

National Arena Swimming League: Western Division

Round 2: Bristol Horfield

It wasn't as far to travel as the previous round in Exeter, kick-off (or whatever the swimming equivalent is) was a reasonable 2pm, and lots of the swimmers already knew the pool.

So despite the fact that a number of senior swimmers were missing due to illness, injury, or competing in the British University and Colleges Sports event, the Cardiff City 'A' team was in pretty good spirits.

Before we knew it, we were at the Horfield pool – an hour and a half early!

"You never know what the traffic will be like, and we have to make contingency for the bus breaking down," they said. (For parents and swimmers new to the game, a year or so ago the windscreen wipers failed on a coach and we had to call for a replacement).

The poor staff at Horfield weren't quite sure what to do with 40 or so swimmers who wanted to tooty down in the café, but there was little choice as the pool itself was still in use by the public.

It wasn't long before the swimmers were allowed to change and move poolside, where there turned out to be less room than they'd had in the café. But no matter, they perched cheek by jowl at the side of the pool like penguins on an undersized iceberg.

The start of the gala was a blessed relief for all, and Cardiff again got off to an absolute flyer. The first ten races of Arena League events are always strong for the capital club. Comprising mostly of relays, they are a real demonstration of the strength in depth that marks Cardiff out, and this time was no different with swimmers and coaches alike screaming and hup-hopping at their best.

Without much room behind the blocks, the atmosphere was cosy to say the least, but the solo events came thick and fast with Cardiff never really looking back from a healthy lead.

In his pre-event pep talk, Head Coach Graham had reminded the team that Poole were going to be the main competition on the day. They had finished second behind Plymouth in Round 1 and were in 5th position in the Western League (out of 18).

And so it proved to be, as race after race they breathed down the collective necks of the Welsh club. But time and time again the Cardiff swimmers kept their skills, proved their stamina, and showed an inner determination that belied their youth.

As the day stretched out and darkness descended, the final result may have become inevitable but the battle for points was far from over.

In a club full of swimmers who are well used to the pressure of performing, and the consequences of winning and losing, it should not perhaps surprise anyone that these are competitive animals.

But maybe the real test of a team comes when the battle is already won.

Nervous tension remained very evident on the Cardiff blocks right up to the very last race. With no encouragement necessary from the coaches, this team was firmly in the 'foot on the throat' camp.

The comfortable distance between Cardiff and the others may not have made for an exciting spectacle for watching parents, but for the team in the pool it may as well have been a nail-biter.

The battle may have been won, but the war that is this national swimming club competition, is far from over, Graham reminded the swimmers on the trip home. "We have given ourselves a chance."

"Round 3 is where we will be swimming for a place in the final*."

"Round 3 is where we will come up against our nemeses Plymouth and Millfield (who beat Cardiff in last year's final) and local rivals, Swansea."

But despite that lip-smacker of a Round, the realities of what is required in the next event are slightly more complex:

Unbeknownst to many, Round 3 becomes a virtual competition, with times compared across every competing club across the UK. Only the top ten best team times will make the final. In theory then a club may win its Round 3 local event, but not qualify for the final because ten other clubs get better combined times (even if they don't win their round).

In swimming there is no judgement, no bias, no luck. Just times.

This is surely one of the toughest club competitions in the land.

Back to training, then.

*The National Arena Swimming League A and B finals are again being held in Cardiff.

Results of Round 2:

PREMIER DIVISION		
Gala 2	Gala Points	League Points
City of Cardiff A	272	6
Poole	204	5
City of Bristol A	169	4
Weston S Mare	155	3
Swim Bournemouth	148	2
West Wilts Force 5 A	102	1

Western Division standings after Round 2

PREMIER DIVISION							
Position	Team	R1 Gala Points	R2 Gala Points	Total Gala Points	R1 League Points	R2 League Points	Total League Points
1	Plymouth Leander	280	278	558	6	6	12
2	City of Cardiff A	272	272	544	6	6	12
3	Millfield	257	268	525	6	6	12
4	Swansea Aquatics A	230	201	431	5	5	10
5	Poole	200	204	404	5	5	10
6	Exeter	195	207	402	4	5	9
7	United Bristol A	192	188	380	5	4	9
8	City of Bristol A	143	169	312	3	4	7
9	Soundwell A	154	146	300	4	3	7
10	Swim Bournemouth	170	148	318	4	2	6
11	Bridgend	139	137	276	3	2	5
12	Weston S Mare	119	155	274	2	3	5
13	Keynsham	133	139	272	2	3	5
14	Swindon A	110	152	262	1	4	5
15	Street & District	152	121	273	3	1	4
16	Nofio Sir Gar	120	124	244	1	2	3
17	West Wilts Force 5	132	102	234	2	1	3
18	Torfaen Dolphins	129	115*	244	1	1	2

R2 * 20 point deduction incorrect officials

Round 3 draw (Saturday 9th December)

PREMIER DIVISION	
Gala 1 - Newport	
Warm Up 11.00am	
1	United Bristol A
2	Poole A
3	Millfield
4	Plymouth Leander
5	City of Cardiff A
6	Swansea Aquatics A
7	Exeter
8	City of Bristol A
<i>Host TBC</i>	