

Northern Athletics 12 & 6 Stage Road Relays Championships 2008

Catterick 6th April 2008

It was no surprise to see Leeds City easily win the men's race or that Chester le Street retained their women's crown.



Leeds lost a close race last year to Morpeth before going on to win the National. This time, a below strength Morpeth team were back in sixth as Liverpool got closest to the Leeds squad, albeit four and a half minutes adrift. And that was with three of their first choices, including Northern Cross Country winner Dave Webb, unavailable. They also had the first B team in an impressive 11th place.

In the women's race Chester le Street did not lead until the second half of the race when

Alyson Dixon took them to the front but won by over two minutes for their third successive victory. Their B team were also impressive finishing 9th.

The traffic free course met with approval but the weather was bitterly cold with snow flurries early on turning to blizzard conditions at the half way stage.

Leeds City's lowest position was sixth on the opening (long) stage although Chris Birchall's run gave them a good platform on a competitive stage won by Tom Lancashire running for an incomplete Bolton team. Confirming his fine cross country form, Lancashire clocked 27:37, fastest long stage of the day, later equalled by Sale's Glen Comish. Runner up Jon Mellor gave Liverpool a great start whilst Jonathan Taylor put the defending champions third. Martin Roscoe, 43, likes nothing better than to set off with half a dozen runners in his sights. His renowned sprint finish seems to get better with age and he stormed through to give Leeds the lead from Derby's Richard Weir.

James Wilkinson, the youngest member of the Leeds team, lost the lead on the next stage but only to Olympian Curtis Robb who looked pretty sharp as he sped round in 14:34, second fastest of the day for the short stage. Wilkinson's 15:09 was in the top 10.

Alan Buckley took Leeds into a substantial lead on stage four, a long one, clocking exactly 28 minutes. Eligible for only a month after joining from Gateshead, he will be a massive asset to Leeds. He has lived or worked in Leeds for 10 years since his student days and it makes sense to make the move as he has trained regularly with the Leeds athletes whilst remaining loyal to Gateshead. Anthony Ford was quick for Blackpool on this leg and Gareth Raven took Sale into third place.

The next five stages saw little change, Leeds maintaining a healthy lead but Sale went ahead of Liverpool through Steffan North on stage 8. Earlier, on the long stage 7, Glen Comish was in fine form clocking 27:37 to move from fifth to third. Stage six saw the fastest short stage of the race when Ian Hudspith took Morpeth into third place with a superb 14:19.

If Sale or anyone else had thoughts of closing the gap on Leeds they were dispelled on stage 10, the final long stage where James Walsh was almost minute faster than Sale (Simon Mills) with 27:59. This left Adam Osborne and Darran Bilton with a simple task but neither is ever content to run steadily and both increased their team's lead. Mark Keeley took Sale into the silver medal position with Trafford taking bronze and Sale being pushed into fourth place.

Trafford improved throughout with a consistent squad and Lee Turner had the fourth fastest short stage 14:56 on stage 8. [Men's Results](#)



Louise Gardner, for an incomplete Lancaster team, led the women's field on the first stage from Rachel Jones of Salford and Hallamshire's Julia Russell. Gateshead, another incomplete team, had a turn in the lead through Jessica Trowbridge before Estelle Malm took Salford to the front at the halfway stage. However, the star on this stage, and of the whole race, was Hatti Dean. Two late withdrawals ruined Hallamshire's medals chances but that made no difference to Dean who moved from 13th to 2nd with a superb 16:07, fastest of the day. Dean has not had the

happiest of winters, her cross country form falling short of her own high standards, but on this evidence she can enter her Olympic preparations with confidence.

Another with Beijing as her focus is Wakefield 1500 metre runner Charlene Thomas. She took her team from 20th to fifth with a time just eight seconds slower than Dean's and a performance which augers well for track preparation.

Alyson Dixon stormed into the lead for Chester le Street on stage four and, with Freya Murray on the anchor stage they were never going to be remotely threatened. A good run by Helen Singleton took Wakefield to third on the penultimate stage and Julie Briscoe, currently in fine form on the road, just caught Salford's Bev Jenkins to snatch the silver medals.

Rotherham ran well for fourth place with Jenny Blizard and Rosie Edwards running particularly well. [Women's Results](#)

Report Roger Norton