

SPORTING MATTERS

BY PETER JACK

WHEN I stepped off a Greyhound bus in Phoenix in late 1980 with my rucksack on my back, I learned very quickly that (a) The Grand Canyon really is just a big hole in the ground and (b) When sport and music mix, it's a potent combination.

I quickly found myself at the home of the Phoenix Suns, a major league basketball team and I sat there entranced as the basket ballers strutted their stuff and when there was a break in the play, the music took over. Before the start, there was musical entertainment and after the match, there was more of the same i.e. the marketers of sport knew even back then that music enhanced the whole entertainment sporting package. Last weekend I had the chance to combine sport and music. There was the Stendhal Festival to look after the latter and there was the Top of the Mournes Triathlon and the Legen-derry Swim to take care of the former.

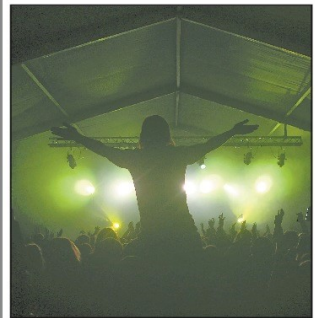
The Stendhal Festival (which literally means "Disorder that causes rapid heartbeat, dizziness, fainting, confusion, even hallucinations when an individual is



TTC on the finish line in Rostrevor. wk3325



Bronagh Gallagher in full flow. NCL33-402s



Stendhal in action. NCL33-400s

Stendhal and Sport

drainage pipes over the winter months, part of the Festival site resembled a World War I battle field. There was a camp site for the hardened festival goers and then there was a camp site for the families in a quieter area. The organisers had thought of everything with first aid cover on hand all weekend for any accidents or illness. You probably got quicker medical attention on the Ballyvelin Road last weekend than you would from your Doctor's surgery!

I met people all weekend from all over the Island who had made the journey up to the North West. Many of these people had never been to Limavady before; the only reason they were there was because of the festival and they were completely blown away by the friendly welcome they received and the stunning performances and the whole special festival vibe. The event undoubtedly pulled in a lot of tourist dollars to the area and gave the whole borough a fantastic "Feel Good" factor which simply cannot be quantified. It made people proud to be from Limavady - which makes the decision of DfECAL not to support it at all, a mystery; and it also makes the decision of Limavady Borough Council only to give it token support a complete travesty. We pay our rates every year in the belief that our Lords and Masters in LBC would actually support local entrepreneurs as we battle to keep our wee town afloat. Despite the indifference of Government, both local and central, the organisers did a fantastic job. Whatever your taste was - Rock, Indie, Punk, Comedy, Folk, Dance, Art, Crafts, Cinema, Kids stuff to name but a few, everybody was catered for. I trust that the Stendhal Festival of Art will be properly recognised in the Awards Ceremonies at the end of the year.

For a Triathlon or any big race, you are meant to taper and part of the taper probably includes spending most of the preceding day off your feet and an early night is obviously essential, so why on Friday night at 1.00 a.m. was I in the front row for the Undertones, given it was still 1978? - Because it was a lot fun folks and if you can't get up for "Teenage kicks" "Jimmy, Jimmy" and "My Perfect Cousin", then you are probably comatose.

Before that we were entranced by the soul and power and artistry of Bronagh Gallagher who blends acting (Commitments and Pulp Fiction) with unbelievable song writing and poignant delivery. After four and half hours sleep, I was on my way to Rostrevor Co. Down for the Top of the Mournes Triathlon, an Olympic Distance race where I was meant to compete against my good buddy, Mark Kinkaid. Unfortunately Mark had an injury and couldn't compete (can I still claim the victory??) but I called in to see him and we went down to transition area on a glorious morning. I had entered the race without knowing anything about it. I assumed the swim was in a nice wee lake somewhere in the Mournes and maybe we had a downhill bike ride and a steady pleasant jog through a nice flat forest... wrong on every count Pete! The swim was in Carlingford Lough, the bike ride went from sea level up to Spelga Dam and then we had a three lap run course which was either up or down but certainly not level.

If Triathlon was easy, everyone would do it. So it all added up to part of the challenge. I was amazed to see some of my club mates there who had all made the same long journey, Brian Scullion (getting ready for the 70.3 in Budapest); Dougie Finlay and a craic relay team of Mervyn Kelly (swim) Thomas Moore (bike) and Fran McFadden (run) - the relay team were to prove victorious several hours later.

How long do you need to get ready for a

Triathlon? Well, take one word of advice, an hour is not enough! At two minutes to 11am I was running down the sea trying to put on a wet suit having finally got my bike and stuff ready in transition, some people actually have time for a warm up, my warm up consists of pumping air into my tyres and sprinting down to the start... I shook the hand of the local mayor to thank the Council for supporting the event, and before I knew it, 200 of us were under starters orders and heading for a yellow buoy which seemed to be half way to County Louth. I was happy enough with my sighting as I was generally going in the right direction, but at one stage I was the meat in an aquatic sandwich and a bloke in the eye I should he seemed to be trying to smash my goggles through my eye socket, but all is fair in love and war, so I just got on with it and drafted him a wee bit to get my own back. Before you could say 25 minutes 50 seconds, I was staggering out of the 17 centigrade water (which had become surprisingly choppy) and running over the main road and along transition back to my bike.

Soon I was heading out the scenic coast road which wasn't too bad, then, as Mark had warned me, we turned left and started climbing.... There were helpful yellow signs painted on the road such as "Keep Going, Nearly there" (we weren't nearly anywhere) and "Hope you like hills", (we don't), but eventually we reached the promised land i.e. the turn at Spelga Dam before an adrenaline filled descent

where we weren't allowed to use our tri bars, such was the speed involved. My descending skills would not be legendary so I am glad my brakes worked and I am also glad that it was dry, because there would have been carnage on that road if it was wet. We then hit a valley and a head wind... In short, it was a tough race, the bike course was hilly, the run course was hilly, in fact, even the swim seemed hilly! As my sweat dripped over my handle bars, it was with a certain amount of relief that I racked my bike and shoved on my running shoes.

I have lots of great memories of competing in South Down, including The Mourne Off Road Marathon which I have done quite a few times and the Coast to Coast (312 kilometres over two days, culminating in 35K in the Mournes), so I felt at home in Kilbroney Park (which is nearly as nice as the Roe Valley Country Park, nearly, but not quite!).

When I start to run in Triathlon my aim is to stay in front of the bloke behind - and to catch the bloke in front, never look back, only in front, chase and pass, chase and pass. As this was a three lap course I was never quite sure who my direct competitors were, but you just put the head down and go for it and realise how lucky and privileged we are to have the chance to take part in this wonderful life re-affirming sport.

I wanted to break 3 hours, but missed it by a minute, but I was thrilled later to discover that I ended up on the podium for my age group (probably because in my age

group there aren't many of us not on zimmer frames yet!) and I took advantage of the fantastic post-race food and I even had a massage on my troublesome right quad! (Pain? Yes, but doesn't everybody have a pain of one form or another?)

I wasn't able to make my Oscar winning prize acceptance speech (which I have been working on for 20 years because it's been than long since I won anything...) because I had to battle back to Limavady for more festival fun - Arthur Smith, for a very funny if completely politically incorrect gig, The Wood Burning Savages, (lots of energy), Paddy Casey (great guitar work) and Frightened Rabbit (whom my sons tell me are the Next Big Thing) before retreating, not to a camp site but to a dry warm bed and the only downer was missing was my favourite band, Paddy Nash and the Happy Enchiladas, but I will blame the Triathlon for that.

The next morning I was standing beside the Creggan Country Park reservoir helping my three club mates, Mervyn Kelly, Gavin O'Kane and Stephen Graham while they organised the Legen-Derry Swim I spoofed on the mic. While the swims took place i.e. 750 metre (one lap) 1,500 metres (two laps) and the Ironman i.e. 2.4 miles - just for lunatics, so why was there the biggest number of entrants for that?

After we had the last of the two laps swimmers safely home, I dashed to put on my own wet suit

(still wet from the previous day) because I was having a go at the Ironman distance. I am not sure why, because I haven't done that distance since Copenhagen last August, but before I knew it Gavin had blown the air horn and off we went.

The Creggan Country Park is a great facility for open water swimming, there are showers and a café afterwards and unlike the sea, the water is sheltered and without waves. Obviously there is a lot less buoyancy than the salt water of the coast, but there are lots of easy to spot red buoys to aim at on your way round. I wanted five consistent laps which is what I achieved. I worked out recently that if you don't bother kicking during the swim section, swimming is not tiring! All you are doing is waving your arms around in a circle and how tiring can that be?!

Ok, good swimmers will kick, but I will never be a good swimmer and secondly my legs need to be without fatigue for the bike normally. So I ambled my way round in just under 1 hour 13 mins. to complete a perfect sporting and musical weekend.

I just hope that maybe next year the organisers of the Stendhal Festival (Ireland's best small festival) the Top of the Mournes (Ireland's toughest Olympic race) and the Legen-Derry Swim (soon to be one of Ireland's biggest open water swim events) don't decide to cram everything again into the same frantic 48 hours...



A contemplative PJ before the Legen-Derry Swim. wk3327



An enthusiastic field on the start line. wk3324

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TTC Rostre
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