

SPORTING MATTERS

BY PETER JACK

From the Roe Valley to Ravenhill

LAST weekend, I had a problem – I wanted to get in a long bike ride but I also wanted to watch Limavady First XV try to win a cup final and finish the season unbeaten.

The solution? Travel from Limavady up to Kingspan (or Ravenhill for those of you of a slightly older disposition) on my bike. It was only going to be one way as I could get back on the supporters bus along with the trophy. All week, I looked anxiously at the forecast. Being mid-April, you may have thought that we could anticipate a bit of sunshine and maybe a temperature in the low teens – so what was the actual mid-April 2016 forecast? A maximum of 7 degrees centigrade between 9.00 am and 2.00 pm but with a wind chill that would make it feel like 3 degrees.

Like most people, I don't like the cold so I put enough layers on to ward off the Baltic breeze. Not only did I have three thermal layers on but I had a balaclava and also my secret weapon, a product which looked like a teabag but when you opened it, automatically provides heat for up to 10 hours. I slipped these into my pair of gloves. These gloves I would normally use in sub-arctic conditions when I am climbing a mountain, ie, perfect for a bike ride in spring in this country!

With my warmed up gloves I was determined

to avoid the fate I had suffered a week previously when my hands were frozen for the first two hours of a 60 mile ride.

I steered the bike downhill wrapped up like the Michelin man to go into meet the ever smiling, ever helpful photographer, Ken Reay at the Rugby Club. We were the only people there. I told Ken he would be the last friendly face I would see for 4, 5 or 6 hours! I set off with the same mind set before any long sporting journey – whatever it takes, no matter what, I will get there. A journey like this is as much psychological as physical.

You can do 60 miles on a bike and never be more than 10 miles from Limavady, ie, Dungiven and back, Derry City Airport round-a-bout and back, Benone and back and there you have it. But there is something about a one way journey that appeals, it's the unknown territory, uncharted waters, etc.

I have done some mad one-way stuff in the past, ie, Mizzon to Malin Head, 430 miles in roughly 4 days. Newcastle to Sligo, 140 miles in 2 days and now this. Of course, it would have to start with a 4 mile uphill slog, ie, the

Ringsend Road – above me lay a big grey cloud like an anvil about to hammer down thunderbolts of rain.

ISSUES

To make matters worse, I was having right knee issues. I had jarred it the week before during a 14 mile run. I had gone to my fabulous chiropractor, Paula Fyfe and like Humpty Dumpty, she had put me back together again.

She told me to take it easy, so what did I do? I went for a 5 mile run with the pedal to the metal and then went squatting and box jumping in Ricky Morrison's fabulous Nspire Gym. Result? Next morning when I put my foot on the floor it was like somebody sticking a red hot poker into my meniscus. Still, I thought, as a triathlete you don't actually need your right leg for the first two thirds of a triathlon. You swim 90 percent with your arms and you can concentrate on your good leg on the bike and just don't get up out of the saddle. Besides, pain is all in the mind anyway....

I hoped that, when I got to Ringsend, the wind might prove to be a wee bit helpful. I had been praying for the usual westerly wind but the wind had been stubbornly blowing from the east all week. Normally prevailing winds have a name. There is the

Mistral in South of France, the Sirocco in North Africa and the Freemantle Doctor in West Australia, so why do we have a name for the wind that we are confronted with at least 360 days a year?

There have been some names I have given the wind when I turn into it after a coffee stop in Bushmills, but they aren't repeatable in a family newspaper!

I broke my journey into achievable bite sizes of approximately 9 or 10 miles – after Garvagh, it was the market town of Killea, then the pretty town with the River Bann running through it, ie, Portlone, then Randalstown, before I eventually pulled in for a much needed coffee stop in Antrim.

I am a lot like Antrim in many ways, we have both seen better days! I didn't want to linger, in case I get even colder so it was back in the saddle for the trip to Templestrick, past some old established hotels like Dunadry, then I passed the Mallusk playing fields, where, believe it or not, I once won a cross country race.

Mallusk in my mind was always one of the coldest places in the country and last Saturday, with a bitter wind from the Arctic, certainly didn't change my mind.

Rather than the motorway which of course I couldn't take, I found myself on the A6 and I passed Bellevue Zoo and the roads got busier and in an even worse state of repair. I wondered if any of our politicians ride a bike and know the appalling state of our tarmac?

I was convinced I was in a third world country the closer I got to Belfast. We don't have enough tarmac to fill the pot holes but we sure have enough election posters.

As the miles ticked by, the colours and names on the posters may have changed, but the promises remained the same....

STILL IN ONE PIECE

Eventually I found myself coming into Belfast, miraculously still in one piece, despite the close attention of hundreds of Belfast car drivers and I swung left in front of the City Hall where I was faster than the vehicular transport.

I wheeled passed the front of the Law Courts and up past the Central Train Station where at last I saw a sign pointing towards the Ravenhill Road. I happily went up past the Martyr's Memorial Church and down left and I eventually worked my way to the back entrance to Ravenhill at 1:20 pm – with a 20 minute coffee stop, it had taken me exactly 4 hours.

My computer stopped working in Garvagh so I

had no idea how many actual miles I covered but I felt very pleased with myself – I had beaten the supporter's bus!

I had no idea however how my good friend John Madden had biked from Derry to Belfast two years ago in 2 hours 39 minutes at an average speed of 28 miles an hour. I am merely a commuter while John is a champion!

I met Mr. Limavady Rugby, Herbie Parkhill who had my bag of gear. I changed and put on some warm clothes – Ken very kindly put my bike in the back of his van and I lived in Lurgan, a very well deserved pint, as the teams ran out onto the hallowed turf.

We were still having the four seasons in one day, sun followed by hail-stones, followed by a really cold wind. We were playing Lurgan for the third time this season. We had beaten them comprehensively in Lurgan, we had trashed them 34 – 0 at the John Hunter Memorial Grounds, so surely another victory was on the cards?

Lurgan kicked an early penalty but we scored a couple of scintillating tries to have a reassuring 11 point lead at half time. The second half started but it seemed that the Limavady team were still in the dressing room.

Lurgan came at us like derbies, they had nothing to lose, we did, we had an unbeaten season on the line. We were hopefully going to be in Arsene Wenger's words, "The Invincibles".

Sport can be a cruel mistress at times but that's what makes it sport. One bounce of the ball, one refereeing decision, one injury, can make – or break – a season. No team has ever retained the Gordon West Cup. We won it last year beating the League winners, Larne in the final. This year we were the overwhelming favourites. It was our destiny. Hubris wouldn't get a look in....

Somehow, Lurgan hadn't read the script which we wrote. Daniel Irvine, our captain, our talisman and our inspirational leader finally succumbed to his long-standing hamstring injury.

We battled on bravely but somehow the stars didn't align as they have done all season. In the fifth minute of injury time, Lurgan scored a try to make it 32–31. The referee blew his whistle, the Invincibles were suddenly no longer invincible. The team in black fell onto the sandy turf of Ravenhill disconsolate, dispirited and defeated.

A few minutes later, they were back on their feet to applaud the victors. Sport, like life, can be cruel but Lurgan deserved it and our team



Saturday afternoon and Peter Jack celebrates after cycling to the Kingspan Stadium in Belfast for the Gordon West Cup final between Limavady Rugby Club and Lurgan. 15857KDR



9am on Saturday morning and Peter Jack is at the Limavady Rugby Club ready to set off for the Kingspan Stadium in Belfast for the Gordon West Cup final against Lurgan. 15818KDR



Enjoying the fun, fully submerged at Mud Madness. NCL16-47s

behaved sportingly. Hey, I mused as I tripped out of the ground, if I was unfortunate enough to live in Lurgan, I would need some consolation too....

MUD MADNESS

The next day I found myself in Foymore Lodge between Dungannon and Portadown for the aptly named Mud Madness helping my friend, Johnny Davis.

This race has been run for the last 10 years and is a crazy combination of running, assault courses, freezing cold water and a bit of stuff you wouldn't envisage in your worst nightmares....

Nearly 800 people had signed up to challenge themselves over two laps of a 2.5 K course, 5k for a decent runner would normally take 24 to 25 minutes. The winning time here, however, would be nearer the hour and some people were

still coming in after 2 hours! It was brutal!

There were 25 obstacles in each lap. I was holding a mic while trying not to laugh. At least I didn't have to deal with the tunnel of doom. Two massive pipes sloping uphill which the athletes had to pull themselves through with a rope. Then there was the camouflaged nets which had to be crawled under and the bog where you went in one colour and you came out another colour....

There is method to the madness too. The race has Marie Curie as its official charity partner and over £150k has been raised over the years.

At least one guy was in his wet suit, two girls were dressed as angels, one guy had a turkey outfit on. One guy didn't even have a shirt on, it was just all muddy, mad and marvelous!

Peadar McCall won

the first race in the morning, dried out and came back to win the second race in the afternoon too. But this wasn't about winning or even times, it was humane –v- the elements. Everyone finished cold and tired but everyone finished happy and knew they had done something really different.

Not a run, not an adventure race but a challenging mixture of obstacle race and cross country and tunnels and smoke filled trenches, etc. Mud madness ain't normal and maybe that's why it's so popular. What other sport has a 65 percent female participation rate by the way?

Johnny promises to run round two in the Autumn.

If you wish to get muddy and have some madness and maybe even raise a few quid for your favourite charity, then see you there!



An enthusiastic competitor dives head first into the mud at Mud Madness. NCL16-46s