

Cycles de Oro/The Printery
Masters Cycling Team
Greenville Training Series Day 5, March 12, 2005

One We'll Remember For A While

Returning to the Donaldson Center (scene of the first weekend's races), the biggest deal was the wind. We had hoped weather.com was wrong. No such luck: the forecast for sustained 24 mph winds was correct. The Donaldson Center is windy on a calm day. Windy days racing bikes there are really ugly. But there we were: Mark Griffin, Blair Palmer (racing sick again), Rodney Simpson, Michael Satterfield, Gary Moore, Dave Petree and me.

We hit adversity, however, before the weather even came into play. To put the problem in context, you probably should read the write-up for last Saturday (day three) if you haven't already. Specifically, the part about Mark's cleat coming lose and his sending Richard Melencio out of the race to Mark's car to retrieve a replacment shoe then wearing out Richard and Blair to pace him back to the field. Well, Mark made sure he had no loose cleats this time by leaving his shoes in Greensboro. It's a good thing we're writing this stuff up as we go, because otherwise no one would believe it. This time it was Michael who would fall on his sword, giving Mark his shoes and having to sit out the race. Somebody needed to give Mark a shoe alright, I just would have placed it somewhere other than on his foot.

Our solid group, now minus Michael, had a rough assignment. We entered the day with Mark tied for 1st in the series with Radisa Cubric. Our job was to defend the lead. If our group was solid, Smith Barney again showed up with a dream team. As for Cubric, we've talked about him some in previous reports. The only thing I'll add is that riding my trainer while watching race videos in the weeks leading up to these races, Phil Liggett seemed well-acquainted with him as he commentated on the 1996 Tour du Pont. Seeing the guy smoke Marcel Wust, Franco Columbo and the other sprinters at the finish at Four Seasons Mall told me pretty what I need to know about where I stand with respect to this guy. Better keep practicing on the trainer. Anyway, on to the race.

The first significant move helped us out. It contained three guys, none a threat to the overall. We could just bide our time and save our strength for later. Right but wrong. This race was so darned hard that if you were still in it, you were not saving any strength. By somewhere on the 4th of 6 laps (7miles each), the field caught the break. By this time, we were down to Mark, Dave and me. The race had started out with maybe 75 racers. The "field" had maybe 30 left by the end of the race. It was brutally hard. Especially if you were a little guy.

By the 5th lap, another three-man move had gone up the road, but again it was not a threat to us. However, this race of attrition had taken such a toll, that we were close to defenseless. Dave was able to impose himself in support of Mark, but only slightly. I was holding on, nothing more. As much as we knew it was coming, we had no legs to respond to Smith Barney's ace for the day, Pat Raines, when he attacked. Dave and I joked afterwards that we were boxed in. We were, but it was irrelevant. Fortunately, and pulling off the coup of the weekend, Mark was on it. Not only that, he was playing offense. (How?) Mark's pre-race strategy was to get in a move that Cubric missed. The tactic was good, but I gave executing it little chance of success. But there was Mark, rolling away, with Cubric stuck in the field. Mark put his head down, and with Raines in tow, and another Smith Barney rider who made the move, caught the threesome already up the road.

With those six having joined forces and the field (what was left of it) in survival mode, it was over for Cubric. He ended up disqualified for center line violations in a vain attempt to respond to the move. Too little, too late, even if the officials had not stepped in.

Up the road, Mark committed everything to the break, to distance himself from Cubric. He finished 3rd to the two Smith Barney racers. Clearly, though, Mark was the big winner for the day, taking a sizeable lead in his bid to win the series. Playing for what was left, Dave was spent and I was cramping by the final lap. With the field racing for 9th, I turned nothing into something and managed 12th, aided by Dave (thanks, as ever) on the run in to the finish. Although Michael's shoes were in the race, he was not and we missed his presence especially in the closing stages.

At the end, we were all bone tired, but we had -- thanks to Mark's execution if not his packing -- taken a big step towards winning the overall. One race left. Cross your fingers one more time. It seems to be working!

Matt Mason