



SPORTING MATTERS

BY PETER JACK

YOU may recall a few weeks ago the story of the Sheffield half marathon, which was cancelled by the organisers, as 5000 athletes stood on the start line because apparently there was a lack of water on the course for the thirsty runners.

The organisers felt they had no option but to make an apology and to announce, through an extremely bad PA system, that the race was not to proceed.

Of course many runners never heard the announcement and somebody on the start line moved and approximately 3000 of the 5000 ploughed on. As the hapless, luckless organiser was besieged by a merciless press, demanding to know why there was no water, she just broke down and cried tears of frustration and grief and humiliation. I thought, there but by the Grace of God, go I.

This weekend sees one of the Triangle Triathlon Clubs biggest events of the year – the Roe Valley Sprint Race. This consists of a 750 metre swim, a 20K bike and a 5K run.

Sounds simple? A bunch of blokes turn up, have a wee swim then have a quiet ride on country roads then a wee stroll up to the Country Park and back from the Leisure Centre. That shouldn't need all that much organisation, should it? That should be a piece of cake really...

The reality is somewhat different. The planning for the 2014 race started in May 2013 when we had a debrief after last year's race to look back at what we did well and what we could do better. As a race organiser, you are ultimately responsible for the safety and well-being of 300 people who are all taking part in a strenuous hazardous activity. Race organisation is not for

How (NOT) to organize a race

in Limavady. It is an honour and a privilege that they trust us with their event fee – and their safety. By the time the race is over I will have filled several files with papers and documents and permits and necessary race information.

Here is the top 20 list of things to do when organising a race:

1. Plan ahead. If your race is in May, lodge and the TTC was formed shortly after that. As a newly formed club, we needed to show the world that we existed so we decided to organise a pool based race in Coleraine which was then our sole headquarters. We obtained sponsorship from the Nationwide and I somehow got away with organising an event which included bikes hurtling through busy streets packed with traffic and Saturday shoppers. Eventually sanity prevailed and we decided to look elsewhere for a safer arena. The best pool based event is from a Leisure Centre on the outskirts of a town. The best option on the planet in my opinion is the Joey Dunlop Leisure Centre in Ballymoney as the Centre is right on the outskirts of town on a quiet straight country road. However, the Leisure Centre in Limavady is also ideal because (a) it's fairly close to the country and (b) the staff and management have absolutely bought into the event 100 percent and could not be more helpful.

So how do you organise a safe and enjoyable event that caters for first timers and also the elite? I'm very mindful of the fact that many people start their triathlon careers with our race

than trying to get one corporate sponsor. I prefer working with local sponsors, all of whom I have contributed a fifth to the overall sum. This year I am pleased to be able to work with Gabriel Devlin Motors, Xperience Software, Hunters Bakery, Marshall Howe's Fruit Shop and Altec Solar. These people were super keen to be involved and really get a kick out of the fact that we have a top class event here on their own doorstep.

4. Design a t-shirt. I sit down every spring and try and come up with a killer logo. Last year, I put it out to the club and Julian Grimes contributed "swim bike run sleep repeat" for the back of the shirt. I'm happy with this year's logo – but will the time and place of 20K bike course; the Springwell Running Club for the run course obviously; the Millennium Volunteers for registration officials; the Rotary Club (Service Above Self is their Motto after all) and obviously the host club TTC. This is where Mervyn Kelly, Brian Scullion, Tommy Moore and Katherine Woods come into their own.

5. Get safety cover. Again another form, the Red Cross are great and help us every year. Two years ago they were needed as a cyclist managed to bike off a perfectly straight road into a hedge. As Elvis Costello once famously sang, "Accidents will happen, they are only hit and run..."

Thankfully the athlete recovered. Hopefully, this year the Red Cross guys can sit and drink tea all day undisturbed.

6. Liaise with the PSNI. We are so fortunate that: (a) The Police do a superb job for us each and every year marshalling busy roundabouts and junctions. We have to provide our own marshals of course, but car drivers intend to pay more attention when they see a uniform... (b) We are not charged for it (yet). As and when the PSNI charge us for their women and man hours, the price of a triathlon in this country will double.

7. Book the timing system, Glenn Grant organises this. He is a former school teacher who now works full time providing timing chips for marathons,

triathlons etc. I was the first to use him. This wonderful computer chip on everyone's ankle gives us their swim time, their transition time, their bike time, their second transition time, their overall time and their position in their age group. I mind the time when all of this had to be done manually...

8. Book a DJ for sounds and also for use of a microphone (as the MC tends to be a bit mouthy on it). I have got Pete Vamos the man himself, so we are in good hands.

9. Get other clubs involved. This year the event is brought to you courtesy of the following clubs: Limavady Amateur Swimming Club (who count 30 lengths for each swimmer), the Roe Valley Cycling Club for the 20K bike course; the Springwell Running Club for the run course obviously; the Millennium Volunteers for registration officials; the Rotary Club (Service Above Self is their Motto after all) and obviously the host club TTC. This is where Mervyn Kelly, Brian Scullion, Tommy Moore and Katherine Woods come into their own.

10. Talk very nicely to Mary McCloskey of St Mary's to have access to the St Mary's pitch for a few hours. We used to have the finish and the whole fulcrum of the event at the Leisure Centre but now it's just too big. We need a bigger and safer transition area.

11. Organize extra car parks in Rossmore School and Limavady College and near the 3G Pitch.

12. Get the bike racks and Finish Line Paraphernalia from Triathlon Ireland i.e. drive to Donegal and back.

13. Fill in a Notice of Intention to organise a Public Procession Application form (I kid you not). I have to answer questions such

as how many bands will be on the traditional route, where the bands will meet and where they will disperse...

14. Appoint course directors for the six vital areas of the race. These are registration, swim, bike, run, transition set up and take down and course set up. If they all do their work I just have to sit there, look pretty and drink tea all day...

15. Organize physio – Joanne Donaghy of Sports Injury Clinic does a great job for aching muscles and she tends to the wounded and afflicted after they have finished the race.

16. Speak nicely to Jim and Kitty Loughery of the Roe Mill Road who not only marshal on the run course but hand out approximately 600 cups of water and tell great white lies as "you are looking great" etc. If only the race organisers in Sheffield had access to Jim and Kitty!

17. Book the Mayor and a special guest who this year will be James Thompson to hand over the prizes.

18. Three weeks before the race sit down with a bottle of gin, a packet of valium, and a whole bucket load of midnight oil and throw 300 names in the air and

gets them each into ten heat off 30, each based either on their gender or estimated swim time or age.

19. Two weeks before the race sit down with an even bigger bottle of gin and work out what swimmer goes in what lane, because woe betide the race director if he puts a swimmer into a lane where the other five swimmers are slower than him and impede his progress!

20. Pray for good weather on race day. The TTC can organise most things but the climate on race day cannot even be organised by Triathlon Ireland! Oh and as extra 21st tip, after the race is over and the course dismantled and the prizes given out and the 17 thank you letters have been sent and the TTC trailer safely loaded and parked away you sit down to organise a date for next year's Roe Valley Sprint Race and you have a debrief – but this year, the debrief will have to wait for a wee while as I am driving to Galway immediately after our race to go and commentate for 10 hours at a half Ironman the next day – now where did I leave that packet of valium...



The weather this Saturday will be very different! 19229KDR.



The indispensable lane counters from Limavady Amateur Swimming Club. 19458KDR.



The Roe Valley Sprint Triathlon takes place this weekend and the final sponsors are all now in place, included are Ian Kane from experience, Peter Jack and John Peart from the Roe Valley Leisure Centre and Gagrriel Devlin of G D Motors. 21089KDR



Some of the hardworking Limavady Millennium volunteers, who are in charge of registration. 19041KDR.