

Predictable and impressively decisive – Lynch and Dickson have plenty to spare over their nearest rivals

Hill & Dale Race 7 by Bogusboy

Incredible as it may seem, the seventh race of the 2019 Hill & Dale series took place at Millstone on Thursday 30 May. With only three races left at Loughshannagh, the Meels and Drinahilly left, Thursdays will soon become devoid of entertainment for those addicted to the weekly challenge of climbing as hard as you can and descending as fast as you dare.

Never mind the Buzzards

This week's offering was very much a case of a steep climb and a sharp descent, punctuated by a bit of winding gravel track. Despite few reported sightings of the angry buzzards (sounds like a good name for an indie band!), the race directors were taking no chances and stayed with the traditional route in the interests of health and safety. With many closing in on the 6 races needed to officially claim a series prize, numbers tend to drop a little in the last few races. nevertheless there were 201 brave souls (198 in the main field and 3 under 16 athletes) at the start line as the field was called to order. After a few short announcements from co-director and King and a few scowls from his partner in McVeigh, they were off. Predictably, pre-race favourites Lynch and Scott were the first to show and were closely attended by a few others including Jared Martin of Ballydrain Harriers. Martin has made excellent progress this year and finished a very impressive third, despite his youth and lack of experience. There will certainly be a lot more to come from this young talent in the future and will be one to watch as he matures as a fell runner.



Jared Martin on his way to winning the Junior Race.

He'll be back - we'll be back

As the race unfolded up the steep climb to the summit of Millstone, Lynch exerted his influence more and ended up a comfortable winner in 38;36, almost two minutes ahead of a very gallant runner up, Jonathon Scott of Mourne Runners. Scott has been flying the flag for the Kilkeel club in the absence of William McKee this year. However, my sources have revealed that McKee is very much on the comeback trail and may appear at a race before the end of the season. Reliable information received says he intends to be a major player in 2020 when full fitness has been retained. Darren Herron and I have made similar promises (again!).

Dickson is a class apart

On the theme of predictability, it was very much a case of 'as you are' in the ladies race. Esther Dickon continued her dominance and gave another virtuoso performance in romping home first in 44:36, good enough for 17th place overall. She was followed by the emerging talent that is Aine McCann (47:20 – 26th overall). McCann has recently returned to running and is training hard and racing well. She is another that will win races in 2020 if she maintains her current commitment to improvement. The female podium was completed by the ever-reliable and consistent Sinead Murtagh (48:56 – 42nd overall).

Rivalries restored

One of the unique features of the series is the unique little battles that unfold throughout the field. Runners soon realise who their main adversaries are and irrespective of overall finishing position these become the focus each week. City of Lisburn stalwart Declan Morgan is one who is constantly on the look-out for Blayney Rocket Francis Nugent. Morgan is of the opinion that he needs to get a jump on his opponent on the climb and do all in his power to hold off the traditionally fast finishing Nugent. This week, like most weeks the script wrote itself. Morgan was over the summit ahead of his nemesis, took a poor line of the top and the wily Nugent went more directly to steal vital yards. Nugent triumphed by 24 seconds, but Morgan is determined to restore the balance of power next week. Ruminating at the finish line, he remarked, 'at least I beat Connell again'.

Similarly the rivalry between the Mighty Hen and Pete Grant has been ratcheted up a notch or two in recent weeks. On flatter 'easier' (Grant's words, not mine!) ground, Hen has been dominant and raced into a 3-0 lead. Barcelona supporters will know that such a score line is far from decisive and recently Grant has restored the balance of power to level things up at 3-3. This week, Grant claims to have 'let Hen win' as he was resting up for the race in Kerry on Saturday, citing that there are two races left in which Hen has no chance of beating him. Hen now leads 4-3, but grant believes he has lured him into a false sense of security and will be 5-4 up by the end of the Meels. Only time will tell; watch this space.



You take the high road and I'll take the low road. Maurice Fitzmsurice in mid air, while Clive Coffey makes a more pragmatic route choice!

Junior take 3

This week we had the third and final event for those junior competitors aged 14 and 15. These athletes completed the same course as the main field. Newcastle's latest boy wonder, Tom Crudgington was first home in a rapid 43:48, a time that would be good enough for 10th overall in the main field and ahead of many highly decorated Hill & Dale campaigners. This has earned him a call up to the NIMRA squad. He was followed by Mackenzie Murray of East Down (52:26) and the ever-improving Ciara Savage of Newcastle AC (57:16).



Category winners

There were category victories for Andrew Tees (V35), Colin Pascoe (V40), the ever youthful Deon McNeilly (V55), John 'Hen' Kelly (V50), Alex Brennan (V45), Sinead Murtagh (F35), Gillian Wasson (F40), Stephen Murdock (V60), Alwynne Shannon (F55), Aine McNeill (F50), Amanda Perry (F45), Rebecca (FJ - having just turned 16), Peter McGuckian (V65), Mary Mackin (F60) and Ian Johnston (V70) - well done to all of these Hill and Dale warriors!

Now you see me Miss

As well as the serious business of race reporting, we like to keep our readers informed of the lighter side of the series. This week we pick on (I mean focus on!) Richard Vassey of East Coast AC. Picture 1 shows him arriving straight from work to registration in O'Hare's at 6:20. Minutes later, this highly respectable professional was transformed into a running machine, ready to do battle with Millstone and Buzzards if necessary! Richard finished in 105th place, retired to O'Hare's for some post-race refreshments and went home happy – all in an evening's work. Well done to Rory Mulvenny who managed to get to the finish with the contents of his stomach in his stomach, something he failed to do at Rocky!!! A special mention to the Rostrevor film crew drafted in for the evening consisting of Barry Og McConville and Stevie McNally. Both were determined to get the best action shots possible and, such was Barry's determination, that he sought advice and guidance from Miss Fleming! The result – some fine amateur photography and videos of the runners as they made their last steep descent in Donard Forest.



Before and after!

Thanks

King and McVeigh would like to thank those, too many to mention who helped out before the race, out on the course and at the finish line. Hill and Dale is about team work and each organising team depend on those who volunteer to help out.

and Finally....

Next week is the most challenging and longest race of the series – the Loughshannagh Horseshoe. The Race will be run anti-clockwise with Carn the first of the four peaks to be summited. Run Directors McCrickard and McCann advise runners to take cognisance of the kit requirements and cut off times, both of which are to ensure the health and safety of all participants and marshals. With rain and cloud forecast for race time, it is essential that all come prepared. Kit will be checked at the start of the race and again at the finish. We would also ask that the instructions of the parking marshals are followed and insist that one side of the road is left clear at all times. This is one race where car sharing is strongly advised. After the race we will be making our annual short pilgrimage to see Mary Margaret at the Horseshoe Bar just outside Hilltown. The Race Directors have promised some culinary delights to satisfy the palate of even the most discerning diners!



Dromore AC at Millstone.



Team MAC always enjoy Hill and Dale nights!

