

ERRA MEN'S 12 & WOMEN'S 6-STAGE ROAD RELAY CHAMPIONSHIP, SUTTON PARK April 11

It is a rare event when a club retains their men's 12-stage title but Bristol & West did just that at wind-swept Sutton Park, whilst women's winner Belgrave Harriers were on the podium in their 6-stage event for the first time.

Clubs employ different tactics in road relays and, whilst Salford Harriers front-loaded their team to good effect, the consistent Bristol outfit saved their two star turns to last, as did second placed Tonbridge.

Belgrave too had to come from behind to take the women's race but were always in the hunt. With the dog-leg out to Streetley Gate again restricted the turn was a short way west of the Jamboree Stone which meant that the length, which was recently remeasured at 5,432-metres and the equal length stages now seem to meet with widespread approval.

Men

Bristol have history in this race and, in 1980, were the first club to approach the what was considered 'magic' four-hour mark and since then had only won once more and that was last year.

Their retention this year was the first time, since Leeds in 2014, to retain the title and they did so with an extremely consistent set of individual times, at least until the last two laps.

Flynn Jennings had set them on their way with a fifth place on the opener, with a 16:00 split and they then drifted out of contention until Peter Le Grice advanced them to third on stage nine and Luke Burgess consolidated on leg ten as he went ahead and then said: "I was five seconds faster than in the Midlands."

It was then almost all Bristol as both Jack Millar and Will Battershill, who was fastest last year both went sub-16 minutes to seal victory by more than a minute.

Back then, Battershill had said that he had twisted his ankle but this year said: "This was more stressful but there was still mud by the lake."

This was ahead of 2018 and 2022 winners Tonbridge who threw everything at stages 10 and 12 but had to be content with second.

They had started well enough after Jack Higgins first stage fourth place, but then drifted out of contention until they played their Ace Card in the form of James Kingston. The 24-year-old may only have gained four places to second but his 15:19 was comfortably the fastest of the day.

Talking about his career to date and what the future may hold he said that he may well go to longer distance road running in the future but with and marathon debut many years away.

Tonbridge then played another card at the death as Ted Higgins went third best overall with a 15:37 return but it was all too late and they had to be content with the silver medals.

Cambridge & Coleridge staged a repeat of their third place from 2025 and, apart from a nippy fourth leg by Jack Gray, went largely un-noticed until they too Played their high scoring cards near the end.

They were to secure the bronze medals as firstly Callum Elson and then Jonathan Escalante-Phillips both went under 16-minutes to keep them more than a minute clear of Kent, Salford and Western Tempo.

However, Salford had earlier led for two thirds of the race after Harry Johnson's 15:44 gave them a first leg victory but then admitted to front-loading their team. He said: "I took the lead and then held it but it's the first 12-stage I have done."

That front-loading was confirmed by their stage four and second quickest runner, Harry Wakefield who had re-gained that first spot as he said: "I picked the team," but it was only on the penultimate lap that they slipped away from the podium,

They did admit that they knew they were going to slip back and stage six runner Jacob Wood-Doyle, who again kept them ahead at the half way point said: "I thought that I was going to get caught."

Western Tempo had won the midland race on this same course and brought in Jacob Cann to bolster their cause. He did so with a 12-place advancement to third on stage four with the second fastest effort of 15:21 but admitted: "we are missing a few."

They then took the overall lead on stage nine thanks to Dom James' 16:01, but they flattered to deceive and could not withstand the back-loading of their rivals and wound up sixth.

It had been Bristol and second placed Tonbridge who had effectively back-loaded their dozen runners but one thing the race did prove was that clubs need to have all of their runners inside 17 minutes on this course. or about 15:30 for 5km. if they want medals. First and second did this and third placed Cambridge & Coleridge had just a single runner outside 17:00, but clubs with more were left out in the cold.

Deep in the field, on leg two, former World 1500-mtres gold medallist and 2025 runner-up, Jake Wightman put in an appearance for Edinburgh and was timed at 16:03 after gaining 15 slots to 36th place.

He said: "It was nice to run through the field." Watchers noticed that Wightman appeared to be running easily and not flat out.

Asked about his plans for the summer the 1500-meter man said that he would be going for both European and Commonwealth championships.

Men (12x5.424m): 1 Bristol & W 3:16:49 (F Jennings 16:00, W Parkin 16:52, D Rigby 16:43, D Minors 16:51, F McGrath 16:16, T Lefroy 16:32, M Campion 16:39, J Morrow 16:41, P Le Grice 16:12, L Burgess 16:13, J Millar 15:59, W Battershill 15:46); 2 Tonbridge 3:17:26 (J Higgins 15:58, L Mills 16:41, C Chambers 17:24, J MacDonald 17:16, H Fraser 16:44, T Bawtree 16:44, A Howard 16:09, J Chambers 17:07, J Crombie 16:51, J Kingston 15:19, K Reilly 16:30, T Higgins 15:37); 3 Cambridge & Coleridge 3:18:14 (C Benyan 16:38, E Spencer 16:27, J Moynihan 16:57, J Gray 15:58, M Morgan 16:38, J Teagle 16:15, W Newcombe 17:30, M Bartram 16:59, L McCarron 16:28, D Jones 16:24, C Elson 15:54, J Escalante-Phillips 15:59); 4 Kent 3:19:17 (R Sesemann 16:37, J Collier 16:06, B Clarke 17:18, J Gilbert 16:32, O Buck 17:05, K Wilkinson 16:48, I Parker 17:03, N Acfield 16:38, N Armitage-Hookes 16:25, R Braden 16:43, O Hind 16:03, J English 15:53); 5 Salford 3:19:33 (J Johnson 15:54, J Birmingham 15:21, J Moores 16:57, H Wakefield 15:50, D Barratt 16:22, J Wood-Doyle 16:48, K Davidson 16:34, K Darcy 16:52, M Mannings 17:06, C Rowlinson 17:04, G Priestley 17:13, T Cornthwaite 16:35); 6 W Tempo 3:19:40 (C Jones 16:20, L Carroll 16:47, L Davis 16:58, J Cann 15:21, M Kelly 16:43, G Jones 16:48, B Robinson 16:33, A Lygo 17:00, D James 16:01, R de Camps 17:12, C Wright 17:19, D Owen 16:31); 7 Herne Hill 3:19:48 (H Bell 16:22, A Ludewick 15:45, D Shaw 16:33, L Laylee 16:52, F Whitelock 17:07, S Bramwell 15:42, E Brown 16:56, D Brashaw 16:56, T Austin 16:55, M Roberts 16:39, A Russell 16:49, T O'Mahoney 17:08); 8 Highgate 3:21:32 (H Grierson 15:55, A Lepretre 16:19, F Kent 17:13, J Allen 16:22, R Brown 17:02, S Gharfari 16:40, R Wilson 17:14, R Poolman 16:39, T Burns 17:20, L Fawden 17:48, D Lewis 17:06, S Jinks 16:49):

9 Leeds 3:22:14 (W Indelbu 17:03, N Marsh 17:04, J Hall 16:49, O Meslek 17:17, D Franks 16:58, W Tighe 16:37, M Abshir 17:11, J Firth 16:20, S Atkinson 18:16, J Beattie 16:17, S Flanagan 16:55, G Chalmers 16:23); 10 Swansea 3:23:12 (C Rogers 16:34, E Slaughter 17:10, M Verran 17:06, A Robinson 18:16, J Hopkins 16:55, E Lawrence 17:24, J Butler 16:22, M James 17:21, D Jones 6:08, D Rothwell 16:51, D Griffiths 16:10, M Rees 16:50); 11 Central 3:23:32; 12 Meirionnydd 3:23:58; 13 Bedford & C3:24:24; 14 VP&TH 3:26:33; 15 Corstophine 3:27:09

Fastest: J Kingston (Ton) 15:19; J Cann (W Tempo) 15:21; Ted Higgins (Ton) 15:37; S Barnwell (Herne H) 15:42; H Johnson (Salf) 15:44; A Ludewick/WBattersil (B&W) 15:46; M Clisham (Cov G) 15:48; H Wakefield (Salf) 15:50; J English (Kent) 15:53

Women

Last year the women ran six legs of what was previously their short stage and statistic buffs were reasonably satisfied at a measure of consistency. This year, however it was all change for the women who ran their six stages of equal 5,432-metres to that of the men.

Winners Belgrave topped the podium for the first time and were always in the top three after Alexandra Barbour gave them a good start in third spot. That was behind first stage 'winner' Bethany Reid who brought an incomplete Trafford squad home with a fourth overall fastest 18:24 ahead of Salford's Sinead Bent.

Reid said: "It was so windy and we were together then I took the lead at the bottom of the hill." Belgrave then see-sawed between second and first as Juliet Hodder brought them home with the sixth best time of 18:30.

This added to their South of England crown from two weeks earlier and theirs was a race of consistency as faster times were elsewhere.

On leg two Saron Haileselaise had gained slot to second, behind City of Leeds' Heather Townsend, who said: "I passed four or five."

Nancie Bowley's 18:18, the day's second quickest, then took Belgrave ahead mid-race and she said: "I missed the win in the Southern and we should hold on as we've got guns on 4,5 and 6."

It was again Leeds who challenged and led at the end of stages four, thanks to Katrina Ballantyne, who said: "the wind didn't feel too bad" and five, through Eilidh Bell, who said: "I tried to ease downhill then be strong on the ups."

Finally, Hodder's 18:30 sealed the Belgrave win by 36 seconds on the glory leg. She said: "It's nicer starting off second and I tried to go off fairly relaxed then squeezed it the second half."

For Leeds it was the third year in a row that they had taken the silver medals having won four times between 2017 and 2023.

In 2024, it was Thames Valley Harriers who came out on top with their Yvie Lock fastest on the long leg and, here, it was Lock who gained eight slots to third place on stage two with a fifth fastest 18:27.

A drop to fourth mid-race followed and steady laps then came their way, before Roxana Lopez Ramierez took them back to the podium place.

That was at the expense of holders and eight-time winners Aldershot, who had moved up to third on stage four thanks to Phillipa Bowden's third quickest of the day 18:20, however, they could not maintain their edge and slipped back over the last two laps.

Largely un-noticed, fifth placed Bristol & West, like their men, saved their best to the end of the race as firstly Chelsea Baker, who was sixth quickest, with 18:30 and then Charlotte Taylor who moved them firstly from 11th to sixth and then into the top five.

For Taylor it yielded comfortably the fastest lap time of 17:53, despite running in a vacuum for the majority of the lap.

Deep in the women's field there were good performance from two of the country's top masters' runners. Holder of several W55 best road times Karima Harris ran 20:24 for Highgate on leg two whilst multi-W60 record and road best holder Clare Elms was quicker with a 20:16 split on the first stage.

Women (6x5.424km): 1 Belgrave 1:52:55 (A Barbour 18:35, S Haileselaisse 19:00, N Bowley 18:18, M Cordon-Lloyd 19:32, E Fennelly 18:58, J Hodder 18:30); 2 Leeds 1:53:31 (S Pennycook 18:40, H Townsend 18:41, G Malir 18:34, K Ballantyne 19:09, E Bell 19:11, Z Hunter 19:13); 3 TVH 1:55:21 (C Buckley 19:15, Y Lock 18:27, A Mundell 20:04, L Sterritt 20:38, T Barlow 19:22, R Lopez-Ramirez 18:34); 4 AFD 1:55:27 (M Grice 19:11, H Preedy 18:38, E Stevens 20:01, P Bowden 18:20, L Gent 19:49, A Griffiths 19:26); 5 Bristol & West 1:56:32 (S Duval 19:27, M Jones 20:25, B Shepherd 19:57, A Nicholls 20:17, C Baker 18:30, C Taylor 17:53); 6 Cambridge & C 1:58:36 (J Leggate 18:49, I Mansley 20:04, K Lowery 19:24, J Colley 20:42, J Edmunds 20:32, E Ruane 19:02); 7 Herne H 1:59:38 (M Coogan 19:19, M Smith 18:35, S Lockwood 21:04, O Stillman 20:11, G Layland 19:53, K Balme 20:33); 8 Belgrave B 2:00:08 (A Gandee 19:35, S Riceman 20:38, G Rowley 19:05, P Oliver 21:08, A Alloula 19:54, L Mangan 19:45); 9 Edinburgh 2:00:16 (L Naga 20:28, A McAuley-Orr 20:45, A Thompson 21:49, H Cox 19:39, I Cubitt 19:01, K Walker 18:31); 10 Swansea 2:01:00 (M Gold 19:18, D Bass 19:36, B Stratton-Thomas 21:19, N McDonald 20:02, H Williams 20:34, B Rusby 20:08); 11 T Bath 2:01:14; 12 VP&TH 2:01:41; 13 Highgate 2:02:12; 15 Bury 2:05:40

Fastest: C Taylor (B&W) 17:53; N Bowley (Belg) 18:18; P Bowden (AFD) 18:20; B Reid (Traff) 18:24; Y Lock (TVH) 18:27; C Baker (B&W)/J Hodder (Belg) 18:30