

2022 Arena League Final Competition Report

This year's Division 2 League Final was held at Ellesmere Port Sports Village on Saturday 10th December. It was the first time we've raced outside of Kendal, and the first time we've come up against the top two teams in the division (Middlesbrough and Knutsford).

To gain promotion to Division 1, our team needed to finish in the top three places, so it was important to raise our performance levels and fight for every point. Not all our swimmers were at 100%, but I was delighted to have almost a full-strength team, and with the resilience and determination shown by everyone. We didn't have any disqualifications and I don't think we lost any positions / points at the end of races.

Lucy Turner set the tone by producing her best ever 200IM swim to win the first event comfortably, this was then followed by a win in the 13 Years and Under Medley Relay, but we did not pick up as many points in the other team events with the opposition noticeably stronger than in our first two matches.

After the first eight events, BOBCATS were in 4th position with 36 points, behind the leaders Oswestry on 43 and Fleetwood / Middlesbrough tied on 40. Chorley, Copeland, and Knutsford were all tied on 35 points, so it was too close to predict the outcome.

It continued to be close during the first half of the individual races with points being shared amongst all the teams, we did have some notable swims including wins in the Boys 13/Under 100m Breaststroke and 13/Under 100m Backstroke, along with another win for Lucy Turner in the Ladies Open 100m Backstroke. The number of second / third placed finishes was really helping to increase our points with Maddison McFadden overcoming illness to finish second in the Girls 15/Under 100m Backstroke, and Samuel Charlesworth returning to the team with a best time in the Gents Open 100m Butterfly to finish second. Baylie Seery demonstrated remarkable consistency to finish second in the Ladies Open 100m Butterfly, recording the same time as in the previous round. A mention must also go to Sam Wilson who along with James Hodson stepped up to cover all the events for the Boys 11/Under team, Sam achieved a third position in the 50m Backstroke and gained 10 points for the team in his two individual events.

At the halfway stage, four clubs had started to open a gap over the rest of the teams. BOBCATS were sitting in third position on 101 points, 4 points ahead of Fleetwood, but behind Oswestry 104 and Middlesbrough 105. I'd expected Middlesbrough would have been further ahead at this stage and with 4 teams still in the running for the top three positions it was starting to get very close.

During the second half of the Individual events, we continued to accumulate points steadily with wins in the Girls 15/Under 100m Freestyle and Boys 13/Under 100m Freestyle. Lola Cragg demonstrated great resilience to second and third places in the 15/Under and Open 100m Breaststroke with very little rest between. Henry Holding also secured a second-place finish in the Open 100m Backstroke and third in the Open 100m Breaststroke in an excellent time. Owen Wilson narrowly missed out on a win in the 13/Under 100m Butterfly, Thomas Binns gained a third-place finish in the 15/Under 100m Breaststroke and Jamie Clayton really stepped up when we needed him to secure a second-place finish in the Open 100m Freestyle, in what was a very close finish.

At the end of the individual events, we had consolidated third position with 184 points, 12 ahead of Fleetwood but behind Oswestry on 192 and Middlesbrough who had started to forge ahead on 221. With just the final four relays to come, we seemed to be heading for a third placed finish, however we outperformed all the other teams to win 25 out of 32 available points.

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Well done to our 11/Under team for gaining three points, our 15/Under and Open teams with second placed finishes and our 13/Under Freestyle Team who gained another win.

The final points were:

1. Middlesbrough 238
2. **BOBCATS 209**
3. Oswestry Otters 206
4. Fleetwood 194
5. Copeland 179
6. Knutsford Vikings 179
7. Chorley Marlins 157
8. Liverpool Penguins 138

It's an excellent achievement to finish less than 30 points behind Middlesbrough and I'm proud of the battling qualities are team displayed to get ahead of Oswestry, we were behind from Event 2 but kept pressing them – finally getting ahead on the very last event.

In total, we had 6 first places finishes, congratulations to the following swimmers / teams:

Lucy Turner, Girls Open 200 IM and 100 Backstroke.

Ben Cook, Boys 13/Under 100 Breaststroke and Boys 13/Under 100 Freestyle.

Maya Smith, Girls 15/Under 100 Freestyle.

Owen Wilson, Boys 13/Under 100 Backstroke.

13/Under Freestyle and Medley Relay Teams:

Lucy Charlesworth, Ben Cook, Niamh Whitaker, and Owen Wilson.

BOBCATS win promotion to Division 1

Its job done for this season; we will be promoted to Division 1 next year.

This would not have been possible without the efforts of **EVERY** swimmer who has taken part, you have earned each point and have stood up to every challenge.

Next year, swimmers will be in different age groups so we will need to call up people who have been reserves or have missed out on selection this season. However, if everyone continues to improve, I'm confident that our team in 2023 will be stronger.

Middlesbrough will again be the strongest team in the division next year, and our aim will be to win promotion once more – this time to the Premier League. So, the challenge is to work hard and try and close the gap as much as possible, so that we can really push them next year.

Once again, thank you to Robyn Holding and Paul Moss who have been our judges, and to Ian Whitaker, Janis Smith, and Andrew Clayton for announcing and recording. Finally, to our parents supporting from the spectator area – Thank you.

Ian.