



James Walton and Laura Wylie

James and Laura triumph in Portrush!

WHILE we are waiting for summer to eventually appear, the sport of Triathlon has been to the fore on the North Coast with a sensational race last weekend organised by the Triangle Triathlon club under Race Director, Adam Wilson.

Causeway Coast Triathlon is the most iconic on the island of Ireland featuring a tough ocean swim, a scenic challenging bike ride which incorporates the legendary Dunluce Castle and finishes with a difficult run with the last 2.5 kilometres on the soft sand of the East Strand.

The air temperature was 11.5 and the water temperature was 12.5 i.e. it was chilly in the water and equally cold for the bike and run sections!

Local hopes were based on TTC's very own elite athlete, James Walton from Boleran in Garvagh. He was up against a topclass field which included Commonwealth Games athlete, James Edgar from Lisburn and perpetual podium placer Dominic McAllister from Belfast and Dr. Finbar McGrady from Newry.

In the women's race, Laura Wylie from the Hi-Elbow was the clear pre-race favourite.

At 10.00 a.m. precisely the race klaxon sounded and 140 athletes ran like lemmings into the sea for the appropriately shaped triangular course. With safety cover being provided by RNLI and local canoeists, all was in order. Thankfully this year the waves and the swell weren't too big.

The Triangle were also contributing athletes all the way down through the field. New mum, April Mark, was doing her first Olympic distance race, Joe Mallon from the club was still trying to recover after his victory in the Windermere swim/run race the week before. That race consisted of a 4.2 kilometres of swimming, 38 kilometres of running in the hills and mountains of the Lake District, maybe the Causeway Coast would be a flatter option!

James Walton, who two weeks previously won the Crooked Lake race in Armagh,

obviously was the pre-race favourite but the crowd who were waiting for James to emerge from the sea in first place failed to appreciate that James Edgar, who had recently returned to the sport after a year off, was on the hunt for the top spot of the podium. After lap one of the swim when the athletes ran up the beach there was certainly a James in first place but it was James Edgar, not James Walton!

James Edgar had a ten second lead and at the end of lap two and the final lap he had stretched that to 20 seconds, however, James Walton, had a transition that was 13 seconds quicker and he had his rival firmly in his sights as their bikes rolled out of Portrush past the new building and infrastructures at Royal Portrush Golf club and up past the Royal Court Hotel towards Ballybogy where they then swept left.

Meanwhile, in third place was Alistair Duffield who was hoping to win his age category and he eventually placed top ten overall. In fourth place was Dominic McAllister with a great swim time of 20.47.

James Walton was aware of his rival's prowess as a runner and he knew he had to put time into the Lisburn superstar.

He overtook his rival after about 4 kilometres and had 36 more kilometres to do damage and to carve out a potential race winning lead. The 40K bike ride was demolished by James with a sensational time of 55.53.

Meanwhile the other James rolled in nearly 2 and a half minutes down and conceded another 10 seconds in transition. The race was now James Walton's to be lost.

A interested onlooker was the guest of honour, Banbridge's Russell White, Ireland's leading elite triathlete who is well on his way to qualification for next year's Olympics in Tokyo.

When both of them ran past a fascinated crowd of spectators, it was obvious that James Edgar was running quicker and smoother.

Both runners headed out towards Ramore Head and when they came back towards the Surf School start area, the margin had been cut to 1 minute 20. With this rate of capture,

James Edgar would surely reel in James Walton over the last 7K!

TTC's James has however been working on his run. He has always been known as an amazingly quick swimmer and a very speedy cyclist but he's been doing his Masters Degree in Sports Science in Leeds rubbing shoulders with the great and the good, like Alistair and Johnny Brownlee etc.

Lots of track sessions and lots of hard work meant that James was not prepared to give up the crown without a fight.

Twenty minutes later, those with binoculars were able to look up the beach and discover that there was one solitary figure coming down with a clear lead - and he was wearing the red and black of TTC!

James Walton punched the air in triumph as he crossed the line in first place, successfully defending his title. Meanwhile the Commonwealth Games athlete who had run very bravely and had the quickest run split of the day in 36.28 had finished less than a minute behind his equally talented rival.

It was a case of James the 1st just triumphing James the 2nd!

In third place was Dominic McAllister with a typically strong performance in a run time of 37.11.

Fourth was Newry's Finbar McGrady.

Meanwhile in the women's race, Laura Wylie had a swim time of just over 20 minutes for a 4 minute lead over Eimear Dowds. She increased this lead on the bike with a bike split 2 minutes quicker.

Although Eimear Dowds ran 4 minutes quicker, Laura's winning margin was a comfortable 4 minutes at the finish line. Third female was Genevive McCallum in 2 minutes 28.

Meanwhile out on the course many athletes were struggling to finish this punishing race in cold conditions and they were all looking forward to their well deserved grub on the finish line. Kieran Cooke did his first Olympic distance race, the strength from his recent marathon training has paid off and he finished very strongly in 2 minutes 36 just ahead of Gearoid Conerney in 2 minutes

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Catherine Butcher finished in 2 minutes 40 with Jason McKnight in 2 minutes 49, just 20 seconds ahead of our first timer April Irvine and Mark Friel of TTC comfortably beat the 3 hour target of by 7 minutes.

Meanwhile Joe Mallon, despite being very tired from his Lake District exploits the week before, beat the 2 hour 30 minutes mark.

Thanks are due from the club to sponsors club Velo Culture of the Ballybogy Road, Portrush and to Chuck Russell of Coucon. Each winner received a handsome and very useful all encompassing all weather cocoon, which is of great use when you emerge from the cold waters off the North Atlantic.

Thanks to Alan Simson and Peter Jack mcing and to Alan Logan Dging - emergency medical services for paramedic cover.

Ryan McGeough of Portstewart Clothing Company for supplying the jackets and Robin Ruddock for water safety.

Most of all however the club are indebted to Race Director, Adam Wilson who pulled out the stops as usual and had club members and friends and family all helping the athletes and the race organisation on the day.

A special thanks to club members Simon Walton, Michelle McElhinney and Jackie Stevenson who all endured a very cold 4 hours while looking after all of the weekend warriors.

At the end of June, there are three events on the local calendar namely a Half Ironman in Donegal organised by Northern Velocity, the Carrickfergus Castle Sprint race and the Titanic Sprint and Olympic Distance race in Belfast. You will be spoiled for choice!

To cap off a great weekend James Walton went down to Dublin and won his first National Senior Title when he won the Aquathon which consists of a 1K swim at the Bull Wall followed by a 5K run, two wins in 24 hours, this young man is destined for further great things and the club were very grateful to him and the club legend Ann Paul who gave a fascinating seminar at the Roe Valley Leisure last weekend on all things Triathlon.