

English Road Running Association National Relays, Sutton Park, West Midlands, October 7

On a day when the unseasonal Autumn weather continued, temperatures reached 24 degrees C by the time that the racing finished as City of Leeds and Aldershot took the two senior races.

In the young athletes' events, only Chelmsford took two titles as the other four were spread around. Overall, Aldershot collected six podium team medals.

Men

City of Leeds repeated their 2019 victory to unset Aldershot, who had won for the past two years and their intention was clear from the start.

Running the first 5.84km stage, Linton Taylor, who was in their winning Northern team, led from the start and down through the first loop before setting off in the lead up the long hill to the top of the lap.

It was Highgate's Jacob Allen who took over up the hill and stayed ahead to the end with a 16:58 split as York's Angus McMillan and Reading's Jonny Davies followed him home.

Allen said: "I took the lead after the corner but I had the summer off so wanted to test myself then push hard off the long hill.

Graham Rush moved the winners up to second, on stage two, despite being passed by Birchfield's Midland fastest lap runner Omar Ahmed., who scythed through 37 other teams to the lead. His time of 16:34 then stayed as the fastest of the afternoon. Ahmed was his usual taciturn self and said: "I passed all the people but we (Birchfield) are not strong enough to win."

Leeds then maintained second on stage three but again had to concede to a faster runner. This time it was Rory Leonard who built on his fastest lap in the Northern to just give the lead to Morpeth. He said: "I've done 90 miles this week and I looked at the all-time list and think I've gone ninth." However, It was actually seventh by the close of play, behind ultra historic course specialist Chris Davies' 16;25 from 2003.

Leeds stabilised with John Beattie, who crossed the line with Cambridge & Coleridge's Jack Gray, who had closed rapidly with a 17:11 split.

Then it was Phil Sesemann, heavy in marathon training, who took them to a 51 second lead, over the north-easterners on stage four, as Aldershot, who had been making steady progress went third through James Dargan.

Sesemann said that he was going for the Valencia marathon in December and is on 120 miles a week currently but, as ever here gave his all before collapsing to the ground. He noted that "it was windy at the top of the hill."

Oliver Lockley kept Leeds ahead on the penultimate lap but was closed down by a 17:01 leg from Cambridge's Callum Elson as Dylan Evans moved up for Shaftesbury.

The glory leg went to Leeds' Richard Allen but he had to be wary of a rapidly closing Will Barnicoat who cut the margin to just 10 seconds after a second fastest overall split of 16:36 Jonathan Escalante-Phillips slipped past Shaftesbury's Jamie Dee to secure third for Cambridge & Coleridge after a 17:15 stint.

Allen said that he didn't feel took good but added I can't lose that and felt better in the second half," before adding: "It's good to get a winning team together."

Barnicoat said of his chase for late glory: "I felt good but couldn't see him (Allen) and I was in no-man's-land."

Ahmed's time slips into fifth in the all-time Sutton Park rankings and Barnicoat's to sixth.

Deep in the field, Belgrave Harriers threw in a final lap from Australian Olympian and 1500m record holder Stewart McSweyn, who notched up a 16:35 split.

However, word had spread early in the day about the likelihood of a problem concerning his UK residency.

Knowing this, the referee advised that they would be disqualified but the Belgrave team manager decided to run McSweyn anyway, but added that they were not initially aware of any problem as he had been registered late in September. He said the entry was an oversight on the technicalities of the rules. So McSweyn's name will not appear in the results.

Belgrave Harriers have previous form in trying to run ineligible athletes and did so with a couple of Spanish brothers in the Mansfield cross-country relays some years earlier before a late DQ.

U17 Men

Chelmsford confirmed their status as a solid young athletes' club and with the same three-man squad as in their winning Southern victory won narrowly from Cambridge & Coleridge.

After a steady start they advanced to third on stage two through Joseph Grange's 11:41 before club mate Sam Plummer matched his time on the final 2.88km leg for a 10 second victory over Cambridge & Coleridge with City of Norwich a distant third.

Their times were equal fifth fastest behind the top four opening stage runners.

There, it was former English National under-15 cross country champion Alden Collier who dominated with an 11:29 time for his new club Windsor, Slough, Eton & Hounslow.

He said: "That's a good indicator for the coming season." Behind, Ewan Busfield, Owen Smith and Ewan Taylor, for second placed Cambridge & Coleridge followed as Collier's time was the fourth fastest ever over this lap.

U15 boys

Blackheath & Bromley had to thank Joesph Scanes for their victory after a final lap 11:44 for the same young athletes' lap that wound up as the quickest of the age group. It was also an under-15 course record, beating Adam Hickey's 11:53 from 2003 and the Blackheath total time was also a course best.

Talking about his rival for top spot, Scanes said: "He was slowing up the hill but tried to hold me then I got him just before the lake."

Wreake & Soar Valley had gone ahead on stage two thanks to Sam Collins' before Scanes sealed it. Trafford took third after Pio Aron's 21 place gain on stage two was followed by Finlay Dobson-Emmas' anchor.

That advance was bettered by Leamington's Archie Lane who gained 40 spots to 17th with a second best 12:07.

Earlier it had been Evan Grime who 'won' the first stage for Salford with a 12:11 clocking but he said: "I pulled away at the ice cream van, but I am the only one from my club."

U13 boys

The first race away had been the under-13 boys' event and they did it despite having none of the fastest times. It had been Cambridge's Harry Cantell who had taken the first stage in 13:16, a time that was to hold as second best ahead of Wreake & Soar Valley's Kieran James' 13:20.

Finlay Byrne then moved Swindon ahead mid-race after a tussle for the lead, before Jesse Bryant finished the job.

There was a final stage charge from North Somerset, as Oliver Finch gained 11 places at the death with the fastest under-13 time of 13:13. He said: "It went well and I took four on the long hill."

Women

Just as was the case in the South of England Championships two weeks earlier, Aldershot again provided the first two teams home, although only one will get the official team medals, with their B squad being recognised with an appropriate memento.

This left third team home Leeds being awarded silver, despite being passed on the line by the AFD B squad. The winning team time of 58:07 was well over a minute outside the Aldershot club's own course record but this was their thirteenth win since 2007 as they unseated Tonbridge for the 2023 title.

In an interesting twist, the two Aldershot teams had to concede to former member Lily Partridge on the opener. Now with what she says is her "father's club of Birchfield Harriers," the 32-year-old clocked 13:55, a time that was to hold up as

the best of a day when there were no women able to break into the top dozen times since the women's race began at Sutton Park in 1990.

Partridge was headed around the first down then up loop after the start by Lauren McNeil and the Hallamshire runner drew the eventual fastest leg runner clear of the rest before fading on the top of the course.

The Valencia Marathon now beckons for Partridge, who said she is on "80 miles a week but I am not sure of my shape."

Lauren Hall took the Aldershot B Team to the front on stage two before Pippa Roessler also had the advantage over their A squad on the penultimate leg.

Phillips Bowden settled matters for their A string quartet with the fastest AFD time of 14:15 but this was just seventh quickest overall.

They were all upstaged by Partridge's 13:55, for the 4.315km lap, which was four seconds to the good of Kiwi Georgie Grgec, who had gained 24 spots for Herne Hill on stage two for 12th, mid race.

Besides having a battle with their Aldershot sisters, the B team also had to fend off Leeds on the final leg, Their Eleanor Curran took the eventual third placers up to second before a do or die effort up the final hill by Emily Moyes gave the AFD foursome the honor of finishing second on the day, but silver went to Leeds anyway.

Belgrave Harriers' find of the year, Kate Axford brought her club home fourth by the line but collected the bronze medals after closing dramatically on the final leg with the third best time of 14:04. This came after Sarah Astin had advanced them to fourth on the penultimate stage.

Fifth placed Tonbridge had two of the top five women's times, through Phoebe Barker (14:08) and Lucy Reid (14:09), but never totally recovered after a slow start.

Deep in the field, for Exeter Harriers on stage three, four-time Olympian Jo Pavey was dragooned into turning out for her club by three 17-year-olds, led by none other than Innes Fitzgerald. They were still mid-field after Pavey's run before Fitzgerald, who had set an under-17 course best here last year, brought them up to 11th after an 14:09 split.

One wag pointed out that the combined age of the Exeter quartet was 102 years of which Pavey contributed exactly half! Pavey said: "it was three 17-year-olds and me. Innes entered us but I would have liked to have trained harder but I am not strong on the hills."

U17 women

Wreake & Soar Valley had the biggest win of the day as track middle-distance record holder Shaikira King anchored the Midland winners to another gold.

They had a steady start as Blackheath's Eliza Nicholson broke well away with a 12:55 split, on the opener, that later became the second best of the day.

She then talked about her plans for the winter, saying that the Euro under-20 team is her target after the UK cross at Milton Keynes and Mansfield.

Imogen Saunders then took Wreake ahead mid-race before King completed the job and a massive winning margin of 69 seconds over a Portsmouth trio who had been led off by Florence East's 13:33 fourth best of the day time.

Starting out in eighth, Saunders said of her run: "I felt the others slowing and took the lead."

Maybe because of the ease of victory, King's 13:22 slipped in as third best but she was pleased with her run saying: "I felt a lot faster and sprinted up that hill."

However good times can always be clocked by those slicing through the field and Katie Pye did just that in taking Aldershot up to third at the line after gaining ten places with a fastest split of 12:50.

U15 girls

Aldershot had earlier claimed another fastest age group time here though Kitty Scott's last leg 13:09 that gained two places to second. Olivia Forest also advanced two to third for Brentwood with a second best 13:10. They now sit fourth and fifth on the all-time list.

This came after Violet Rudkin had 'won' the first stage for Wreake with 13:47 but her club then slipped back as Molly Granta took Lincoln Wellington ahead on a stage with no outstanding times. Ella-Rose Whitworth then finished the job for Lincoln with a 13:19 time, but it was touch and go.

Whitworth said; (I did start first but she (Scott) caught me but I managed to keep with her then got he up the (final) hill." For her part Scott said: "she had the better sprint."

U13 girls

Chelmsford had won their first team gold when, after a steady start in third spot, through Heidi Woodley, Ava King took the lead mid-race, saying: "we had the same team as in the south and I took the lead at the top of the hill." Then Erin Kelly held on to win, ahead of new club Warriors Pentathlon, who were 15th before the Beddow twins took them to a solid second.

Earlier, it had been Masie Mullett who had 'won' the opening stage with 13:58, for Wreake & Soar Valley, a time that stayed as the best of the race. She said: "I felt good and took the lead on the downhill and am very happy with my run."

The twins Isobel and Eve were next best with 14:05 and 14:08. Aldershot took another medal in third after Poppy Guest moved them into the frame on the final leg.