

No Better Place to Be

Report by The Big Fellas Fella

Race 2 of the 2019 Hill and Dale Series Tollymore Forest Park

The title for this weeks race was inspired by our local care home boss, Mark King. As he sat on top of the mountain with no name, counting all the athletes as they reached the summit and the yellow sun began to set over the rolling green hills, he thought to himself that this was truly a place of beauty to be shared with like-minded people. There was “*no better place to be*” on a Thursday evening.

The Course

This year’s race begins at the stone monument just opposite the Rangers/Celtic office in case we may cause offence. The athletes run along the Shimna River almost as quickly as the Salmon heading to spawn. After reaching the lowest part of Tollymore, they run to the very highest point of the park at Carrigard via the affectionately known “*chute*”. From here they cross a stile onto open mountain leading to the hill with no name, a sharp climb and it’s all downhill from there to the finish... well almost. So far this years` race directors have added and subtracted new paths, just to spice things up. They certainly had a little chilli powder before crossing the finish line.

The Legend

Before we give the full race report, it would be remiss not to mention the legend that is Deon McNeilly, A.K.A “*the big fella*”. Deon has won more races than most people have had hot dinners, so it was a surprise to see him in 62nd place in last week’s race. A quick Google diagnosis of exercise induced asthma, a new inhaler later and suddenly this week he was 36th. He claimed he had more Salbutamol than a famous Tour de France winner. Seamus Lynch better watch out as Deon has suggested that he is taking a double dose next week. It is ironic that this is called the monument race. The race takes its name from the stone obelisk built by Robert Jocelyn, in honour of his son James, who suffered from asthma in the days long before Google.

The Results

Past champion Seamus Lynch made his first appearance of the series and he proved he is back to his best, with a gun to tape win. Indeed he looked very relaxed as he effortlessly ran up the green rig, a cruel finish to any race.

2nd and 3rd place went to Mourne runners, Timothy Johnston and Jonathan Scott respectively. Jared Martin in 5th place was the first junior to pass the finish line.

As well as the Senior Event Phil Hodge organised a junior run as a selection race for an international event. These young ones are aged 14 to 16 and it was incredible that Tom Crudington (aged 14) of Newcastle AC on a slightly shortened course managed to cross the line even ahead of Seamus Lynch. Ciara Savage of Newcastle AC was the first female junior. A massive congratulations to all of the juniors who entered and hopefully we can encourage even more for the next junior race at Binnian.

The ladies event followed a similar vein with last week’s winner Esther Dickson of Newry AC in dominate form. 2nd place was Karen Wilton and Sarah Graham romped home in 3rd. Poor Sarah, however, was cornered by Deon McNeilly in the Avoca at the presentation, who was heard regaling

her of his past triumphs including his 28 minute 10K and 47 minute 10 miler. Perhaps there was some consolation for Sarah in that she wasn't subjected to Joe McCann recounting his illustrious Armagh 10. If ever there was an incentive for rival clubs to challenge Newcastle AC, surely it must be to prevent future clean sweeps by the host club, who won the male open, the 14-16 Junior male and female, the Vet 35, Vet 40, Vet 45, Vet 50, Vet 55 and Vet 60.

A Time to Pray

Getting into the great outdoors often inspires spiritual re-awakening especially on Holy Thursday. Our time keeper, Frank Morgan, had his annual feet wash at his local chapel. PJ proved that modern technology & 4G can aid worship as he was able to watch the Church service on his phone while marshalling a strategic corner. People were also heard praying for an end to the endless climb up the chute and some offered to carry out a funeral service as they wanted to bury the race directors.

Competition

There was a lot of fierce competitiveness on show at the Monument race. Mourne runners Timothy and Jonathan, 2nd and 3rd overall threw down the gauntlet for the championship and this is one rivalry worth watching. Hen Kelly beating Pete Grant to the Vet 50 honours keeps that pot boiling. Which of the Newcastle McVeigh brothers can claim bragging rights? Honours this week go to Connaire in 10th place overall. From the construction industry, which of the two plumbing mates Sean and Gary would emerge victorious? Sean eventually prevailed in 12th while *Mackers* was 14th. The rivalry extended to families with Joe Kennealy setting aside fatherly humility to beat his daughter Eve.

Our equine vet Hugh Suffern in 109th place apparently hasn't trained as much as his running mates, so he relied on his large elbows to hold them at bay. Despite Hughs physical attributes the even broader shoulders of former rugby star Brian Wilson beat him to the line in 108th.

Other Notables

"Lost in Mountain" award this week goes to Hugo Rodgers in 144th. Hugo a very experienced runner almost missed the start of the race as he turned up to compete in Castlewellan Forest Park instead of Tollymore.

Jinksy's car was so fed up waiting on him to finish that it almost drove off without him.

Penny Polly from Crossgar Harriers in 279th place loudly declared this was her second and last ever Hill and Dale race due to the tough course. Somehow I think she may be back with her friends Cathy Black and Gemma Barr as the competitive spirit is alive and well in Crossgar.

Talking of names, we had our longest ever entry in the registration list. Zoe Elizabeth Mila Dewdney Parsons completed the course in 275th place. Zoe lives in England but her family is from the Mourne area and when coming over to visit them she wanted to run a race. Zoe thoroughly enjoyed the event and is planning more Thursday visits home.

A big thanks to the course markers for doing such a great job in guiding the athletes safely around the trail. Surely no one could have missed all the sawdust arrows? Step forward David Bell, in 92nd. Don't worry David, we have ordered an extra bale of sawdust for next week. Thanks to all the marshalls dotted around the route, to the galant band of volunteers at the registration and finish

line and of course to Darragh McCrickard for the immense work he always does in compiling prompt and accurate results.

Thanks to John Butcher Kelly who each week does sweeper to make sure everyone gets home safe and sound. This week he was given an extra job in removing directional tape that is hung from branches along the race course. He complained about the use of a set of steps in setting the course out as he couldn't reach most of the tape until it was explained that Phil Hodge had hung the said material. Thank you to the Avoca in Newcastle for the lovely finger food buffet and for the use of their facilities at the presentation.

Next week's race is Slieve Martin in Kilbroney Forest Park in Rostrevor. Bring full body cover in case of adverse weather, bring your own water in your rugged Hill & Dale container supplied by your ever environmentally friendly Hill & Dale committee and of course, bring your race number as issued previously.

On another important matter, did anyone come across our first aid kit and defibrillator? These were secured in a Newcastle AC bag at the finish line of the Castlewellan race. They are both missing and of potentially immense value when required in an emergency. Any information gratefully received.