

With the work week breathing down my neck, this'll be quick, but ...

Yesterday, Michael Satterfield, Lonnie Brooks and myself raced the Meadowmont Criterium in Chapel Hill. From what I hear, that means we improved our chances of staying upright in comparison to the Tour de Guilford. Ouch. Who'd a thunk it?

Anyway, if Michael hadn't pre-registered for Meadowmont and had it not been my turn to drive, I'd have been whining to stay in Greensboro, not race, and ride the Tour de Guilford. But things worked out. The venue for Meadowmont is just neat. The course is through an attractive development of commercial (only adjacent to the start/finish) and residential (most of the course) area just east of Chapel Hill. Residents, often with their children, dotted the neighborhood sidewalks taking in the novelty of a bike race through their streets. The course was intimidating at first blush, punctuated by two kneebreaking hills. The loop took just over two minutes to complete and you were seemingly always flying down the 70% of the course that was losing elevation or cranking up the 30% of the course where you gained it all back.

Our 35+ field once again had firepower. Dave LeDuc, recovering from a bad crash, was still Dave LeDuc. Rick Creed seems to be winning every race. Charlie Brown seems to be on par with these guys (and would show that to be so again today). Charlie Storm and his Back To Dirt team (with our former teammate -- man I hate we lost him -- Peter Hymas) made their 35+ debut and rode actively.

On seeing the course and the competition, we adopted the a pre-race strategy. Since I'm sure you won't reveal it to our rivals, I'll share it. It was, "do your best." Not that we had a whole lot of power to choose, but it proved a pretty good approach. Lonnie lost contact part way through and couldn't regain it -- you couldn't on this course. Michael rode the hills very well and to my surprise I was having a decent day too. So we basically managed the course and the flow of the race until the final few laps. At 4 laps to go, we had a very spirited lap in which the LeDuc, Creed, Storm, Brown group hit it hard and forced small selections several times. I sucked it up and it hurt but made these moves. None stuck. And I was reeling from the effort. Michael had wisely remained near the front of the field. With 3 to go, the field had refused to allow any of those attacks to gain a real gap and it was together. A well-timed 3-up move not containing any of the heavyweight favorites then went, did not draw an immediate chase, and would hold on, just barely, to take the first three places. Just inside one to go, Michael and I linked up. The pace for the last mostly uphill half mile of the course was all out. Michael gave me a big lift trying to peg back LeDuc, Creed, Brown and one other, with me in tow. Although you won't reel those guys back once they open it up, the effort put us on next on their heels for 9th and 10th. The race paid 10 deep and our winnings, while small, made it

feel like our indulgence at the coffee shop near the finish line was free.

If you want to do a bike race or see a bike race, this is a good one. How many races do you do that have an excellent coffee shop just down from the finish line? As Armstrong's retirement shows, it's not actually ALL about the bike and you don't have to be a bike racer to appreciate this event, although if you're a bike racer you probably will.

Matt Mason