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## Road Running & Cross Country

Surrey Women's CC League, Division One Race 1, Epsom Downs, 7 October 2006.

### Close - but Belles win League opener

Although team managers don't generally like surprises, the ones at Epsom Downs on Saturday weren't just good, they were very good. Having thought the team may be a little low on numbers due to various illnesses and injuries we ended up with a strong squad of eight for the first fixture of the season. Sadly there were no youngsters though, as Megan Evans had been taken ill the night before.

New team member Chrissie Wellington kept her running talent hidden to begin with as she'd never tackled a cross country race before and was doing it to build strength for her triathlon races. Not to worry advised the team manager, it's a 2 lap course, take it easy on the 1st lap and then if you're feeling strong on the 2nd, up the tempo. Hmmm, how foolish did the TM feel when she flew past in 3rd place after the first lap looking very comfortable and then managed to pick off the exceedingly talented Emily Nelson of Epsom & Ewell towards the end of the final lap to finish in 2nd place behind Lucy Hassell. Only afterwards did we discover that she'd recently won the World Triathlon Age Group Champs (for all age groups!). Welcome to the team Chrissie, and we're looking forward to seeing more of you.

But it wasn't a one person team effort, and following close behind in 8th place was the ever-present Sarah Murphy. Despite still suffering with knee problems this was another outstanding run from Sarah and she was closely followed by our youngest team member, Catherine Bryson, just outside the top 10, in 11th spot.

Tilly Heaton showed she was returning to her previous form with a top 20 finish (19th) and Erica Fogg closed in the team in 22nd place, having driven up from Southampton that morning. A quick tally of the other teams showed that the Belles had taken a good lead ahead of Thames and Ranelagh, although when the final results were published it proved to be a lot closer than originally perceived, with Ranelagh only 5 points behind.

Although a complete B team wasn't fielded, Sarah Gailey continued her ongoing improvement over the longer distances, and Helen Smethurst bravely tackled the cross country despite only just recovering from a foot injury to finish a solid 41st. Louise Cooper, more at home over longer distances still, managed to close in for the Belles in 54th place. It's going to be tough to maintain our lead in the league, but with a number of reliably strong team members absent but planning to be around in the next few fixtures, it's possible that we could wrest the title back from Ranelagh again.

1 L Hassell (Thames H&H) 18:14; 2 C Wellington (Belgrave) 19:16; 3 E Nelson (Epsom & E) 19:23; 8 S Murphy 19:42; 11 C Bryson 20:13; 19 M Heaton 20:54; 22 E Fogg 21:04; 39 S Gailey 22:02; 41 H Smethurst W40 22:07; 54 L Cooper 22:45.

Teams: 1 Belgrave H 62; 2 Ranelagh H 67; 3 Thames H&H 78; 4 Stragglers 165; 5 Herne Hill H 166; 6 Wimbledon Windmilers 167; 7 South London H 209; 8 Epsom & E 215; ... 19 Belgrave H 'B' 467; 36 teams.



Junior Galley

Sweatshop Men's Surrey CC League, Division One Race 1, Brockwell Park, 7 October 2006.

### Second place at Brockwell Park

"Looks like we're going to have a picnic," said Rob Harding, when he showed up with his family and saw the cool bags and cake boxes stacked at the foot of the Belgrave flag. Afterwards, maybe, but the race was no picnic as Herne Hill slammed all-comers on their home turf.

Several days of heavy rain had failed to do more than encourage the grass to grow, and on the lush Brockwell Park sward, in brilliant sunshine, around 170 runners charged away from the start. The course had been extended a little to make it a full five miles this year.

John Kimaiyo and Malachi Byansi led up the slope but as soon as the top had been gained it was Jermaine Mays, in South London's colours, in the front – and he stayed there for the next half hour. Dave Anderson chased hard to start with but having just had a cold found himself engulfed in a wave of dizziness that he couldn't shake off – and wisely came out just before the end of the first lap when lying in second place.

"Sharpy" was not to be found in his normal front rank position. He was using the race as a training run and attempting to keep his heart rate below 175 before letting rip in the last 15 minutes. Not far away was Richard Stannard, World Aquathlon Champion from Lausanne a few weeks back and starting a winter of cross country in a quest to get his 5k time down to 14:30 next summer. The Skipper and Mike Trees were also in the vicinity so the scoring position wasn't too bad but it was obvious that Herne Hill were on their way to a win.

Into the second lap then. Stephen Sharp pulled back places but while Malachi and John Kimaiyo held their positions, Richard found himself under attack from Will Cockerell and then Mike Trees, as he faded towards the end of the race. Good to see that Knut Hegvold has shaken off his foot injury – but then a little gap until juniors Alex Bodin (non-scoring) and James Fairbourn came through. James has recently started at

Loughborough University but says he has every intention of getting back for each of the league races.

Soon the leaders were approaching the finish. Stephen was into 4th ... and then 3rd as he overtook McFarlane of Thames but then ran out of race before Herne Hill's Dave Taylor could be reached. Each of the others more or less held their positions with another astonishing performance from Malachi. Completing the ten it was Warren Lynch and - would you believe it - Rob Harding. Apologies to Robert Norville, who ran a good race and went away thinking he'd made the scorers for the first time.

Among the rest of our 21 starters, Peter Cross made a rare and welcome excursion onto the country, Tim Weeks began his climb back to fitness after months of inactivity and our President Dave McMillan celebrated his election to high office with two energetic laps of Brockwell Park.

As is often the case, we've given ourselves a fair old handicap if we have any intentions of winning the league - we were exactly double the winning team's score. But if it was a lackadaisical day for the Bels it was doubly so for Thames who found themselves behind Ranelagh for the first time in many seasons.

In the youngsters' race Joseph Taylor-Holland was our sole representative. We had hoped for more to back him up - but somehow they didn't materialize. He might have been on his own but as last year's individual U13 winner, Joe looks set to make a big impact in the U15s this time around. Unfortunately we have not yet been able to track down his position or time.

1 J Mays (South London) 25:58; 2 D Taylor M40 (Herne Hill) 26:23; 3 S Sharp (Belgrave) 26:37; 14 J Kimaiyo 27:51; 15 M Byansi 27:57; 17 W Cockerell 28:00; 20 M Trees M40 28:09; 21 R Stannard 28:15; 33 K Hegvold M40 29:05; 47 (guest) A Bodin (U20) 29:48; 57 (scoring 52) J Fairbourn U20 30:15; 68 (62) W Lynch 30:32; 89 (77) R Harding M40 31:37; 97 R Norville 31:57; 99 S Zealey (M40) 32:09; 122 T Weeks 33:56; 128 M Taylor (M40) 34:18; 139 P Cross (M50) 35:36; 140 H Corbett (M40) 35:41; 154 L Rehn (M40) 38:07; 157 D McMillan (M50) 40:08; 162 finished; dnf D Anderson; S Baxendale.

1 Herne Hill H 157; 2 Belgrave H 314; 3 Ranelagh H 378; 4 Thames H&H 395; 5 South London H 452; 6 Stragglers 499; 7 Guildford & G 604; 8 Reigate Priory 607; 9 Dulwich R 689.

Under 15. J Taylor-Holland - position and time not yet known.



Pat Mead

Above: Catherine Bryson ran fastest stage for the Belles in the National 4-stage Road Relay

## The Autumn National Road Relays

ERRA Women's 4-Stage Road Relay,  
Sutton Park, 21 October 2006

Things don't get any easier at Sutton Park - the standard of competition seems to rise year on year and there are so many clubs who can turn out an awesome foursome.

For the Belles it was another solid performance and although a place in the top twenty might have been dreamed of, 26th with each of our quartette clocking a time within one minute of one other, was actually a very good effort.

So many of our local rivals don't make the journey up to Sutton Park for this event but simply being there and building on the tradition is important. As our men's team found out in the 70s-90s - if you're not in it you can't win it!

Sarah Murphy's 16:06 turned out to be our second fastest run but with many of the "one star" teams front loading their squads, it was worth 44th of the high on 100 starters.

With 59-second 400m speed, Sarah Gailey has all the potential to become a super middle-distance runner. She moved up two places to hand over to Tilly Heaton. Tilly clocked an identical time to last year but after a summer in the doldrums is looking so much more powerful in her running and improved our position by another ten places.

And then over to Catherine Bryson who overtook a further six teams and so narrowly failed to go sub-16.

1 Birchfield H 59:33; 2 Aldershot F&DAC 59:39; 3 Charnwood AC 1:00:17; 26 Belgrave H 1:05:17; 98 teams started; 78 teams finished.

Belgrave H - S Murphy (44) 16:06; S Gailey (42) 16:57; M Heaton (32) 16:14; C Bryson (26) 16:00.

Fastest: 1 H Clitheroe (Preston) 14:11; 2 J Blizzard (Rotherham) 14:12; 3 C Mutwa (Birchfield) 14:13; 4 H Dean (Hallamshire), J Wilkinson (Bedford & C) 14:18; 6 S Twell (Aldershot F&D) 14:19.

ERRA Men's 6-Stage Road Relay,  
Sutton Park, 21 October 2006

## Five year run comes to an end

To win five times in a row requires more than talent - it requires the continued generosity of Lady Luck - and in 2006, after favouring the Bels for half a decade, she turned her back on us. Losing Mark Miles with a cold was a big blow but this problem was chased by another when we learned that Jonathan Blackledge's return from an end of season break was being delayed by tendonitis. And then with race day looming Richard Ward had to pull out with a muscle problem. All this doesn't just hit the A team of course, it filters down to the Bs as well where, additionally, Mike Trees had picked up a hamstring problem, Hassan Raidi was in Morocco, the Skipper was in Vietnam ... and so it went on through 21 names until it became obvious that we weren't going to be able to complete a B squad.

The Beagles had a top team out but we were pleased with our final line-up, still hoping for medals, and Phil Wicks had a broad grin when he found he was back in the A team.

### Stage 1

There was some talent on parade on stage one. Sharpy looked oh! so fit as he took his place on the start line. As the gun fired and elbows jostled he took station in a leading bunch that remained intact for most of the lap before Birchfield's Burundian John Ndayisenga, 6th behind Milesy's 5th in the Horwich 5k, made a run for it towards the end and broke away. Michael East headed the bunch for the Beagles but there was really nothing in it as Stephen came through in 4th.

1 J Ndayisenga (Birchfield H) 17:21; 2 M East (Newham & EB) 17:25; 3 D Samuels (Morpeth) 17:28; 4 S Sharp (Belgrave) 17:32; 5 K Heywood (Bristol) 17:35; 6 D Pettit (Peterborough) 17:37; ... 45 J Kimaiyo (Belgrave B) 18:44; 77 teams started.

## Stage 2

Paul Freary set off in confident mood and by the foot of the hill drifted into the lead as Birchfield began a 24 place crash, Morpeth dropped away and Newham's talented junior Tom Bilham also came back. Paul was still ahead as they ran along the top but he could hear breathing close behind as Bilham timed it nicely to give the Beagles a one second lead over Altrincham with Lincoln Wellington and Harrow also squeezing past. Just 12 seconds covered the first five.

1 Newham &EB (+1) 35:15; 2 Altrincham (+7) 35:16; 3 Lincoln W (+7) 35:18; 4 Harrow (+20) 35:26; 5 Belgrave (-1) 35:27; 6 Tipton (+5) 35:35; ... 44 Belgrave B (+1) 37:33.

Fastest: A Bowden (Harrow) 17:17; 2 J Mays (Kent) 17:21; 3 A McLean (Team Soton) 17:21; 14 P Freary 17:55; ... 36 M Byansi 18:49.

## Stage 3

Step up Phil Wicks. Originally scheduled for first leg for the Bs, Phil was delighted with the additional excitement of running in the A squad. After weeks of being unable to run because of shin splints, during which he had kept aerobically fit by much swimming and cycling, he was back where he loved to be. There's no doubt that this was a painful run for him as he struggled to suck in oxygen and felt very tired as the lap unwound; but he moved up a place and clocked a time which showed us that there is an extremely low 17 run due to pop out any time he tackles this circuit with a decent background.

Mark Warmby began to pull the chips the way of the Beagles and Jason Ward kept "Alty" in contention but as Lincoln and Harrow's challenge faded, into the frame crept the familiar green and white hooped vest of Tipton, back in contention after a couple of years in the wilderness.

1 Newham &EB (0) 52:30; 2 Altrincham (0) 53:03; 3 Tipton (+3) 53:05; 4 Belgrave (+1) 53:19; 5 Sale (+2) 53:40; 6 Aldershot F&D (+7) 53:52; ... 44 Belgrave B (0) 57:02.

Fastest: 1 M Warmby (Newham &EB) 17:15; 2 D Webb (Leeds C) 17:29; 3 N Burton (Tipton) 17:30; ... 11 P Wicks 17:52; 51 P Willis 19:29.

## Stage 4

Tipped for a good run, eighteen year-old Kris Gauson set out on stage four. Altrincham's bid subsided and very soon Kris was into 3rd but, now running on his own, his pace judgement let him down. Undoubtedly extremely fit, he was hitting the early part of the stage too hard and by the time the takeover had been reached a posse of five men had jumped him - Scaife (Morpeth), Frank Tickner (a scintillating 17:03 for Wells City), Cox (Bristol), North (Sale) and Robinson (AFD). Newham and Tipton seemed to be comfortably in charge of gold and silver while the Bels - and four other teams - were within ten seconds of bronze.

1 Newham &EB (0) 1:10:01; 2 Tipton (+1) 1:10:55; 3 Morpeth (+4) 1:11:49; 4 Wells C (+12) 1:11:51; 5 Bristol &W (+3) 1:11:52; 6 Sale (-1) 1:11:54; ... 8 Belgrave (-4) 1:11:59; 46 Belgrave B (-2) 1:16:56.

Fastest: 1 F Tickner (Wells C) 17:03; 2 M Geele (Newham &EB) 17:31; 3 D Deed (Bedford &C) 17:39; ... 19 K Gauson 18:40; 50 M Humphrey 19:54.

## Stage 5

Nicholls (Tipton) and Vernon (Aldershot) put in the two fastest runs of stage five as the autumnal Sutton Park squalls began bending the trees and showering spectators and racers alike. But third fastest on the road was Simon Jones, reeling in Sale, Morpeth and Wells City, and clocking a time only seven seconds slower than Sharp on stage one. Quiet in manner and steady in pace Simon's steely determination is proving a real asset to the Belgrave team.

1 Newham &EB (0) 1:27:44; 2 Tipton (0) 1:28:16; 3 Aldershot F&D (+4) 1:29:20; 4 Bristol &W (+1) 1:29:32; 5 Belgrave (+3) 1:29:38; 6 Morpeth (-3) 1:30:08.

Fastest: 1 P Nicholls (Tipton) 17:21; 2 A Vernon (Aldershot F&D) 17:24; 3 S Jones (Belgrave) 17:39.

## Stage 6

With Mo Farah lined up for the last lap, the voyage of the Beagles was all but complete. Tipton too seemed safe in second - but what could our Davey do in the way of salvaging a set of bronze medals. He had an eighteen second gap to make up on Aldershot - it seemed possible - but Bristol's last man, setting out six seconds ahead of him, was one Rob Whalley - in good shape and looking to impress the selectors in the hope of gaining a British Ekiden Relay team slot.

With a way to go to reach top form, David did indeed pull back AFD but Whalley was too big an ask on this occasion. It was good running from our Vice-Skipper but with luck his best form will be seen in that period the other side of Christmas when National Cross and 12-Stage Relays enter our minds.

It was good to view Tipton back near the top and also to see local rivals Herne Hill make the journey to Sutton Park. Commiserations to Wells City who lost Adrian Marriott (rumoured to have been hospitalised the day before) and Notts AC whose first leg runner was injured just as the runners were beginning to line up.

Result:

1 Newham &EB (0) 1:44:46; 2 Tipton H (0) 1:46:24; 3 Bristol &W (+1) 1:47:01; 4 Belgrave H (+1) 1:47:29; 5 Morpeth H&AC (+1) 1:47:58; 6 Aldershot F&DAC (-3) 1:48:03; 73 teams finished.

Fastest: 1 M Farah (Newham &EB) 17:02; 2 R Whalley (Bristol &W) 17:29; 3 D Bilton (LeedsC) 17:45; ... 5 D Anderson 17:51.

Fastest overall:

1 M Farah (Newham &EB) 17:02; 2 F Tickner (Wells C) 17:03; 3 M Warmby (Newham &EB) 17:15; 4 A Bowden (Harrow AC) 17:17; 5= A MacLean (Team Soton), J Mays (Kent AC), P Nicholls (Tipton), J Ndayisenga (Birchfield H) 17:21; 9 A Vernon (Aldershot F&DAC) 17:24; 10 M East (Newham &EB) 17:25.

## *Skipper's Corner*

*We bring you an edited and slightly abbreviated version of Skip's occasional diary entries.*

### **Young guns have gained maturity**

September 11. Welcome to the third series of Skipper's Corner and another tempestuous eight-month romp that'll take us right through to D-day, April 7th, 2007, and our attempt to regain the National 12-stage Road Relay title, which is currently on loan (deservedly) to the Beagles of Newham and Essex. My last dispatch spoke of one of the most dramatic – and painful – days in our history as we let go of a title we were confident of retaining. The summer has been a period of convalescence as our young guns have gained maturity and confidence, while some of our more experienced folk have shown welcome signs of a return to the limelight. Oh, and we won back the title that is so dear to us: the British Athletics League for Track and Field. Congratulations to all involved. So in short we enter into *Mission-120* [this is the 120th winter of our existence], in fine fettle: let it roll!

I had a lively summer of releasing my book, commentating on the World Series of Backgammon for *Eurosport*, getting hitched, and honeymooning. My book sales are ticking along quite nicely and my humble thanks to all who have been kind enough to purchase a copy. Before I turn my attention to domination of world sales, I should like to offer a discount for anyone who would like an inscribed copy of "The 50 Greatest Marathon Races of all Time," of £15 incl. post and package.

### **A day at the races**

I thought the Surrey Road Relay gave us a terrific day although I was a little distracted with inheriting some team manager duties. Let me tell you, this role is tough! While Alan was ankle-deep in manure in the results hut, I was doing my best to foul things up on the outside. Quite how the poor C-team managed to crash, burn and disappear without trace

remains a mystery to many, and I apologise to Tom Fordyce for his haywire day. The lad took it all in good grace.

Wonderful to see DA back with a bang, to somewhat erase the grisly image of his wrecked body limping round Sutton Park in April. And after a near four-year hiatus since his cracking 4th place in the Surrey League at Putney Vale, Pdraic shows he's still a man with all the moves. But of most importance is that *Mission-120's* trophy count is up and running with immediate effect. What will be our final tally? Seven titles remains the benchmark for "Dreamland"... Who will add to their man-of-the-match awards? Who will join them? Here's a reminder of the 22 winners from the last 32 races:

4 wins: Phil Wicks  
3 wins: Jon Blackledge, Lee Greatorex  
2 wins: Mark Miles, David Anderson, Tim Watson, Tom Ellacott  
1 win: Tom Hadfield, Karl O'Connell, Will Cockerell, Paul Freary, Pete Willis, Knut Hegvold, Stephen Sharp, Mal Byansi, Mike Trees, Hassan Raidi, Alaster Stewart, John Charles, Harry Corbett, Erwin McRae, Warren Lynch.

(First man to join them for this season: Pdraic Buckley, by a whisker over Bodin and Fallenius.)

### A jaw-dropper of a team from Newham

September 28. Hmmm, well that's shut me up... nothing like a really savage caning to make good ol' Skipper's Corner go quiet for a few days. But, as in a column here of similar theme from last April, there's much reason for cheer in the wake of Rushmoor Arena's Southern 6-Stage parade from the Beagles. First up, the race was primarily a celebration of the quality that exists in South of England running. As a post on *LetsRun.com* said, 'the Northern six-stage made the Southern look like a Golden League meet'. And wasn't that a jaw-dropper of a team from Newham ... surely the best for a generation, and a testament to the dedication and 'pulling power' of the indefatigable Bob Smith.

We battled very hard on Saturday and fighting spirit remains strong in our team. What I kept asking myself on the day was: "How did we ever win this race?" The quality was so high, the runners appeared so hungry. I think the sentimental value of the four golds we won between 2002-05 should skyrocket after this ... not such an easy race to win after all, lest anyone think that it was. A mark of all strong teams in any sporting field is how they react to adversity. After the Ashes last summer for instance, the stung Aussies were so angry they won 12 of their next 13 Tests, often at a canter. How will we react to adversity? It'll be fascinating to see.

'Relic Wardy' is my man-of-the-match winner by a whisker from Jonesy and Paul's great turn. Rich was very brave to go with the fierce pace over lap one, and even braver not to blow-up over lap two. He deservedly adds his name to the man-of-the-match honours board ... the 24th entry of an elite gathering of stars!

So the Cross-country season is here again and with it the Surrey Cross Country League. For those of you less familiar with this series, it is quite simply a unique and delightful sporting occasion; full of atmosphere, tradition, super runners, and great surroundings. The four courses for this winter's extravaganza are all classic venues. Which course is the greatest? It's an interesting question. Here, I rank the four courses, by giving them marks for four different criteria:

*Aesthetics*: how picturesque and attractive is the course.

*Interest*: how historic, quirky, varied is the course.

*Undulation*: cross-country courses should be nice and hilly ...

*Difficulty factor*: judging the mud, the length, steepness of hills etc.

Brockwell Park: Aesthetics: 7, Interest: 7, Undulation: 7.5, Difficulty factor: 6. Total 68.75%

Coulsdon: Aesthetics: 8, Interest: 8, Undulation: 7.5, Difficulty factor: 7.5. Total 77.5%

Wimbledon: Aesthetics: 7.5, Interest: 8.5, Undulation: 6, Difficulty factor: 6. Total 70%

Richmond Park: Aesthetics: 9, Interest: 9, Undulation: 8, Difficulty factor: 8. Total 85%

### Cockers on "Brockers"

October 9. I have Brockwell Park a little bit in my heart. It was the scene of my first ever race in a Belgrave team on 17 October 1998, and 153 Belgrave races later I hope that I'm just getting warmed up ... but I am more wary than ever as to the fragility of our great sport. How many of our scoring ten from '98 were out for us at the weekend? The likes of Hurst, Estall, Foley, Gilby, Quinn, Carstairs, Armanini, Webb and Galley for the most part belong to a Belgrave story of another era ... although Master Quinn still runs to an excellent level elsewhere, Webbo was spotted in our colours in the fairly recent past, and Junior, out on the course cheerleading on Saturday, is a valued committee member, and reports he is coming through his latest injury.

If we continue down the list of runners from 1998 (Mather, Minett, Harding, Bale, and Mann) one name leaps out like an ecstatic salmon from the water, having avoided a fisherman's hook. And it is of course Rob Harding. Rob was a stalwart figure of our team in the 1990s (placing second in the cross-country plate 1998-9). The question is how far has he tumbled down the leader board ten years on, now that he is deep into M40 territory. Pah - not a bit of it! 1996: 120th; 2006: 89th, scoring at 77th. Inspiration to us all, and a clear winner of the man-of-the-match.

Two names from Hounslow stand out like beacons from the Oct '98 race. The late, great Sam Haughian won it, and a youngster called M. Farah won the under 17s, who still does some occasional running, last time I checked. DA's problems neatly show what a great leveller running is. In 2004 he turned up at 'Brockers', and in golfing parlance, tore the course to shreds and shot a 63. Indeed his time of 22:22 that day really was a bit special. Upon reflection, although his race this time was ruined by a cold and cost us over 70 points, it could well go down as one of the 'best-timed colds' in Belgrave history with another race in 12 days starting to loom large.

### Sutton Park ... a day of celebration

Whatever happens on 21st October at Sutton Park, it should be a day of celebration. What we have achieved there with five wins in a row at the National 6-stage is magnificent, and perhaps we can now finally savour our wonderful wins all the more, now that we go into the race as underdogs. Our team for this year is looking very poor - full of overweight, aging, past-it, winos and flunkies. They haven't got a prayer and will do well to finish in the top-40 ... but frankly I fear even that is beyond them.

However, on the happier subject of yesteryear, I shall kick off the celebrations by paying homage to the 18 men who got us those 5 magical wins. Here are the appearances for the club since 1999. Would the following please take a bow:

#### Number of appearances

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 7 | <i>The One...the only...</i> Spencer Barden  |
| 5 | Stephen Sharp  |
| 4 | Paul Freary, Mark Miles  |
| 3 | David Anderson, Alaster Stewart, Lee Hurst   |
| 2 | Jason Lobo, Kassa Tadesse  |
| 1 | Paul Evans, Jonathan Blackledge, Yacin Yusuf, Phil Wicks, Richard Ward, Martin Dent, Kevin Nash, Charles Herrington, Allen Graffin |

And here are Belgrave's losing - and winning - margins for the past seven years, and the man-of-the-match winners:

| Winning/losing margins     | Man of the match |
|----------------------------|------------------|
| 1999 - lost by 111 seconds | Paul Evans       |
| 2000 - lost by 202 seconds | Spencer Barden   |

|      |                      |                |
|------|----------------------|----------------|
| 2001 | - won by 4 seconds   | Al Stewart     |
| 2002 | - won by 120 seconds | Spencer Barden |
| 2003 | - won by 59 seconds  | Paul Freary    |
| 2004 | - won by 80 seconds  | Mark Miles     |
| 2005 | - won by 78 seconds  | Paul Freary    |

I shall tune into the BBC World Service from Hanoi, Vietnam (visiting the wife) for coverage of the race, and to check up on my top-40 prediction. In the meantime, good luck to the creaking blobs! (Perhaps consider easing up on the kebabs, big macs and lager.)

### Psychic Paul reads the game real good

October 27. Warmest regards to you all from the 4th country that 'Skip Corn' has reported from: England, Germany, France and now Vietnam where Dorchie is on a 6-week secondment with the Department for International Development. I shall provide a short travelogue to this fascinating country in a moment, but first a couple of quick observations about last weekend.

In Biblical terms it has been seven years of harvest since the fine six-stage squad from 1999 also placed fourth. (They were Freary, Hurst, Lobo, Evans, Miles and Barden). Paul Freary spoke to the media at length after that race. Here are some highlights of what he had to say:

*"We are a little disappointed ... we felt that we might have run a little quicker ... but there is tremendous potential in this squad ... so come on guys, let's get back out there ... the medals are waiting!"*

Paul is either psychic or else he just 'reads' the game real good, because his prediction of medals has had a ring of truth to it. The podium has escaped us this time at Sutton Park though, but it puts the spotlight even more on the CC relays at Mansfield on November 4th. Bring it on!

### Hanoi ... in a hurry

I flew out to Vietnam's capital, Hanoi, to visit Dorchie last week. The flight to the stopover in Bangkok is an 11-hour grind, made worse for me by the sumo wrestler in the next seat, who took up a third of my seat as well. Pinned in like this, as a naturally jumpy character anyway, led me to go stir-fry crazy half-way through the flight and I decided to repeat the track work-out I'd done the day before ... 24 by 400 metres. I was onto lap 15 of the plane, having just pinged an immaculate split of 66 seconds, when I was frog-marched back to my seat by a stewardess who explained some of the passengers were becoming anxious – and dizzy – at my athletic feats.

Here are some brief observations on Hanoi: it is a very bustling, exciting, hot, humid, manic city *in a hurry*. The traffic situation is incredible – everything moving all the time – in all directions. Traffic lights purely there for decoration. Scooters outnumber cars ten to one. Crossing the roads is a lottery not for the fainthearted. Two rules, never look at the half-dozen scooters driving straight at you (that way you'll be accepting 50% responsibility when they crash in to you), and never break your stride. If you just keep moving at a steady pace the vehicles will predict your movement and swerve around you. Falter and you'll be squashed. I have seen three juicy collisions so far.

Our plush apartment building overlooks the old prison where 550 American POWs were held during the war. We had a look around it and saw the flying suit which US State Senator and presidential candidate John McCain was shot down in. He spent six years at the prison from 1967-73.

I have secured myself gainful employment by becoming a restaurant reviewer for a local tourist magazine called Pathfinder. My first report was chatty, full of statistics and breathtakingly ignorant. I also teach English for two-three

hours a day to some of the Vietnamese workers in Dorch's office.

The currency here is the Dong ... one of which ain't gonna buy you very much (regardless that everything here is around seven times cheaper than in England). I asked how much the bill was last night at dinner, and the friend we were with replied, "one million, four hundred and fifty four thousand, five hundred and fifty Dong." (It came to under a fiver each, and that was a flash restaurant.)

### Getting some training ... with a tough geezer.

I am getting some training done despite the 90 degree heat and higher humidity. Dorch's boss (Phil) happens to be a Swansea Harrier from their glory days of the mid-1980s. He may be 54 now, but is still a real tough geezer with 35 marathons under his belt and 6 ultras. On Sunday we went on a two hour run which included a trek through the marshy swampland of the Red river. I was knee-deep in slime, but he's one of those annoying runners who is able to just run over the top of mud and not sink straight into it. We ran through ghettos, along highways, through maize fields and along roads that were in the process of construction – no rest for the poor on a Sunday.

At one stage we came to wrought-iron gates of a posh housing estate. "We come through!" exclaimed Phil to the security guards. They shook their heads. "Ok – we go through hole in fence!" Phil said ... taking me to a gap in the railings. As we squeezed through and trampled over a flower bed, Phil nodded in the direction of the guards, who were caressing the butts of their revolvers, and said, "I do hate it when people are silly like that." I awaited the sound of gunfire but none came.

By the end of the run, I was a soaking, stinking wreck – two hours is the longest I've run since the Frankfurt Marathon two years ago, but it does perhaps spell the return for me to the marathon. My career has so far consisted of 14 marathons in 10 years (my debut came on April 18, 1994), with a couple of pearls, a couple of solid runs, and ten woeful botch jobs ... Here's to the next ten years – I can hardly wait.

See you all at Coulsdon on November 11th. I have a wedding that day, which also starts at 3pm, but as if that's gonna stop me. If I turn up to the reception and coo to the bride, "I so enjoyed myself during the service," I won't be lying, will I?

*Skip*

## Results Roundup

### Road & Country

#### October 2006

- 14 **NCAA Pre-National Meet 8 kmCC, Indiana USA.** Men. 9 S Overall (Butler/Blackheath) 23:53; 100 D Gauson 24:54.
- 27 **Serpentine Last Friday 5 km, Hyde Park.** Men. 1 J Shane (Basildon) 15:59; 31 T O'Neill M50 18:27; 58 L Rehn M40 19:49. Women. 1 H Wilson (West 4H) 17:58; 4 H Smethurst W40 19:00.
- 28 **Bushy Park Time Trial.** Men. 1 R Stannard 16:07. Women. 1 R Disley (Thames H&H) 19:13; 6 S Gailey 20:48; 34 J Moore W45 26:06.
- 28 **Scottish CC Relays, Cumbernauld.** Men's 4 km. Fastest: 1 M Pollard (Inverclyde) 13:17; 6 K Gauson U20 13:38. Women's 4 km. Fastest: 1 F Murray (Edinburgh S) 15:12; 12 C Bertram 17:49.
- 28 **Butler Horizon League CC 8 km, Indianapolis USA.** Men. 1 S Overall (Butler/Blackheath) 24:53.7; 4 D Gauson 25:36.9.
- 28 **DODS European Schools CC Champs, Schwetzingen, Germany.** Men's 5 km. 1 G Billington 15:48.97.
- 29 **Rainforest Foundation Taut 10 km, Regents Park.** Men. 1 M Byansi; 32:08 2 J Kimaiyo (time not yet known).
- 29 **Ronhill Surrey Classic 10 km, Nonsuch Park.** Men. 1 W Clark (Epsom & E) 32:51; 9 M Webb 35:52; 224 D Davies M65 53:08.
- 29 **National Trust Snowdonia Marathon.** Women. 3 L Cooper 3:16:09.
- 29 **Noosa 5 km, New South Wales, Australia.** Men. 1 M Dent 14:10.