

Dave Petree and I headed to Waid Park near Rocky Mount, Virginia on Sunday for the Commonwealth Games Road Race.

We raced the 40+ division, which raced together with the 30+ and 50+ divisions. The field was about 45 riders. We didn't recognize many of them, but the ones we recognized were strong: Keith Johnson, Roger Friend, Bernie Sanders (wearing a national champion's jersey), and Patrick Brittain. The race consisted of 5 laps of a 10+ mile course, that was more up and down than we're used to, beautiful, and lightly traveled. We figured that it would be good preparation for French Broad next weekend. Going in, we both permitted ourselves the luxury of just riding in the field. The winning break went on only the second lap, making us even more pleased that we had not ridden more aggressively and been rewarded with the opportunity to tour Franklin County chained to the bumper of Friend, Sanders, Brittain and the two others in the break.

Shortly after the break went, I drifted to the back of the field to find that most of it was gone. By the end of the second lap, the race had a 5-man break, and maybe twenty left in the field. The course was taking its toll. Dave and I were managing fairly comfortably. On the final lap, we decided that we'd play the finish with Dave on my wheel. I'd race the finish trying to win the sprint and, either way, hopefully give Dave a strong tow. The finish has a high-speed left turn at the bottom of a fast downhill, immediately onto a stiff uphill which eventually eases and then crests out shortly before the line. Even so, the hill defines the finish. From the turn to the finish line is about 1/4 mile.

On the run in, three men jumped ahead of the field a mile or two out and had a tenuous gap at the turn. Playing it patiently to this point, this meant that head to tail the field was strung out coming through the turn and the head of the field had significant ground on the tail. My initial assessment that the sprint would not go from the bottom was wrong. We had too much ground to make up to stay patient any longer. Unfortunately, Dave violated Mario Cipolini's first rule of finishing -- never brake -- and lost my wheel in the turn. Not knowing this, I plowed on up the hill passing people and feeling pretty good about the leadout job I was doing. Drawing up to the leaders, one rider appeared the strongest challenge. I elected to go ahead and gamble everything then, rather than risk a cat and mouse game to the line. Good choice. Finally daring to look back nearing the line, no one was there. That was good for 6th overall (not sure where in the 40+) and Dave came through for 15th overall (not sure where in the 40+). Roger Friend won the race.

Hopefully, riding solidly but not over the top at the Commonwealth Games will sharpen us for this-coming weekend, as French Broad is a big objective for Dave and one in which the team hopes to perform at its best. We'll see

soon enough.

Matt