

The Masters Team  
Cycles DeOro/GVC/The Printery  
Greenville Training Series  
Day three (first day second weekend)

If you've followed our account thus far you'll know we came to this race with the lead in the three week series. Mark Griffin was leading and Matt Mason was sitting fifth. We felt good about our chances on this difficult road course, which deserves description. The Falls River road race is certainly one of the most demanding courses we face during the season (ironic in that these are meant to be training races). It loops around a mountain for about seven miles and the finish line sits right on top of the most challenging feature -- a 3/4 mile long hill. It's not the worlds toughest climb, but gets your attention at around 9% grade. About 3/4 of the way up a nice little stair step slaps you at about 12%. It's presents enough grade change to be significant, especially so far up and with so much ground yet to cover before the top/finish line.

We were forced to re-evaluate our strategy when the one man juggernaut Big-Wheel-Shore was unable to make the race. Blair Palmer was suffering with a head cold that had made its way deep into his lungs. Both men had huge roles in our success during weekend one. Clearly we were in for a challenge without a 100% effort from them both. We also noted a big show of presence from Smith Barney. They had been largely shut out of the points during the first weekend of racing and there is no way Smith Barney will be in such a position for long.

The race started at the base of that long hill (how nice) and was meant to be ridden up the first time neutral. Smith Barney fairly well ignored that directive and rode a strong tempo. They immediately launched a rider over the top and the race was on before anyone could get their breath. A small group of riders, each without points, would form up the road during the lap.

Our strategy was to ride more conservatively than we had the previous weekend. We would try to throw punches only when they'd really count. We'd allow riders up the road who didn't have points and hope other teams would chase. Hopefully things would stay more or less together until we headed up that hill for the last time. Both Matt and Mark had proven ability to finish strong on this course. We split our team into two groups -- one riding near the front protecting Matt and the rest further back with Mark.

The pace up the hill the second time was blistering. A small gap had opened to several riders late in the lap. When we caught them near the top of the hill another Smith Barney rider (Pat Raines) jumped the field. By the time we came back to the hill for the third time, three riders (two Smith Barney and one Bianchi) had solidified a one minute gap over the pack. Despite two more laps of hard racing this would remain the situation until the last lap when attacks became so numerous we would lose track of the numbers. Indeed, our inability to keep tab of the riders slipping away and lack of communication would prove costly. While we remained close to the front of the race we each had a different perception of exactly what was taking place.

With about two miles left to race I thought five riders had managed to get clear. I correctly believed none of them had points. When Mac Cannon (Bianchi) launched I felt we had to react (he did have points and, well, he's Mac Cannon). I took a hard pull on the front expecting to drag the field along. To my surprise, it didn't work. Most riders at this point in the race are completely focused on that last trip up the hill. Fortunately Kent Williams (Asheville Bicycle Racing Club) also saw opportunity slipping away and followed my effort with an even longer, stronger pull. He drove the pace half way up the hill and sealed Mac's fate. When Kent blew, I gave a last hard effort and popped just short of the stair step. Matt would lose out only to Radisha Cubric in the sprint to the line. This accomplishment deserves a much better finish than was the case. We had misjudged. Two more riders had escaped and Matt's tremendous finish would earn him only 9th for the day. He and other teammates thought the finish was good for fifth.

Unknown to us up front, Mark, Blair, and Richard had their own epic for the day. It was not a

good one. Mark suffered a bad nose bleed early in the race. He was also struggling with the hill. On top of that he had a mechaical problem with a cleat. He sent Richard Melencio out of the race back to his car for a spare shoe. Richard and Blair would bury themselves in an effort to pace Mark back into the race. All for naught as Mark found himself unable to compete up the hill on the last lap.

That's racing! Stay tuned for more.

David