

PONTEFRACT Park – 29<sup>th</sup> January 2022

## HUGO HAPPY NOT TO BE BLOWN AWAY

GALE force winds failed to blow Hugo Milner off course in his Northern Senior cross-country debut as he claimed a superb victory at Pontefract Park.

The Derby AC international has a liking for the Yorkshire racecourse venue for he was successful there in the under-15 championship in 2012 and also finished in third place in the under-17 contest in 2015 after topping the podium in the same age group the previous year at Knowsley.

Apart from running into the strong winds, underfoot conditions for the 500+-strong field were ideal which was welcome after competitors had encountered a mud bath course three years previously. Once the initial charge from the gun settled down Matlock's Daniel Howarth was quickly at the head of affairs and, much to the surprise of many spectators on the sidelines, had opened up a significant lead of around 150 metres at the completion of the first of three circuits with the chasing group of a dozen or so, which included Milner, Hallamshire's Andrew Hayes, Nigel Martin (Sale) and City of York's Angus McMillan, content to keep sheltered from the wind.

As the second lap unfolded Milner and Martin decided it was time to reel in the leader and the duo managed to overhaul Howarth just before entering the final four kilometres despite Howarth trying desperately to stay in contact and keep the chasing pack at bay. It was now a case of who would be first home between the pair as they started to put daylight between themselves and their pursuers.

Milner, being the taller of the two, was a shield for Martin but in fairness the Manchester athlete did his fair share of leading as the final lap unfolded. However, it was the Derby athlete who proved the strongest in the final stages as he managed to pull away with around 800 metres to go and cross the finish line seven seconds clear of Martin who had finished eighth in the Northern at Bedale in 2020.

Howarth, meanwhile, hung on strongly to claim the final podium spot which was a reward for an extremely brave early front-running effort.

Milner, who is set for a two-week sunshine break in Spain before setting his sights on the National and Inter-Counties, said after his winning performance: "Naturally, it was tough out there today but it's always nice to get a win, especially after finishing fourth in Belfast. After we caught Daniel it was a case of trying to get the better of Nigel on the last lap but he was really strong. He did his share of the work and at the end I was into my reserves to get away with the finish approaching.

A delighted Milner added : "No wonder it was tough for after crossing the line I checked my watch and it came up as 8.4 miles which is a bit longer than the advertised distance of 12.1k!"

Haworth meanwhile, after being asked about his bronze medal performance, had this to say: "I just felt good so just went for it. I was 25<sup>th</sup> the last time and I was aiming for a top 10 this time but I'm more than happy with third."

In a close team contest, Salford, led by eighth-placed David Barratt, came out on top with 141 points, Leeds City finished runners-up just eight points behind with Hallamshire a mere two points further adrift in third place.

## SENIOR WOMEN

AFTER a fine fourth place in Belfast the previous week Ribble Valley's Eleanor Bolton topped the podium after only deciding to make the start line 24 hours earlier.

Despite that, the European Cross representative – she was 26<sup>th</sup> in Dublin before Christmas – was always going to be one of the fancied competitors despite facing a strong line-up which included former National under-20 champion and Northern 2020 senior runner-up Georgia Taylor-Brown of Sale Harriers Manchester.

Competing over a distance of 8.05k, Bolton and Taylor-Brown were in the leading group going into the second and final lap together with

Lauren Hayes (Hallamshire), Ilkley's Jemima Elgood and Sophie Tarver (Wirral).

And it was Bolton who proved the strongest on the run to the line after taking the lead with the finish in sight to come home six seconds ahead of Merseyside champion and fellow England representative Tarver with Olympic tri-athlete Taylor-Brown a further seven seconds adrift in third place after holding off Hayes in the run to the line.

After receiving her award, Bolton confessed it was touch and go whether she would take her chance after a busy January which had seen her competing every weekend leading up to the Northern's."It certainly was a late decision whether to take my chance or have a training session. So it proved to be a good decision for I went into the race with no pressure and it paid off."

## UNDER-20 MEN

AFTER a superb third-place finish in the Scottish Inter District Championships in Irvine, Yorkshire senior champion Josh Dickinson was always the one to beat especially after being the title holder after his victory in Bedale in 2020.

In the early stages of the 8.05k contest Dickinson was joined by Lancaster and Morecambe's Rhys Ashton with a group of three around 100m adrift going into the final lap. Approaching the last kilometre Dickinson forged ahead impressively to come home well clear of Ashton with Middlesbrough's North East champion, Max Creasey, proving the strongest of the rest to claim third place.

"I felt good throughout and left it as long as I dared before heading for home. It's nice to retain my title and it gives me confidence for the National – where he'll compete as a junior – and the Inter-Counties – where he'll be in the Yorkshire senior team."

Chesterfield and District, led by fifth-placed Finlay Grant, won the team race ahead of Trafford and Vale Royal.

## UNDER-20 WOMEN

HAVING her first competitive outing of the year Wakefield's Abbey Brooke proved strongest of all as she held off Samantha Mason (Salford) the recently-crowned Northern 3,000m Indoor champion, by three seconds with Wirral's Ellen Kearney, who had finished second behind Mason in Sheffield, completing the one-two-three. After getting her breath back Brooke confessed it was a tough contest saying: "It was very challenging due to the strong winds so I purposefully held back for I knew it would have been difficult if I had gone to the front too early and been out on my own." Liverpool, headed by 10<sup>th</sup>-placed Faye O'Hare, won the team title finishing ahead of Salford and Houghton Harriers.

## UNDER-17 MEN

AFTER a successful outing in the Belfast International Chorley ATC's Jacob Deacon led the field home to win comfortably by 13 seconds. After covering the first small lap there were at least 10 athletes together but as the race progressed with Deacon at the helm the group quickly began to break up with the Lancashire champion crossing the line ahead of Houghton's Brandon Pye with Trafford's James Knockton a close-up third. After his success, Deacon said: "I was confident going into the race after winning the Lancs Championships and I knew the strong winds wouldn't bother me for I'm used to it where I come from!" Wirral, with 10<sup>th</sup> placed Elliott Savage their first counter, won the team title ahead of Morpeth and Gosforth

## UNDER-17 WOMEN

CUMBRIA champion Jess Bailey (Leven Valley) left it to the final kilometre before moving away from her main rival, GB junior representative, Ella Greenway of Cleethorpes AC. The pair were together with Bingley's Rebecca Flaherty at the conclusion of the first small lap before Bailey upped the tempo in the

closing stages to come home with a four-second cushion with Flaherty claiming the bronze award a further 10 seconds back. Bailey commented after her victory saying: “ I didn’t want to go too early so left it as late as I dared and I’m pleased that I did for the wind was so strong at times it took your breath away.” Vale Royal, led home by sixth-placed Grace Roberts, won the team gold medals finishing ahead of Rotherham and North Shields Poly.

#### UNDER-15 BOYS

CHESHIRE champion Robert Price came out on top after breaking away from his rivals on the only ‘hill’ on the course as Sale’s Oscar Schofield, the Greater Manchester champion, claimed the runners-up award ahead of Preston’s Lancashire champion, Matthew Clark. “Once I got away at the hill I was pretty confident I could go on and win,” said Price after receiving his award. Seventh-placed Louis Hatton led Wirral to team victory with Vale Royal edging out Keighley and Craven for the silver medals.

#### UNDER-15 GIRLS

IT WAS a repeat one-two-three of the recent Yorkshire Championships with victory once again going to City of York’s Lottie Langan who finished four seconds ahead of Lilia Harris with her Rotherham team-mate, Isabella Waugh finishing in third place. With ninth-placed Caitlin McCoy and Emily Bott (16<sup>th</sup>) backing up the silver and bronze medallists, it was a comfortable team victory for Rotherham as Stockport finished in second place and Salford third.

#### UNDER-13 BOYS

SALFORD’S Evan Grime took up the running after the first kilometre and came home 10 seconds clear of Middlesbrough’s North East champion Charlie Jones with Leigh’s Thomas Amaral taking the scalps of his Cheshire County rivals to claim the bronze award.

Trafford, with fifth-placed Pio Aron their first counter, won the team awards ahead of Wirral and Sale.

### UNDER-13 Girls

AFTER being in the leading group for most of the way, Rotherham's Grace Igoe, third in the Yorkshire championships, managed to pull away in the closing stages to claim victory by five seconds with Bailey Hughes holding off her Liverpool team-mate, Molly Carvell, by just one second to claim the silver medal.

Liverpool, with seventh-placed Isabella Doran and Erin Fay (11<sup>th</sup>) backing up the silver and bronze medallists, were comfortable winners of the team award as Rotherham finished in second place and Sale third.

\*\*WHILE conditions were tough for all the competitors it can also be said it was as bad or worse for the marshals and officials who stood their ground for the duration of the five-hour programme, so a huge thanks to them all.

Also Northern Athletics acknowledge the support of their main sponsors, Start Fitness who had to fight the elements throughout the day to stay in business; Wakefield MDC; GJ Fecitt (Sportsoft); All Occasions Marquees; Think Traffic Management; FR Systems; Remote Medical Services; Fox Audio; DS White Fast Foods and Green Toilet Company for without their input the championships would not take place.

BILL McGUIRK

