

## Bill McGuirk Reports from Leeds on Men's 6 & Women's 4 Stage Road Relays

NO DIFFICULTY for Leeds City and Chester-le-Street to retain their Northern Athletics Road Relay titles but Romanian Marius Ionescu is all the rave at sun-drenched Leeds Met Carnegie.

### MEN'S 6x3.8-mile

LEEDS City, going for a hat-trick of victories, got off to a slow start with Adam Grice contesting the first leg and finishing in 10th place, one place and one second ahead of their B team (Mike Burrett) but 43 seconds down on Sunderland's Patrick Martin who led the 84 teams going into leg two ahead of Altrincham and Warrington.

However, while Sunderland extended their advantage on the second stage to 12 seconds due to Jack Martin, the younger of the Martin brothers, Leeds moved into a medal position thanks to fastest on the course, James Wilkinson, who was now just 18 seconds behind the pace



setters with Morpeth (Jonny Taylor) splitting first and third.

Lincoln Wellington consolidated fourth place as St Helen's moved into fifth - from 19th - due to Dave Forrester's storming leg with Warrington and Altrincham dropping down to seventh and eighth place respectively.

Things took a familiar look on stage three as Simon Deakin, with the fastest stage time, moved the defending champions into pole position for the first time.

Brian Rushworth, as enthusiastic as ever at 46-years-old, kept the Wearsiders in touch in second place

though Deakin had taken the home-based squad into a 52-seconds lead. Just three seconds down on Sunderland came Sale with Gareth Raven bringing them through from ninth place. Altrincham (Matt Barnes) moved up to fourth as Morpeth (Ross Floyd) dropped to fifth closely followed by Warrington's Matthew Jackson.

Leeds' advantage was cut drastically to nine seconds on stage four and it was Altrincham's Marius Ionescu who did the damage. It wasn't that James Walsh ran badly for the leaders it was just an eye-catching, breath-taking run by the athlete who had finished just 22nd in the previous week's Great North Run. Walsh, who also had a tough contest the previous week when he finished in fifth place in the Commonwealth Mountain Championships in Keswick, was third fastest on the stage - Morpeth's Ian Hudspith, who finished 14th in the GNR - was second fastest in a highly-competitive stage with just two legs remaining. So, after four legs, it was Leeds, Altrincham, Morpeth, Sale, Sunderland, Liverpool up to sixth and Salford, moving menacingly through to seventh and Leeds' B team in eighth place.

The top three placings stayed the same on leg five though local boy Alan Buckley opened up a championship-winning margin of 1min 45sec as both Altrincham and Morpeth slipped way off the pace. That gave Tomas Abyu the chance to close in on a podium spot. And despite a

13th place in last weekend's Berlin Marathon still in his legs he brought Salford to within 21 seconds of a medal position. With victory almost assured once again Darran Bilton was given the glory leg for Leeds and he had no problems as he came home unchallenged but all the action was happening behind him. Andi Jones, warming up for the World Half-Marathon Championships in two weeks time, set his stall out from the start and he quickly cut back Altrincham and Morpeth's advantage and, with less than a mile to go had moved Salford up into second place. While Leeds were celebrating another success, Jones entered the stadium 20 metres clear of Andy Norman (Altrincham) with Chris Sampson (Morpeth) a further five metres adrift. Jones had the legs to hang on for second place at the line as Sampson eased ahead of Norman with 100 metres to go. However, Norman wasn't having any of it and dug deep to overhaul his bronze-chasing rival with 40 metres to go.

It was a fantastic finale to a well-organised event though it was a bitter-sweet Morpeth team who travelled the long journey back to Northumberland especially when one of their B-team runners was over a minute quicker than their slowest A-team athlete! Liverpool were over two minutes adrift of Morpeth in fifth place as Leeds once again showed strength in depth for their B team to finish in sixth place ahead of Derby with Hallamshire, Sale and Gateshead making up the top 10. One of Leeds' gold medal team, Alan Buckley, who lives within a stone's throw of the campus and trains there on the track each week, said he was delighted to be part of another Leeds success. "I was eager to know what sort of course they could muster and I was pleasantly surprised the circuit they managed," said Buckley, who joined his home city club after many years with Gateshead. "There were a couple of tight corners but all in all it worked out pretty well. "In the end it showed that Leeds can still take on the best and get a result when it matters."

### **WOMEN'S 4x3-mile**

THE women opened the day's proceedings and at the half-way stage Leeds City were in pole position, however, they used their big guns on the early legs and the Tykes eventually slipped out of contention to finish in eighth place, the same as at Hartlepool last year.

Susan Partridge led the 52 teams home on the opening stage with a nine-second cushion over champions for the previous three years, Chester-le-Street (Melissa Turner).

Partridge covered the three-mile circuit in 15min 53secs which was to prove to be the fastest time at the end of the day. Lancaster and Morecambe's Louise Gardner was a close-up third with Sale, Rotherham and Warrington making up the top six.

Claire Duck extended Leeds' advantage to 23 seconds as Chester-le-Street (Sarah Wilkinson) continued in second place with Mary Ferrier moving Gateshead from seventh to third ahead of Kingston upon Hull, Hallamshire and Lancaster and Morecambe at the half-way point.



Chester-le-Street moved into pole position for the first time thanks to Alyson Dixon, who, like Andy Jones, dashed down to Birmingham after the event for a GB team

get-together before the World Half-Marathon Championships. Dixon, who ran 16:31 which was to be the second fastest time of the day for the second year running, gave the Cestrians a 36-second cushion over a surprising second place Chester-le-Street B team thanks to Tracy Laws who had taken over in 10th place! Liverpool also made a significant forward charge into third place thanks to stalwart Jenny Claque as she was followed to the final changeover by Hallamshire, Sale and Gateshead.

Despite looking all over winners Maxine Czarnecka didn't take things easy on the glory leg for Chester-le-Street. Pushing on all the way to the line, Czarnecka came home over two minutes clear though the fastest on the stage, Lizzie Adams, brought Hallamshire up from fourth to silver medal position ahead of Liverpool's Laura Murphy. Despite improving four places on the last leg Scunthorpe's Nicola Geddes had to be content with fourth place this time round after finishing third in last year's championships and second the year before that. Bingley was the biggest mover on the last leg with Sarah Jarvis moving through to fifth from 13th with Chester-le-Street's B team next home ahead of Salford and Leeds City.

*Report Bill McGuirk, Photos Ken Smith*

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Darren Bilton Brings home Leeds to their third 6 satge championship in a row

Photo Harry Shakeshaft  
(further photos from this event on [Harry's website](#))