

Whiteout!

They beat the big freeze to get there, then they beat all their opponents. Just months after becoming White Rose Junior League champions for the first time, City of Leeds became junior league champions of England at the first attempt.

Roger Guttridge reports from the Arena Junior Inter-League final at Corby. Pictures by **Gavin Pordage**





Few clubs have a better tradition in league swimming than City of Leeds, winners of the 'senior' National Swimming League 18 times in the past and likely to be back in contention at the national final in April. In junior league swimming, however, they are the new kids on the block. But what new kids! Just 18 months after contesting Yorkshire's White Rose Junior League for the first time, and a few months after winning it at the second attempt, they made their debut at the Arena Junior Inter-League grand final in Corby – and won it by the fairly handsome margin of 48 points.

'We won all our rounds in the White Rose League this year, we won the northern final and now we have won this,' said junior age group coach Alex Gray. 'In previous rounds we won more individual events but this is the best team performance we have had because we had to fight hard for the results.'

It's a great team event for the kids and it breeds a team spirit, which is something that's vital for the younger ones. It gives them something to swim for. It's a great experience for them to get behind each other and race in a team event like this. It's also a great day out for them as well. We have all enjoyed it.'

Cauldron of excitement

Outside, all was white and temperatures down to minus 7 as the November cold snap began to bite. Seven of the eight finalists made it to the East Midlands but not City of Newcastle, who had the worst of the early snow in the North East and missed what would have been their 18th final since 1988. Inside the atmosphere was anything but frosty as a gallery packed with spectators turned the Corby East Midlands International Pool into a cauldron of excitement, noise and colour.

Leeds started as they meant to continue, winning the opening four >



Top: Corby's new 50m pool was converted to short-course format for the junior league final

Above: Hillingdon claimed second place behind Leeds
Left: Southport's Rebecca Cuff broke the competition record in the 10yrs 50m breaststroke

Opposite page: City of Leeds captains Blake Bennett and Katherine Fisher proudly display the winners' shield

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◀ relays, breaking the competition record in three of them and giving themselves a lead which they never lost. By the 49th and last event, they had notched up 17 wins and eight second places and broken a total of six records.

Leeds' winners include Liam Birrell, whose time of 16.48 in the 9yrs 25m butterfly knocked half-a-second off the league final record and won him awards for the best male swim in his age group and overall. Kiani Campbell-Grady claimed the 11/u girls' age group award for one of her wins in the 50m backstroke and freestyle (33.89 and 29.71) while Katherine Fisher set a competition record

with a winning 30.99 in the 12/u 50m butterfly. Other Leeds individual winners were Blake Bennett (boys' 12/u 50m freestyle 28.52), Euan Cowan (10yrs 50m fly 33.89 and freestyle 33.13), Jacob Seddon (12/u 50m breaststroke 36.62) and Chloe Adams (11/u 50m breast 37.80).

Dramatic improvement

Seven wins and 14 second places helped Hillingdon to improve dramatically on last year's sixth place, claiming the runners-up award with 20 points to spare from City of Liverpool. 'I thought the kids would be hard-pressed to swim faster than they did when we

won the southern final but nearly everyone did,' said assistant coach Gary Mohamed. 'Our skills in the water were very good. It was an excellent performance.'

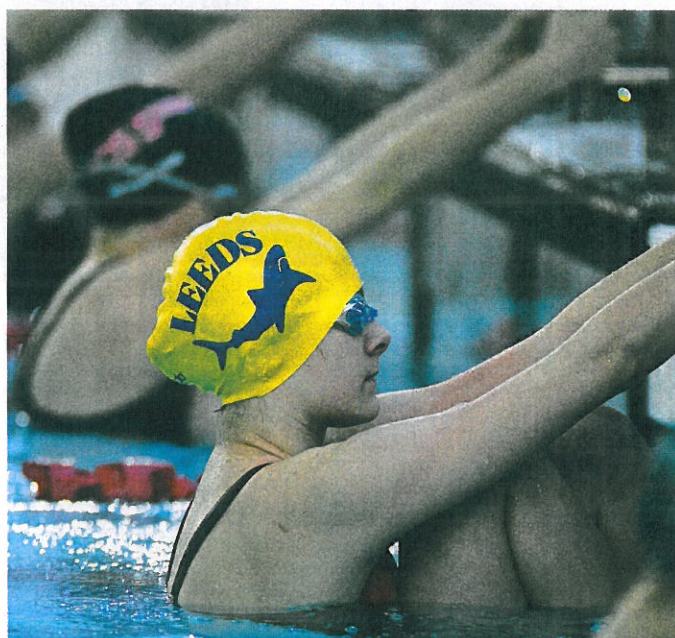
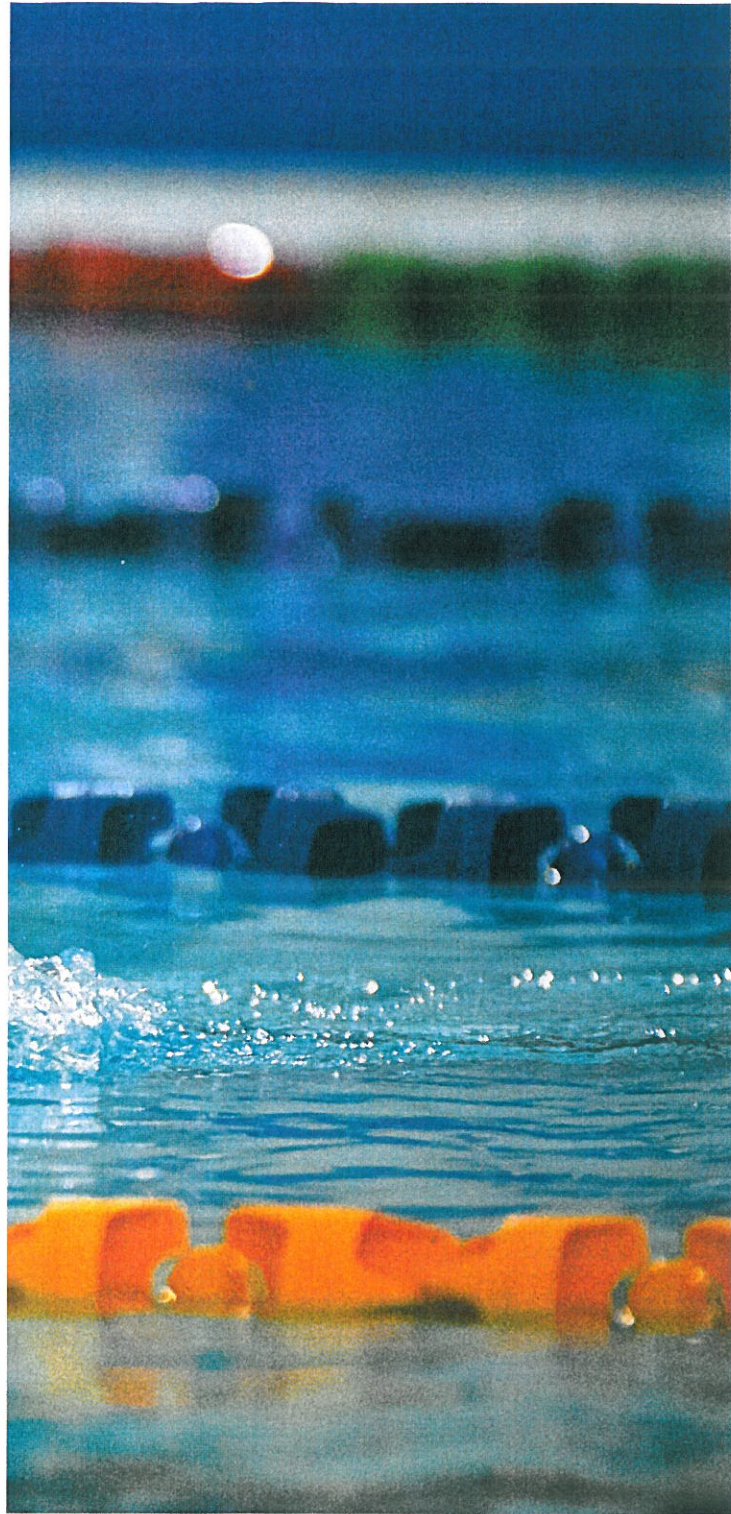
He added: 'We've got our new 50m pool and that has got to help. I just think we have a great team. It's probably the best team atmosphere I have ever experienced. There are no prima donnas, no people who think they are stars. They all pull together.'

Hillingdon's individual winners were George Taplin in the 11/u 50m backstroke (35.65), Molly Thompson (9yrs 25m breast 20.29), Elise Kelly (11/u 50m fly 33.22), Liam Styles (9yrs 25m back

18.58) and Brodie Judge (9yrs 25m fly 17.52).

The battle for third and fourth places was something of a Merseyside derby with City of Liverpool edging out 2008 and 2009 champions Southport to revive their own proud tradition in this competition.

In fact City of Liverpool have the best inter-league record of any, winning the title eight times between 1992 and 2001 and using it to blood many promising youngsters such as Fran Halsall and Michael Rock, who still hold competition records from a decade ago. Their eight winners this time included Athena Clayson, who set



Left: Boldmere's Matt Price won the top boy award after his wins in the 10yrs 50m breaststroke and backstroke

Top (l-r): Hillingdon's Brodie Judge, who won the 9yrs 25m fly; Ellie Jones, who anchored Leeds' 9yrs girls freestyle team to victory

Above: Phebe Robinson prepares to lead off Leeds' 11/u girls' medley relay team

competition records in the 9yrs 25m freestyle (14.84) and backstroke (17.97) to collect the award for the top nine-year-old girl and share the overall girls' award with Southport's Rebecca Cuff.

Hannah Platt was also a double winner in the 12/u 50m freestyle (29.18) and backstroke (33.43) and won the top girl award for that age group. Harvey Martin won the 9yrs 25m freestyle (15.77) and Liam Whittle the 11/u 50m breaststroke (38.76). Liverpool also won the award for a record-breaking win in the 8x25m cannon relay.

Double winner

Rebecca Cuff was a double winner

for Southport, taking the top 10-year-old girls' award after winning the 50m breaststroke in a competition record-breaking 40.31 followed by the 50m butterfly in 35.61. Holly Hibbott, one of the record-breakers in Southport's title win at Enfield 12 months earlier, was also a double winner in the 10yrs 50m backstroke (36.29) and freestyle (31.69).

Boldmere, first-time finalists in 2008, returned to match their fifth place on that occasion, finishing just nine points behind Southport and two ahead of City of Derby.

Jake Dixon and Matt Price topped their points chart with two individual wins each and the

awards for the top boy in their respective age groups. Dixon's wins came in the 12/u 50m butterfly (29.70) and backstroke (32.28), Price's in the 10yrs 50m breaststroke (43.08) and backstroke (35.16). Team-mate Bethany Grant won the girls' 12/u 50m breaststroke in 36.89.

Rueing the DQs

City of Derby head coach Mel Marshall was left rueing the three disqualifications, including two in the last five relays, which cost her team fifth and perhaps even fourth place in the final countdown.

They had their moments of glory, though, with Danny Johnson

claiming the top 11yrs boy award for his winning 29.82 in the 11/u 50m freestyle. Johnson also anchored 12/u 4x25m freestyle team-mates Joe Hurst, Declan Smith and Ben Slevin to victory in 55.73, which knocked 0.58sec off the competition record.

Like Southport, UAE City of Norwich were making their fourth consecutive appearance in the final and they matched their seventh place from 2009, scoring three more points despite there being less to swim for due to Newcastle's withdrawal.

Casey Barrett was Norwich's only race winner, taking the boys' 11/u 50m butterfly in 32.42. ▶



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Top: The Leeds team celebrate
Far left: Athena Clayson (City of Liverpool) and Rebecca Cuff (Southport) share the award for the best girls' swim
Left: Goldmere's Jake Dixon was the top 12-year-old boy
Below (l-r): Individual award winners Danny Johnson (Co Derby, 11yrs); Liam Birrell (Co Leeds, 9yrs and overall); UAE City of Norwich captains Sophie Alden and Keenan Stokes with ASA East president John Toll; Southport captains Joanne Whittingham and Jacob Lee



JUNIOR INTER-LEAGUE FINAL CORBY, NOVEMBER 28, 2010 RESULTS AND AWARDS

OVERALL RESULT

1	City of Leeds	322
2	Hillingdon	274
3	City of Liverpool	254
4	Southport	223
5	Boldmere	214
6	City of Derby	212
7	UAE City of Norwich	191
-	City of Newcastle	DNS

CANNON RELAY AWARD

City of Liverpool

TOP SWIMMER AWARDS

Overall

Athena Clayson (City of Liverpool) & Rebecca Cuff (Southport)

Liam Birrell (City of Leeds)

9yrs

Athena Clayson (City of Liverpool)

Liam Birrell (City of Leeds)

10yrs

Rebecca Cuff (Southport)

Matthew Price (Boldmere)

11yrs

Kiani Campbell-Grady (City of Leeds)

Danny Johnson (City of Derby)

12yrs

Hannah Platt (City of Liverpool)

Jake Dixon (Boldmere)

LEAGUE FINAL RECORDS

Girls

9yrs

Athena Clayson (City of Liverpool) 25m freestyle 14.84

Athena Clayson (City of Liverpool) 25m backstroke 17.97

City of Leeds (R Fisher, S Hobbah, R Mawson, E Jones) 4x25m freestyle relay 1:03.48

10yrs

Rebecca Cuff (Southport) 50m breaststroke 40.31

Southport (H Hibbott, R Cuff, E Whittingham, N Wilgar) 4x25m medley relay 1:06.15

Southport (H Hibbott, R Cuff, E Whittingham, N Wilgar) 4x25m freestyle relay 58.94

11/u

City of Leeds (G Coates, S Hussain, C Adams, K Campbell-Grady) 4x25m freestyle relay 56.86

12/u

Katherine Fisher (City of Leeds) 50m butterfly 30.99

City of Leeds (K Campbell-Grady, C Adams, K Fisher, J Aylesbury) 4x25m medley relay 1:00.66

Boys

9yrs

Liam Birrell (City of Leeds) 25m butterfly 16.48

City of Leeds (L Birrell, B Walker, T Coates, H Kayani) 4x25m freestyle relay 1:03.53

10yrs

Boldmere 4x25m (M Price, K Alexander, T Bloor, A Langston) freestyle relay 59.27

11/u

City of Derby (J Hurst, D Smith, B Slevin, D Johnson) 4x25m freestyle relay 55.73

Mixed

City of Liverpool (A Clayson, H Martin, M J Oliver, R Warner, M Harris, L Whittle, H Platt, C Charnock) 1:56.01