


SPORTING MATTERS
BY PETER JACK

A TALE OF THREE RUNS AND TWO CITIES

I RECENTLY had the chance of doing three different races of different distances on both sides of the pond otherwise known as the Irish Sea – so naturally enough, I did them!

The chances to take part in the races came about by accident.

The first was a local 10 miler which had been postponed a week due to the inclement weather and which had been a sell-out – a kind club mate, Jonathan Lynch, offered me his place when it was rescheduled for a week later; the second and third races were in England when we were at a family wedding.

By circumstance, I was able to a Park Run and also a major city centre race on the same weekend.

Where were the races? Well they were either in Londonderry and Liverpool or L'Derry and L'Pool or Derry and Pool depending on how you want to describe the two cities!

The local one was the SSE 10 Mile Road Race and it was held a few weeks ago after the awful weather had resulted in the postponement of many sporting fixtures (I presume the local darts and snooker leagues were unaffected).

My preparation for the race, which started at the brand new Foyle Arena, could not have been worse. I had had a tooth extracted 48 hours before the race, after a week of agony and the whole process had worn me down.

I'm not sure if it was a big tooth but I felt about a kilo lighter and my face felt I had been in the ring as a warm-up guy for Anthony Joshua.

I had also been at a wine tasting which left me groggy for other reasons! Despite that, I lined up on the start line in Ebrington Square, that vast wonderful arena which has been the fulcrum of so many events in the recent Capital of Culture year and which serves as an epic backdrop for any event which starts there.

It was a bitterly cold freezing morning where the wind seemed to whip off the nearby River Foyle and chill the bone to the marrow. It was however a case of "Be Bold Start Cold". It was at least mercifully dry.

The inimitable Master of Ceremonies, David McKibben, gave us our countdown and we got underway and left the Square to plough down beside the river and work our way up to what is still called the "New Bridge". I had hoped to break 1 hour 25 minutes but found myself ahead of schedule.

The course doubled backed on itself and I was able to see Scott Rankin



Iron men on Crosby beach. NCL14-13s

from Foyle Valley and Catriona Jennings from Letterkenny storming ahead of their respective rivals.

Six years ago I saw Catriona on the streets of London in the 2012 Olympics in the Marathon. She is from a very talented family as her sister Sinead, who used to be in our own Triangle Triathlon Club,

hundreds of sporting fixtures across the province.

In a nut shell, the effect of this legislation means that if you organise an event on the roads, as an event organiser, you need to a) employ a Traffic Management Company at a cost of about a £1,000.00 and b) accept their advice about the employment of PSNI

This sorry state of affairs will affect the local sporting landscape with the equivalent of an earthquake. For some reason, bike races and band parades seem to be exempt despite them needing much more police presence than running races or triathlons.

I have been talking to my fellow race organisers



The finish line of the Liverpool Half Marathon. NCL14-12s

also raced at the Olympics in the sport of rowing.

Catriona not only wins a lot of road races but also beats all the men regularly as well, she is that good!

While Scott and Catriona were heading for the top step on the podium, my mind wondered about the recent implementation of the Roads (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act (Northern Ireland) 2010 – why? Because when this obscure piece of legislation was recently enacted, it put into doubt

Officers (who previously turned up for free) and each Constable could cost £70 per hour. The net effect of all of this is that many sporting events (10ks, charity runs, triathlons, half marathons etc.) would be ruinously expensive to organise and simply wouldn't take place.

Our own scheduled Roe Valley Sprint Triathlon which has been held for over 20 years and is scheduled for the 12th May is very much up in the air – unless you have a spare £2,500.00 down the back of your sofa?

and we all find ourselves in the same sorry boat. Maybe the government, both central and local, doesn't want its populace to be fit and healthy? Maybe it wants all of us to be physically inactive and clogging up the Doctors Surgeries and Hospital Wards? Sometimes, you have to spend a little to save a lot but that would actually mean joined up thinking – and as the Folks on the Hill are on permanent holiday, that may take some time.

I tried to banish such unhappy thoughts as I battled my way across the

words forming sentences in my head but for once I thought silence satisfaction would suffice as I left him trailing in my wake.

The rest of the field behaved honourably and as we headed back towards the Craigavon Bridge and beyond for what seemed to be a very long mile before turning back to the Peace Bridge. I realised that I was certainly going to break 85 minutes. On the finish line, my joy at breaking 85 was replaced by disappointment at being a few seconds over my new target of 80.

Still, as I shivered in the rain and looked forward to my shower, a finish line is always a mighty fine place to be.

Twelve days later, I had recovered from all of my teething problems and had a good solid week of training behind me which included three x 2k swims, an hour of torture on a turbo (good for strength endurance) and one tired run.

What's the only better thing than one race at a weekend? Well, two races of course! And that's why the day before my Half Marathon, I was on the start line of the Crosby Park Run just a stone's throw from Hannah's house on the outskirts of Liverpool (Incidentally, our wedding was in Spital and I wondered if I would bump into Jamie Carragher there?) All park runs in England start at 9am. Over here, we think 9.30am is early enough but over there your park run is done and dusted by the time the Limavady Park Run is even started!

Before a race such as a half marathon, the previous day should probably include either resting or some light exercise. I set out on the Crosby beach very gently for the first three minutes past four of the famous "Ironmen", designed by Sir Anthony Gormley. These four all had high-vis jackets on so we knew where we were going.

There have been famous cases where competitors in the London and New York Marathons decided to use the underground to cut out those tricky 16 or 18 miles in the middle! There have even been cases of twins who have swapped at the halfway mark in a Marathon!

Meanwhile back down beside the Foyle on a day when I felt as grey as the sky above, I suddenly threw the toys out of the pram and worked myself into a lather of indignation and redoubled my efforts.

I would work my little cotton socks off to chase down this cad, this interloper, this bounder. When I passed him, I tried not to gloat.

For some reason after three minutes, I suddenly decided to go from zero to wannabe hero and I took off as if I had left the immersion heater on. As we climbed off the beach and through the soft sand up onto the causeway, I saw I was 18th out of a field of 120.

For some reason, I decided that I wanted to finish in the top 10 so as the course proceeded on the causeway for a mile and then on grass for the last mile, I steadily ticked off eight unsuspecting parties who had no idea they had a target on their backs. I did indeed finish 10th with an average time of just under seven minutes a mile.

It was my first proper Park Run as a 60 year old! As I tried to suck oxygen into my scorched lungs, I suddenly remembered I had a 21k jaunt in 24 hours time..... the next morning after having avoided the twin excesses of weddings (alcohol and dancing), I got the 8.22 train from Blundellsands into the middle of Liverpool.

There was one other runner on the platform when I waiting for my train. I went over to say hello and funnily enough, he was from Derry! We had a ten minute walk down to the start line where there was 7,500 people. 5,500 of them were doing the Half Marathon (now celebrating its 25th year) and the remainder were there doing the ten mile race. I lined up behind the 1 hour 50 minute pacer. For some reason, the 1 hour 40 minute pacer was behind us which meant that within several minutes of the start line, several hundred if not a thousand people all eased their way past me. This was not good psychologically!

The course was great and we saw a lot of the sights of Liverpool including the criminally unheralded Sefton Park where we ran for a least 3 miles past lakes and fountains and through the wonderful parkland.

I wanted to break 50 minutes for 10k sometime this year but I ended up going through this distance in under 47 minutes. I wondered if the wheels of this optimistic chariot would soon come off? Well I made it to 10 miles still feeling fairly good but as I suspected, the last 3 miles were a bit of a lucky dip as I haven't actually run more than that distance this year.

Runners started to pass me again that I worked hard to pass over the previous one and half hours. I talked to a girl wearing a Chorlton Runners race vest as my son Patrick lives there in Manchester. Her target was 1 hour 45 minutes and I told her I thought we would beat that time.

The last couple of miles were into a head wind and also on the cobbles beside the River Mersey. The scenery was stunning which at least distracted me from the pain. We ran behind the Echo Arena, where I had last been to see the BBC Sports Personality of Year in December and also the Beatles museum, then over towards the finish line which was under the shadow of the famous Liverbirds Building where the pain finally stopped.

My watch told me that my finish time was 1:42:53 so I was way above my expectations but then one of my fellow competitors told me his Garmin (a mini computer /distance marker on your wrist) confirmed the course was 400 yards short i.e. my time would have been about 2 minutes longer. The organisers could have got away with it 30 years ago but not now!

So it was a strangely unfulfilled feeling that I was left with to accompany all of the lactic acid.

We all got a lovely medal and a hard earned t-shirt. I would certainly recommend the race – provided the organisers could find another 400 yards somewhere!



Londonderry Peace Bridge. NCL14-14s