much up for grabs.

Doddlers still have work to do

In the Ladies Second Division, Dorchester RIOT produced the lowest score of the competing clubs, with Bournemouth AC finishing second and Verwood Runners third.

Dorset Doddlers managed to edge out Purbeck Runners for fourth place, which was a welcome result after their surprise victory at Weymouth Bay.

However, it still looks like a difficult task for the Doddlers if they are to avoid relegation.

They will need to win at the Boscombe 10k and hope that Purbeck Runners fail to finish inside the top three.

It's a tall order, but after their recent resurgence, they won't be giving up just yet.

Verwood turn the tables in the Third Division

The Men's Third Division produced another intriguing twist, with Verwood Runners getting the better of Dorchester RIOT at the Wimborne 10.

That result sees Verwood move to the top of the standings going into the final fixture, with Dorchester dropping into second place.

However, the championship is far from settled.

Should Dorchester RIOT win at the Boscombe 10k, they will still have done enough to claim the title, regardless of Verwood's performance.

It means the two clubs will head into the final race with everything to play for. After such a closely fought campaign, it would be fitting if the destination of the title came down to the final day.

There was rather less uncertainty in the Ladies Third Division, where Lytchett Manor Striders secured their eighth victory of the season.

Bournemouth Joggers were the only other club to field a scoring team, finishing second, but there was no stopping Lytchett, who have been in a league of their own throughout the campaign.

Individual honours begin to take shape

With the penultimate fixture completed, the individual competitions are also beginning to take on a more definitive shape.

In the men's standings, Tommy Corbin has now secured the individual title, while Lewis Clarke has wrapped up second place.

Mark Savage of Wimborne AC had already guaranteed himself third, meaning the leading positions in the men's competition are now settled.

There is still a little more to be decided in the women's standings, although Victoria Pye has done more than enough to secure the individual championship, having established a sizeable advantage over her nearest challengers.

Dawn Andrews has also confirmed herself as runner-up.

Kitty Cook currently occupies third position, although her Bournemouth AC teammate Katie Bentley still has the opportunity to overtake her if she turns out at the Boscombe 10k.

All roads lead to Boscombe

And so, after a thoroughly eventful and decidedly damp afternoon in Wimborne, the Dorset Road Race League season is heading towards its grand finale.

Egdon Heath Harriers have finally got their hands on the Ladies First Division title, while Poole AC continue to dominate the Men's First Division.

Poole Runners can also celebrate promotion, and Lytchett Manor Striders have enjoyed another memorable campaign in the Ladies Third Division.

But there is still plenty to be decided.

The battle between Bournemouth AC and Twemlow Track Club for second place in the Men's First Division remains alive, while Egdon Heath Harriers and Wimborne AC are now level on points in their fight to avoid relegation.

Dorset Doddlers have given themselves a lifeline in the Men's Second Division, but their counterparts in the Ladies Second Division face a much tougher challenge.

And then there is the Men's Third Division title, where Verwood Runners have edged ahead of Dorchester RIOT at precisely the moment when the season is reaching its climax.

The Boscombe 10k is now the only thing standing between the clubs and the end of another entertaining Dorset Road Race League campaign.

If the Wimborne 10 was anything to go by, we could be in for quite a finish.