TING MATTERS

BY **PETER JACK**

BATH is known as being a pretty city in the South West of England, full of lovely Georgian buildings, a burbling river, a very prestigious University but it's not so well known for its sport.

Last weekend, after Saracens beat them) having discovered that and were riding high young Hannah Jack had never been to watch a Rugby Match in Bath, I went over to rectify this omission. What made the match even more interesting was that the opponents for Bath were Saracens of London, or Sarries as their supporters lovingly call them and they are Ulster's opponents in the quarter finals of the Heineken Cup in four weeks' time and I wanted to cast a wizened eye over what lies between us and a home semi-final in Dublin. Bath also had a road

Bath also had a road race on the same weekend, the Bath Half Marathon, which of course I tried to enter, only to be rebuffed. Although the field had an entry limit field had an entry limit of 15,000, it was sold out months ago. Unbelievable! The Unbelievable! Unbelievable! The race raises millions for local charities and also has 'celebrities' (ok, a Coronation Street actor). The whole city was awash with yellow AA signs on the Friday when I arrived from

AA signs on the Friday when I arrived from Bristol Airport warning me that the roads would be closed on Sunday for the race.

The Bath Rec is where Bath play their Rugby and it's a bit like the Stoop ground at Gloucester. They are both tight but tidy grounds which are always sold out and where passion and where passion and pride have produced two very successful teams over the last few decades. Bath have been having the best season for many years and were undefeated since November 2012 when funnily enough

Saracens beat them) and were riding high in the league in third place. The top four teams in the Aviva Premiership get into the much vaunted playoffs with two semi-finals and a final, a system which has been successfully copied by the Pro 12 League in which Ulster play. I was with my good friend Shaun Simpson for the jour-simpson for the jourmey over and we met up with our talented off spring for dinner. Andrew Simpson is about to finish an Engineering degree and last year, when Hannah was in her year out in Paris and Buenos Aires, Andrew was in every known part of the tennis playing world, having secured a spudented a total talented the specific placement with Hawkeye. Young Andrew got to know ney over and we met up with our talented Andrew got to know Andrew got to know all the top players like Djokovich and Nadal and Murray on his various sojourns to Australia and America and China and all over Europe etc. Hawkeye Europe etc. Hawkeye were so impressed with Andrew that they offered him a full time job with them as soon as he obtains his degree and he will be a team leader leading out his trained cohorts to tennis tournaments to tennis tournaments all over the world to ensure that even if the linesmen or Umpire need to go to Specsavers, then Hawkeye will step into the breach. Well done young Andrew, who is a credit to Bath University, the Roe Valley and to Limavady Grammar School.

It was only a couple all over the world to

It was only a couple of degrees above

Sath Sport

freezing and you could see the breath of the Rugby players in the air as they attempted to warm up before kick-off. Bath, in their famous blue and white famous blue and white strip, went into a 3 nil lead with a penalty and things looked good. Their scrum half was Peter Stringer, the ex-Munster and Irish play-er, but he was taken out by a psychopath in the by a psychopath in the Saracens pack called Burger who was about three times the size of the nippy scrum half and Bath never recov-ered. Saracens were remorseless and their pack bullied their oppo-site numbers allowing site numbers allov site numbers allowing their own packs to bul-lock their way over the Bath gain line with unceasing ease. Bath should have really gone for an early Bath because they were never in it and Saracens won at a canter. Their ex England Captain, Steve Borthwick, was majes-England Captain, Steve Borthwick, was majes-tic and looked like a guy who wanted to prove Steve Lancaster, the England Rugby Coach, England Rugby Coach, wrong. There was a lot of argy bargy between the two sets of forwards near the end but that was as close as Bath got to their opposite numbers and they trooped off the pitch rather sheepishly at the full time whistle.

I love sport but I also love the English lan-guage and the next day we were fortunate enough to hear the we were fortunate enough to hear the English language at its very best. In the morning we were at a Jonathan Dimbleby lecture in the Guildhall as part of the Bath Literary Festival where Jonathan was talking about his book, 'Destiny in the Desert' and I marvelled at his fantastic turn of phrase and mellifluous use of language.

BATH HALF

The next morning we were up early to go and see the Bath Half. As Hannah's house is practically on the Race Course, we didn't have Course, we didn't have to far to go. Hannah had two of her flatmates attempting the distance. Lots of students had entered as they realised that their carefree, halcylon four year exis-tence as a bohemian in one of England's nicest Campus University Campus University towns was coming to an

towns was coming to an end.
We wished Lucy and Hayden well as they left to get down to the busy start line. Why are Half Marathons so popular? In sunny Northern Ireland, we have at least two in the early part of the year i.e. the Omagh Half and the Larne Half. I hope to do Larne in two weeks time if I have recovered from a have recovered from a have recovered from a broken toe and a chest infection. Then there is the Belfast Half later in the year. A lot of peo-ple attempt a half as a build up to a marathon

build up to a maration but for many people, it's an end in itself.

I just don't like the name of the event itself!

A Half Marathon Whoever wanted to accomplish or achieve a half of anything?! We all know a marathon is all know a marathon is 42K so why hasn't some vital rebranding been done i.e. the race should be called 'The 21K' or a '13.1' (for the Imperial equivalent). Those wise

ago.

ago.

Realising that most of
us mere mortals can
only do one Ironman a
year, the WTC popularised the Half
Ironman brand i.e. a
race of a 1.2 mile swim, a 56 mile bike and a 13.1 mile run, but cunningly labelled it a '70.3' i.e. the total distance in miles. There are now over 30 '70.3' events in the USA alone and they preliferate all and they proliferate all over the world. Most athletes can do three or athletes can do three or four of these a year i.e. the WTC get a lot more 300 dollar entry fees from the super keen athlete – what a cunning

LOCAL EVENTS

In Limavady, we have the Round the Bridges the Round the Bridges
10 miler in June, we
have the 8K Roe Valley
Trail Run (which took
place last Saturday).
Slightly further afield is
the 10K and 5K Sports
Relief runs on the East
Stand Bostonsk in Sports Strand, Portrush in a few weeks time so ably organised by Andy Deal. The only local Deal. The only local Half Marathon, sorry '21K', is the Derry Half and the last time I did it, the course was dreadful, up and down a dual carriage way and in and out an Industrial Estate of an Industrial Estate
(mind you I had biked
112 miles the day
before, so maybe that's
why I didn't' feel too
hot during the race itself....)

The organiser in Bath had paid a few middle ranking Kenyans to come and show the rest of us how it's done. must confess I am not a believer in this. The organiser may have ended up with a course

people in the World Triathlon Corporation don't they put the saw the potential in a appearance fees money Half Ironman years into the prize money into the prize money and just encourage the best athletes to take part? In Dublin last year for the Marathon, year for the Marathon, the prize money was very attractive, no appearance fees where paid and the event was won by locals. We have to encourage our own top athletes and not just go for headline grab-bers.

The world record the way for a Half Marathon is just under 59 mins so maybe the possibility of a sub two hour marathon can be attained by our succes-sors in the next 20 or 30 years.....

The weather for the Bath Half was dry for kick-off but it got very wet and miserable later on. Lucy, who had run the course in practice



Rachel Cochrane, runner up in the Girls Primary School race at the Roe Valley Country F 10206KDR Park trail run on Saturday.

four days previously, had a PB in 2 hrs. 10 mins. and Hayden (who had got lost in a (who had got lost in a practice run on the week before and ended up doing 22 miles – who said students weren't keen!) had a great 1.43 despite or maybe because of enough Ibuprofen for a knee injury to give a a knee injury to give a mule a stroke...

My TTC colleagues, Kevin Murphy and Murphy

Paul McErlain com-pleted the course in 1:30 and 1:35 respectively along with two of their Magherafelt Harrier team mates.

Well done to all the participants. Now, if only we had an equally big race in Limavegas, wouldn't that give the local economy a boost? local economy a boost? Ah well, we can but dream. See you on the start line in Larne on

THE STUFF OF LEGENDS



The Magherafelt Mafia! NCL11-30s



The start line for the 2014 Bath Half Marathon, wk1115



Bath's Anthony Watson gets tackled. Picture from www.bathrugby.com wk1116