

## **ERRA AUTUMN RELAYS at Sutton Park October 8 2022**

### **Report by Martin Duff for the English Road Running Association**

It was another record-breaking day as, for the second year in a row, the all-time lists were amended by both teams and individuals.

There were no spectacular team times from the women's four-stage event but Amelia Quirk produced perhaps the best ever individual run of the relays.

The Bracknell runner gained nine places to seventh for her club, on the last leg and her 13:38 was easily the best effort of the race but, more than that, it was the second-best time in the 32-year history of the women's race here.

Only Paula Radcliffe's 13:26 had been quicker and had been set on a slightly longer but different loop, in 1993. Quirk's 13:38 is actually a record for this exact distance here, beating Steph Twell's 13:41 from 2007.

Quirk was quick to give the reason for the spate of faster times in the last couple of years saying: "they didn't have the shoes back then."

That women's race was won for the first time by Tonbridge, who joined their men in now being race winners here. Their men won in 2015.

This year, it was Aldershot who held on to their men's 6-stage title and it was their fourth win in the last 11 races and they did so in the third best time, behind their winning 2021 one and Newham & Essex Beagles' 2009 effort.

The day had begun with the young athletes' races in bright autumnal sunshine and mild weather and there were six different clubs taking home the gold medals.

### **Men**

Aldershot were never out of the top three and began with Josh Grace and then led after the second leg as Will Barnicoat's 16:50 split, that stood up as the second-best time of the day.

Cambridge & Coleridge's Jonathan Escalante-Phillips had led on the opener and expressed himself surprised to 'win' as he said: "I had two days off with a cold." He emerged from a big group and followed as Tonridge's Ben Cole took it on at the stone, before pouncing to take the stage.

It was then Leeds turn in front on leg three and the 2019 winners, who were second last year, threw in Phil Sesemann, just six days after his London Marathon 2:12:10. The eventual winners lost further ground on leg four as Ben Bradley could not match the pace of Cambridge's James Teagle and Leeds' Ed Bovington and were now third.

Cambridge then extended their lead on the penultimate stage as Callum Elson took Leeds' Richard Allen further away from Aldershot's Sam Eglen.

Aldershot had gambled by leaving Rowe to deliver the goods, on the final 5847-metre lap, to secure victory. He was 53 seconds down but set off with determination if not at top speed.

He said: "I felt I had it but had to go off steady. My Garmin said I ran the first mile in 4:47 but the third mile was 4;23. It's good to get back-to-back wins and fastest laps."

The Aldershot win was by just five seconds as Leeds and Cambridge filled the minor placings.

## **Women**

Winners Tonbridge were nearly two minutes off of the head of the field on the opener and minor placers Salford and Aldershot were also slightly adrift. It was Abbie Donnelly brought Lincoln Wellington home in 14:00 a time that was to hold as the second best of the afternoon.

Tonbridge soon made amends, on stage two, as Phoebe Barker gained 20 places with a 14:20 split. The kent outfit then kept up their momentum as Nicole Taylor went up to third on the penultimate leg before Lucy Reid completed the job and victory was theirs, by 11 seconds, over Salford.

Lincoln remained possible medallists throughout but just failed at the death.

Sophie Wallis slightly increased Lincoln's lead on stage two, ahead of Salford's Anna Bracegirdle.

Jess Judd was also out on the second leg doing even better with a 26-place gain, with 14:02, third best of the day, for Blackburn to take them up to third.

Salford then took a narrow lead on the penultimate leg, through Eleanor Bolton, on the last hill, as India Barwell kept Lincoln in the frame.

With the destiny of the title still in doubt, Taylor's 14:08 had gained eight places for Tonbridge, who were now just 22 seconds from the lead on stage three. Reid, then duly delivered with a 14:10 timing as Salford took second and Aldershot moved up to third, thanks to Philippa Bowden.

The best effort of the day came from Amelia Quirk who scythed through on the last lap with a ten-place gain to seventh for Bracknell with that 13:35 split. The 22-year-old, modest as ever, was quick to point out the advantage that the new type of running shoes gave runners.

It is perhaps worth pointing out that racing shoes have always evolved, from Plimsolls, to Tiger Cubs, to the modern high-tech product.

## **Young Athletes**

The day had begun with the young athletes' races with the first away being the U13 boys, quickly followed by the U13 girls.

Pre-race favourites Wolverhampton & Bilston took the boys' event thanks to Fred Jones' mid-race fastest lap of 12:22 and they wound up a minute clear of Herne Hill. His time was the second best ever under-13 effort on this course.

English National fourth placer Noel Homer ran 12:27 for Birchfield, on the opening lap, but he was the only runner from his club. He said: "there was a tiny bit of wind but I felt really good."

The under-13 girls' event followed and saw a victory for Aldershot, ahead of Birtley and Chelmsford.

Jasmine Christmas' led their field home, with 13:38, on the opening lap for Cambridge & Coleridge ahead of Windsor's Zoe Allan's 13:43. "She was with me until the last corner," said Christmas of her rival.

Christmas time was the second best-ever under-13 time behind Naomi Speake's 13:36 from 2006.

Kitty Scott gave Aldershot a solid mid-race lead with a third best time of 14:00 before Matilda Robertson completed the job.

The young athletes' races always have their fair share of thrills and spills and so it proved but Sutton & District defied the odds to win the U15 boys' event. Their Ethan Newell fell at the start but got up after, as he said of the runners that he passed him: "I was dead last and they were holding me down."

Despite grazes to both shoulders and both knees Newell fought back and steadily clawed his way through the field of 75 starters to sixth and just twenty seconds down on race leader Archie Parker of Keighley & Craven.

Owen Ulfig was fastest here in the Midland race and again took Wolverhampton & Bilston to the lead, mid-race, with a race fastest split of 11:55. The time was just two seconds slower than Adam Hickey's 2003 under-15 boys' race record.

Sutton's Elliott Manning gained two places for Sutton, on stage two, but lost time on the lead, before Alex Lennon made up 55 seconds for an unlikely Sutton victory with a 11:57.

The under-15 girls' race, saw Banbury's Isla McGowan, 'win' the first stage in 13:15, just ahead of Shaikira King for Wreake & Soar Valley. McGowan said: "I took the lead going up the last hill and she was with me all of the way."

King too was in the wars and said: "I got tripped at the start."

Aldershot's Katie Pye matched McGowan's time mid-race, to give her club the lead but Violet Rudkin kept Wreake a close second. before Imagen Saunders gave them a comfortable win over Emmiline Orbell's Aldershot.

At the presentation, only Pye was given the medal, after a genuine mistake from the announcer. With only one medal pre-engraved, a second fastest lap medal will be forwarded to her club.

Cambridge & Coleridge and second placed Rotherham, battled in the under-17 men's event. Zak Ferguson was home first on the opening leg, for Rotherham, with the race's second-best split of 11:38, before Liam Conway and fastest of all Isaac Morris, with 11:36, completed the job for Cambridge & Coleridge.

Morris said: "I had a stress fracture six months ago and I felt a bit rusty in the hot weather but, once I hit one-and-a-half-km, I felt so good."

Exeter won the under-17 women's race after being nearly a minute down on Phoebe Gill's 12:56 opener for St Albans. Isla Bryson moved Exeter up to seventh mid-race, as Zoe Gilbody put Wreake & Soar Valley ahead of Wolves and Windsor.

Exeter had Innes Fitzgerald on the anchor leg and she produced what was perhaps the best run by anybody on the day. She ran 12:08, which was 30-seconds better than Jess Judd's 2010 course record for the age group.

Full results can be viewed on Graham Fecitt's Sprortsoft website  
[SportSoft Race Results - 2022 \(race-results.co.uk\)](http://race-results.co.uk)