

Hampshire League Cross Country Match Report, 13 Nov 2021, Bournemouth

Bournemouth's King's Park hosted the first Hampshire League Cross-Country event of the year on Saturday 13th November. Consisting of five different cross-country fixtures spread across the winter season and hosted at various locations across the counties of Berkshire, Hampshire and Dorset, the Hampshire League has for many years been an important part of the Reading Senior Men's winter fixture list.

This year was no different, as 14 Reading runners made the two hour trip down to Bournemouth to take on some of the South East's finest runners over what is for the most part a fast and flat course. To the disappointment of some, there was not a speck of mud in sight, a fact that would certainly play in favour of the speedsters amongst the field. Spurred on by a sterling performance from their Senior Women counterparts (who were second in the team rankings behind AFD), the Reading men made their way to the start line with high hopes. Totalling approximately 9.6 kilometres, or 6 miles in imperial measures, the course was run over four laps of Bournemouth's finest flatlands, and it was clear from the gun that a very competitive field had turned out for this first league fixture of the season.

Some excellent packing from Palmer Park's finest would ultimately lead to just one minute separating Reading's first six athletes, with the first five making up the scoring team. Neck-and-neck was the order of events, as Dan Thorne continued his fine start to the season to come across the line in 23rd place in a time of 31:36, with Isaac Farnworth close on his tail to finish just one place behind in 24th with a clocking of 31:41. Farnworth can be happy with this performance, firmly backing up his 69-minute run at the Reading Half Marathon from the previous weekend. Richard Price and Luc Jolly were not far behind, as they battled it out right up to the line, with Price ultimately coming through the victor in 27th place in 32:06, and Jolly passing the finishing line in 28th place and a time of 32:08. Finishing off the scoring team of five was Reading debutant Sarab Dhillon, who had a fine outing to come through in 30th place, with 32:24 on the clock. This would give Reading a score of 132, enough for fifth place on the day (behind AFD, Southampton, Basingstoke and Winchester) in what was an extremely competitive field. Following on from Dhillon was Mark Booth, who had a very strong outing to come through the finishing funnel in 39th place and a time of 32:42. Ryan O'Brien continued the proceedings with a solid outing to come through in 67th place, and 34:18 on the clock. The next three Reading athletes all packed somewhat closely, with Tom Nike, Arturo Martinez de Murguia and Ed Stockdale all having promising runs, finishing in 77th, 85th and 93rd positions respectively, and with times of 34:44, 35:04 and 35:28. David Lewis was the next red, blue and white vest across the line; not feeling at his best, he posted 111th position and a time of 36:31. Just eight seconds

behind Lewis was Aryan Gupta, who had a fine run on his Senior début to make it through in 117th position and clock a time of 36:39. Next in after Gupta was Joe Hayes, who managed to master the four-lap course in 40:46, which gave him 208th position. Following on from Hayes was Gerry O'Driscoll, who had a great run to make it into the top three-hundred, with a 296th place performance and a time of 48:02.

All-in-all, there were some great performances on the day, and the Reading men can be proud of themselves for their fifth place in the league rankings after the first of five Hampshire League fixtures. The next match will be held at Wellesley Woodlands in Aldershot on Saturday 4th December, and we hope to see the Reading men out in force once again!

David Lewis