

McKee and Haugh box clever on Rocky

Hill and Dale Race Report 5 by Rusty and Stainless

Which direction are we running this year? The oft asked question we, as race directors, put to the "Bard McBurney". With the benefit of infinite wisdom, garnered over more than a quarter of a century of knowledge of all things Hill and Dale and utilizing an algorithm that would baffle most NASA scientists the answer "anti-clockwise" was given.

With the usual military precision Mary, Rita, Debbie and Darragh set about signing on the 225 runners who set off at 7.30pm in the prescribed anti-clockwise direction. The starter got a little tongue tied at the start and declared that there would be no Hill & Dale on Tuesday or Saturday of next week – facts that most already knew!!! What he meant was that there is no race next Thursday (18 May) as Slieve Donard, the 6th race of the series is on Saturday afternoon! With usual insults mingled with the traditional cries of 'BARF', the assembled mass began the climb to the first of the four peaks.

Rivalries renewed

The previous week's race, at Binnian, saw an epic battle between the 2 stand-out runners in this year's series. Showing some intelligent race craft, and a good eye for a gap in the wall, Newcastle's Zak Hanna took a well-earned win from Mourne's Willie McKee, thus setting the scene for a titanic battle over the Rocky course. From the blow of Morgan's whistle, McKee set a high tempo pace as the race climbed towards the first summit at Altnataggart. The two continued to increase the significant distance to the rest of the field with Hanna shadowing McKee as the race summited Tournam Rock towards the ascent of Rocky. McKee began to put daylight between himself and Hanna; an interesting point given Hanna's data showed him to be running at sub 5 minute mile pace - no mean feat across rough and challenging mountain terrain. The leaders summited Rocky with Hanna gaining some time back on the climb. As they came into view of the descent of Rocky it was nip and tuck. McKee, descending superbly, ran out the deserving and relatively comfortable winner in a time of 31.35, with Hanna 22 second adrift. All in all it was a superb effort from both runners which sets them up nicely for the next installment of what is already an intriguing battle; the Slieve Donard Race Saturday 20 May, when both European and World's selection are up for grabs.

The podium was rounded off by Newcastle's Barry McConville who put in a superb performance on home ground; great to see Barry coming into form after injury. The Spartan was not too far behind as he dropped off the mountain at breakneck speed. Either he had to get home for the 8:30 baby feed, or he thought that Wonderwall had rounded up a few Persians and were closing in fast, and waving!

The Ladies' race was dominated by the increasingly impressive Charlene Haugh. Charlene, making a comeback to Hill and Dale after a few years

away, rolled back the years and showed her class with a winning time of 38.12. She was joined on the podium by Gillian Wasson and Patricia McKibbin.

Other Notable performances on the night included Pete Grant, who ran out winner of the male vet-45 category. Rumor has it that this performance has John "Hen" Kelly considering fitting wing mirrors on both shoulder for the next race as Pete edges ever closer!

Ewe must be having a laugh

Post-race interviews with second placed Hanna revealed an interesting addition to the series with 2 ewes acting a pace makers on the way towards Altnataggart. Zak was impressed with their even pacing and decided to sit in their slipstream; the additional company of the mountain ponies only added to the experience of being in the hills that is traditionally associated with a visit to Belfast Zoo!

A bit hilly!!

At the finish line, as is customary, we congratulate, verbally abuse and occasionally ask if they enjoyed their race. One reply was noteworthy; "it was a bit hilly". The incredulous and perplexed look on my face must have been interesting to observe!

Stage 2

With the results team in full flow we congregated in the Maghera Inn where Matthew and the team provided much appreciated food and ale with iron levels needed to restore tired muscles. We extend a huge thanks to all those who contributed to the smooth running of the race and to competitors for supporting the series. Finally, to reiterate the earlier point, here is NO RACE next Thursday night due to Slieve Donard on Saturday. Thursday racing resumes with Race 7 May 25 at Moughanmore. Registration is at the Deer's Meadow. Online Registration is now open for those wishing to join the series for the more mountainous events.