

Crossroads Classics

Charlotte Coliseum Criterium

Masters 45+

Some semblance of sanity returned to the racing for a few of us Saturday morning as the good folks with Charlotte Sports Cycling separated the 35+ and 45+ racers. The racing was only really hard like always instead of the crazy hard we been doing the past two nights. I was the only GVC'er as about forty of us lined up to start this fast course which uses part parking lot and the main entrance drag of the Charlotte Coliseum. The "L" shaped course features one significant hill but it isn't steep enough to really make the race -- it only softens up the weaker riders. There are no technical corners but there is an exciting sweeping left hander at the bottom of the long downhill run from near the Coliseum's entrance doors and lower parking lot off Tyvola Road. We were carrying speed well in excess of 40 mph through this turn most laps. Fun!

As we waited for the man to say go I took time to look over the field. Most of the usual names were there (Baxter, Hinson, Shields, McCloud, Williams, Lyons, Leousis, etc...etc) as well as several new faces. New faces have been a consistent theme during this Crossroads racing. It's a testament to the success of this event and has made the racing harder and interesting. I couldn't help but notice two big men wearing pinkish kits. I'm terrible for not taking note of team names so forgive me for being unable to share that information. These guys were easily 220 pounds and each looked like they could do their share of pulling the farm plow for a few hours to give the mule a break.

Once the race started I noted that one of these two men were always near the point and covering moves. They were sharing that duty like good teammates do. The racing was fast and characterized by attacks followed by counter attacks (surprised!). I managed to stay very near the front of all this and was able to make each of the moves that seemed to me worth going with. I was pleased to find that the hill was giving me no problems as we scorched up it at 25mph most laps. Nothing ever stuck until Barney Baxter hit it especially hard in the straight just before the hill. Only one other rider (unknown to me) was able to match Barney's trademark acceleration. The pair held their lead going up the hill and then Barney ripped it going down the other side. He would continue this approach of holding the lead along the flat sections of the course and then building on it going downhill for several laps until it appeared to many of us that we were now racing for third.

But, the pack went to work and the racing over the next several laps was intense. Kent Williams (ABRC) showed he didn't show up to let Barney win another one taking several long hard pulls. So too did those plow boys and Perry McCloud (Smith Barney), and men from Bike Source and Chick Fillet. I got involved with the chasing too taking pulls near the top of the hill. We brought them two men back and the race was close enough to the end that the task of getting position for a good finish began.

Positioning for a good finish is a difficult thing to manage in these affairs. Being good at it takes a lot of skill, nerve, and effort. The guys that win these things are amazing to watch. They make it look easy. It's not my strength and it isn't easy. I felt strong enough though to make a go of it. I was determined not to lose positions. With three to go I was sitting about fifth wheel as we came through the start/finish line and stormed towards the first left hander. The road goes from very wide here to very narrow and the pack swarmed as every rider wanted to be among the first to hit that turn. I found my brakes like I always do in these situations and gave up about fifteen places. I began moving up to undo my mistake. As we came around for the bell lap the pack again swarmed through the start/finish. One of the plow boys (if you know who these guys are, please don't share this analogy. I don't mean it to be derogatory and either of these guys could squash me like a possum caught moving too slow across the highway) swung right and I stuck his wheel. I was feeling pretty proud of myself as we headed down the straight before the uphill. I was in

great position. About then Barney Baxter came accelerating hard around the right side of the pack being matched by Randy Shields on the left. Amazingly we all made it through the right hander safely at warp speed. When we started up that hill Randy attacked hard and the guys who could match it began the surge to stay in contention. Suddenly plow boy couldn't go and I found myself stuck behind this behemoth unable to get out -- doomed. The juggernaut had failed me. I'd guess I went from about seventh to seventeenth in one seconds time before I got clear and started the nearly impossible task of moving up again. Once you start down that long hill before the sweeping left hander and the finish line your place is pretty well sealed. I came across the line fifteenth thinking coulda-shoulda. Ronnie Hinson came away with his first win of the season.

I'm looking forward to today's race in Concord. Once that one is in the bag it's time for a big cone of Cabarrus Creamery ice cream and some much needed rest before the build up for the Carolina Cup.

Let me add to all this too that many, many, people approached me Saturday to inquire about Matt's injuries and well being. It made me feel both proud that our fallen teammate is cared for by so many of our peers and saddened to know he will be missed once again this year to finish up a what has been a super strong showing this season.