



SPORTING MATTERS

BY PETER JACK

From Limavegas to Lanzarote! (Part II)

AS you may recall from last week, I was in Lanzarote in the Canaries to take part in the Club La Santa International Running Challenge.

On our first full day in Lanzarote, we drove to the south to revisit a few of the haunts we had last seen last century when a dreaded camel ride on the side of the Fire Mountain there hadn't been helped by a banana liquor induced hang-over! Three and a half decades older, if not three and a half decades wiser, we decided to skip the camels.

We also checked out Puerto del Carmen and Playa Blanca (does every Spanish tourist resort have a 'white beach?') I got registered for the four races and claimed my race tee shirt to be worn with pride back home. The whole registration process was very slick with an army of international volunteers. So, I had my race number, I had my timing

chip, I was suited and booted – but was I ready to rock 'n roll? Part of the anticipation of this escapade was three races in three days. I had never tackled anything like that before.

The previous week, I had flayed myself alive at the GB and Irish International Cross Country Race at Gransha (and before you ask, no, I wasn't in the International Race – I was in the People's Race where there was an alarming amount of International reserves who hadn't made the team for their country but who wanted to show the selectors a thing or two).

The day after that race, my body went into its usual shutdown mode and all I was fit for was a slow and cold two hour bike ride.

Here in Lanza, I was meant to go flat out day after day after... how would my body cope? And just as importantly, how would my mind cope? I learnt long ago, however that whilst the body can only take you so far, it's the mind that drives you on.

I have just finished two great books by Yuval Noah Harari. The first 'Sapiens – A History of Mankind' and the second 'Homo Deus – The Future of Mankind'.

They are a frightening look at how far we have come and how far we can go in terms of so called 'progress'; about the appalling way in which we treat animals, both domesticated and wild, for our own gain but it is also about the power of the mind.

If you can just hang on in there, you can turn pain into gain, you can turn threat into opportunity, you can achieve a myriad

of possibilities if you can only believe in your own strength and willpower.

Now, this wasn't an Ironman or an Ultra Marathon I was about to tackle but it would be an interesting test, both physical and psychological, over the next three days. Normally, the day after a race your body – and mind – tell you you are shattered but here on the morning of race day two, I amazingly felt just as fresh as race day one, or was my mind playing tricks on me?

STARTLED JACK RABBIT

Day one was a 10K which started on the famous track. Most runners associate a track with speed so most of them took off as if they were going to put out a fire. I had warned myself to try to start sensibly but the neurons in my brain were all fired up and I took off like a startled jack rabbit.

I love starting races at the back because then, no one can pass you! It's a good psychological ploy and besides, your official time only starts when your chip timer goes over the registration mat. The 10K was a three lap race so the first aim was not to get lapped.

It was hot and boy, was it windy. It was like running in a hot wind tunnel. But how come the wind seemed to assist us for only a third of each lap!? Anyway, I kept going out of my comfort zone to record my fastest 10K of the year (which is not surprising, as it's been my only 10K of the year!) As I crossed the finish line back on the track under the green and white finish arch, I practically fell over and every ion in my body longed for oxygen, but whether you are a fun runner like me or an Olympic gold medallist, two minutes later, you feel great as the endorphins flood your system with that wonderful feel good factor.

I felt even better when I was able to say hello to the legendary Kenneth Gasques, the organiser of the Ironman Lanzarote. I had heard of him years ago when I covered the race for Triathlete Magazine in the late 1990s.

Kenneth has been the Race Director for 25 years and is a real stylish gent with his ponytail and leather waistcoat. He even knows Sam Gordon from Portglenone!

Then I spotted and said hello to the equally legendary Bella Bayliss (formerly

Comerford). I've done 15 Ironman races and never come within 5 hours of a win but Bella has won 16 Ironman races!

Bella is not only a great athlete but her and her hubby Stephen have a very popular training camp based in the Sands Beach Resort where Anne and Cheryl were staying.

Your every athletic whim will be catered for by a very knowledgeable coaching team and it's a bit more personal than the colossus that is Club La Santa.

I threw myself into the sea to try to cool down, then drove back to our base in Arrecife for the rest of the day where I could play at being a tourist (as opposed to playing at being a runner in the morning).

PRE-RACE NERVES

The next day, the pre-race nerves were there again but the body accepted it and, more importantly, the mind did too and it felt normal standing on the start line after a great warm up (Abba songs with our two instructors dressed as animals!)

Day two was the 13K ridge run where the terrain was mainly off road. This reminded me of a series of races I organised quite some time ago with five races on five different types of terrain – sand, trail, tarmac, grass and then one race combining all four which were a lot of fun (well, at least they were for the organiser).

Today, we started on tarmac for about 100 metres and then we were up, up and away clambering up a hill. There were several blokes on bikes beside us but it was so steep, we were going faster (a relative term) than them! Thankfully, there was a water stop every 2 miles.

My new bestie, Nathan, and I ran every step together and whilst

I had intended to stay in my comfort zone for this race, that plan went straight out the window. Before I knew it, I was puffing and blowing like a steam train. As the late great Ken Jones famously said: 'Don't confuse motion with progress!' There was a lot of motion but there wasn't much progress.

It got so steep and so windy that I was reduced to walking with my hands on my knees. I wondered how wee Annie was coping with this horrendous wind. She is so slight, she could be blown off the side of this mountain. Maybe she was wearing a rucksack of rocks to weigh her down? I shouldn't have worried as she put another 2 minutes into her age group rivals to increase her lead. I was just glad to be standing.

The first 7K were uphill and the next 6K were basically downhill again, ending with a sprint on the track. I was stuffed. Two down and one to go. How bad could 5K on a beach be?

DAY THREE

Day three dawned its usual pleasant 20° Degrees centigrade (Lanzarote is at 28° Degrees north of the equator as opposed to our 55° Degrees).

The start was on one of the many beaches in Puerto del Carmen – a bit like Portrush but whilst Portrush has one White House, in Lanzarote, every house has to be white!

My usual Park Run is in Portrush which is one of the most scenic in the Northern Hemisphere. I used to think that the sand on the East Strand was soft and difficult to run on but that was before I discovered Puerto del Carmen.

It was like running in treacle wearing a rucksack filled with concrete.

Ann said it was even tougher than last year but I squeezed every single last morsel of energy out of what was left in my system. Ann told me later that, when she looked at the results, I was third in my age group... but only if I was 15 years older, ie, in the 70-74

age category! The standard was very high.

Ann was cleaning up in her age group and taking home a prize every night. I was just taking home a bunch of sore limbs but a dip in the warm Atlantic can revive even the most jaded of pallets.

I left for the airport, a little bit reluctantly but probably also a little bit relieved that I didn't have to face my fourth race in four days – a half marathon in the heat, hills, humidity and scowling winds of the beautiful sports mad Lanzarote.

I had no doubt that my club mate, the one and only Annie P., would bring home the bacon. I, on the other hand, was bringing home a bunch of sweaty race clothes but also a bunch of great sporting memories.

If you like tackling four different races in a lovely climate, then the Club La Santa International Running Challenge in Lanzarote at the end of November is for you!



One hump or two? NCL50-14s



Arrecife Beach, Lanzarote. NCL50-15s



PJ and his new best friends before the 5k beach run. NCL50-17s



Rotary gets everywhere. NCL50-16s