

Swimming Times January water polo

THE National League's final matches were taking place on December 14 but even with one weekend of play remaining, most of the titles appeared to be already decided.

Lancaster have already been crowned Division One champions by virtue of their six-point lead with two weekends left. This will make it their 10th National League title in 13 years.

Rotherham were hoping to hang on to second place after moving up from a fifth place finish last year.

Rotherham coach Norman Leighton said: 'We are hoping to come second. We can be caught but I think we have the best run-in with the teams that we're up against.

'We have two games coming up where we'll be playing our reserve goalkeeper due to our number one goalie getting married. Then we have the final game in Millfield.'

He added: 'We've benefited from some new younger blood in the team, including two GB junior players and the inclusion of Jerome Gabarretta from Malta. He is studying optometry at Bradford University and is a junior international for Malta as well as a member of the national champion club team.'

Tyldesley have claimed the top place in Division Two and the Croydon Amphibians have taken the Division Three trophy.

In Division Four, Swindon needed just one point from three matches to claim the title and be promoted to Division Three.

Questions still remain as to where Hucknall will be next season after a poor end following a strong start left them facing the play-offs to try and keep their Division Two place.

The GB junior teams fared well in Division One, with the 1989-born group undefeated going into the final weekend of play after showing improvement during the season.

The younger 1991 group played in the bottom half of the table and gained valuable experience.

The players in these two teams could well be the ones that go forward to national teams in the future and fast-tracking them into Division One play is an important part of their development.

WOMEN'S LEAGUE

The Women's Water Polo League is almost over with just one weekend left to play, which will see all divisions come together at the Manchester Aquatics Centre on January 17-18.

The Liverpool Ladies continue to hold on the top position in Division One. Manchester A have also been in excellent form to remain on Liverpool A's tail for the title.

Liverpool coach Gordon Dacre said: 'Competition among the top four clubs is as close as it has ever been with several games being decided by just a couple of goals.

'We are delighted with the overall performance of the team so far this season, especially some of the younger players. Training, injuries and the retirement of some key players have meant more than ever that the whole squad has had to make a big contribution.'

In Division Two, Otter have yet to lose a game and are looking strong candidates for promotion next season.

Manchester C are storming ahead in Division Three with Sheffield B and Liverpool B fighting for second place, which will give them the opportunity to play-off for a place in Division Two at the end of January.

A good year all round for Otter sees their B team also leading in Division Four, winning all their matches so far.

GB Senior Women

The Great Britain senior women made a return trip to Florence following the Italian side's successful training visit

to Manchester. The focus was on training with four to five hours per day of game practice and training. The women's team focus for next year will be to win the European B Championships and gain promotion to the A championship, giving the team a stronger argument for taking part in the 2012 Olympic Games.

Moscow Mission

Sheffield Ladies have gone to Moscow to compete in the European Club Championships. We'll feature a report next month but the trip involved a visit to London to get special visas to allow the players into the country.

ASA Champs

Watch out for announcements online regarding dates for the revamped asa championships for 2009. Various meetings are taking place to finalise the date and format of the new-look event.

Coaching Course

A level one unit 2 course is taking place at the Concord Sports Centre, Sheffield (north of the city), from March 28-29, 2009.

Sarah Dunsbee is the tutor and application forms are available to download from the British Swimming website. The cost is £165, which is subsidised.