

The WMRA International Youth Mountain Running Challenge

Ostheim vor der Rhoe/Hausen, Germany

Sat. 27^h June 2009

Junior Men (92/93)

5th Billy Pinder, Skipton, ,
12th Jonathan Bradshaw, Wharfedale,
17th James Ellis, Warrington
23rd Ashley Kay, Rossendale 3rd team

Junior Women (92/93)

4th Rachel Robinson, Scunthorpe
6th Rachel Jefferson, Warrington



Our journey began early, very early for some, at 5am in Manchester airport on Friday 26th June. After waiting 10 minutes or so Bashir arrived, just after 5-15. After various pieces of kit were handed out, stretching our already full bags to the limits, we headed off to the gate. Our flight was straight forward with nothing really of note, barring Bashir's slightly odd way of going to sleep en route to Frankfurt! (like a Vampire, he likes to sleep in the dark !!) We took the opportunity to get to know each other a bit better and the first nicknames were created by Bashir and Jackie. 'Manuel' for Ashley and 'Garcon' for Billy due to the fact that both have jobs as waiters. Unfortunately this level of humour was to be continued for the three days...



After arriving at Frankfurt at about 10.15 we met a couple of the other Home Countries taking part, however, we soon lost them and we ended up spending the next quarter of an hour wondering where to go. Luckily, a guide finally arrived, telling us that we had a short walk to meet up with the other teams. This was the first test of will for some unfortunate team members, the ones without wheels on their bags struggling round Europe's largest airport! Upon reaching the meeting point we were told that we had to wait for the rest of the teams before we could leave. This meant we had 4 hours to kill. As typical teenagers none of us fancied sitting around for that long doing nothing, so the 4 boys set off in search of a football whilst the 2 girls just went for a wander. After navigating our way through a maze of corridors we found a Nike shop and everyone chipped in to purchase the cheapest football on offer. This was the second one we picked up as Billy, our German translator, informed us the first one was €100! (or £91)

Our next challenge was to find a place where we could play without losing it or getting it confiscated. We ended up finding a spot just outside the airport in-between two buildings. This kept us entertained for a good while until disaster struck and Ashley laced it onto the roof! After the use of English and mime failed to get us a ladder we looked if it was possible to climb up, but we decided the risk was not worth it. Instead we headed back to the shop and purchased a second one, much to the amusement of the woman in the shop. Originally we were just going to keep it for around the hotel, but we decided lightening couldn't strike twice. Alas an hour or so later and the ball hit the frame of a bike at just the wrong angle and Ashley had put a second ball on the same roof! Bad as it was that we didn't have a ball



again it was so funny and had us all in fits. We returned back to the meeting area deciding to give up on the football idea. After a short team meeting with Bashir

and Jackie who talked through the trip we finally left the airport just after 2.15. Unfortunately our travel woes were not over, as the coach's aircon was broken, making the journey very hot and stuffy. Combined with the fact it took 3 hours rather than the 2 hours we were told everyone was very glad to finally arrive in Osteim the venue for the race. We walked round the 1000m loop checking out our race lines and possible areas of difficulty. This was quickly followed by an easy jog to stretch out our legs.

Another short coach journey later and we arrived at our 'BnB' where we would be based for the next few days. After dumping our bags in our rooms we looked for the next essential thing, another football! The balcony served as our football pitch, adding the additional incentive that if you had a bad touch you were off downstairs to get the ball back! Our banter with the Italian's, the team with whom we were sharing a hotel, began here with us shouting 'caio' every time we saw them run past our balcony!

After some time to ourselves we walked down to the building where the opening ceremony was being held. We had a short introduction to the area by the woman guiding us in near perfect English, barring a couple of amusing slips. The opening ceremony itself was a fantastic event with all 11 countries squeezing in under their flags. After the national anthems we received a talk from the town mayor which was interesting because of his hand gestures rather than for what he said, as very few of us spoke any German whatsoever! The next challenge was to find something to eat, as all the foods on offer were local 'delicacies'. This was especial difficult for Rachel R. (soon to be known as 'Robson' by Bashir and Jackie or 'Scunny' by us) as all the food contained meat, leaving a vegetarian with few options.

We returned back for an early night, under instruction to sleep in as much as possible the next morning.



We slept in till about 9.40 that morning giving us 20mins to wake up and get down to breakfast before it closed! Breakfast was followed on by a team meeting where we decided to stay put for the day, rather than heading back to the course. This gave us plenty of time to stay off our feet and rest for the race. We had plenty of time to fill and after our attempts to sleep failed we returned to the trusted time filler football feats and conversation. Playing on the balcony passed some of the time for the boys whilst the girls amused themselves by dressing up!!! Several 'cat-walks' were also videoed but unfortunately



these can't be viewed on a paper copy!



At 1pm we headed down to a pasta restaurant so we could all get a healthy, filling meal before the race. The outing was memorable mainly for certain team members' issues with the flies which seemed attracted to our table. Not for the first time we were indebted to Billy's German, although the added suspense of not knowing what we were going to get added to the amusement. We returned to the BnB at 3 for a final team meeting where Bashir relayed the last race details to us. The girls took the 4.30 coach to get them to the

course in plenty of time for their race whilst the boys opted for the 5 o'clock option. This half an hour wait has to be

one of the tensest I have ever had with not a word spoken for nearly 15 minutes! Finally the tension was broken and we all relaxed again as conversation started to flow, easing everyone's nerves.

Arriving at Osteim, we met the hardy parents who had taken the long journey to support the team. Our base was inside the small clubhouse, tantalisingly close to the cake stand! After warming up we watched the girls' race start, which wasn't without incident due to the terrible countdown. After starting mid-pack after lap one, both girls pulled through strongly, slowing at a much lesser rate per lap than the other competitors. Upon completion of the third lap, Rachel Robinson finished in 4th place overall, only 13 seconds behind the Italian winner. Rachel Jefferson soon followed in 6th place, a further 13 seconds back. It was a great effort by both girls', unfortunately the lack of a third runner ultimately cost them a medal that they both deserved.

The boys' race then set off at 7pm with a blistering pace from the gun. Apart from the runaway Russian winner, retaining his title from last year, the race for 2nd and 3rd and the team prizes were all very much up for grabs. Again those who slowed the least through each lap were the ones in contention at the end.

Billy Pinder led home the English contingent, in a fantastic 5th place only an agonising 4 seconds off a medal. Next in was Jonny Bradshaw in 12th place followed by James Ellis 17th. Finally, Ashley Kay finished a brave race which left him suffering with dehydration, yet vitally he did enough to grab England third place in the team standings. This was a great reward for the hard work of all of the team and also placed England as the highest placed Home Nation.



After being shepherded onto another bus shortly after the race we were run back to the hotel for a quick shower and change before the closing ceremony, held in the same building as the opening one. After the presentations we were treated to another meal before a local band got going. Deciding it wasn't really our thing we all returned back to the BnB with the Italian's. National pride was put at stake as we had a 3-on-3 street football match in which we were victorious, much to our delight! From my very unbiased viewpoint I must say the 6-3 score line did not flatter us, although the match had to be abandoned when Ashley scored our 6th goal, but in the process the ball rolled down the road and was lost, completing his hat-trick of lost footballs! Upon this abrupt ending to our match our team of Rachels' started hitting us with pillows, which snowballed from an internal battle to national war, with us taking on the Italians. At this point I hasten to add nothing was broken or damaged during our stay! Quite late at night now, the Italians then left the building again and a few friendly glasses of water we send in their direction to help them on their way! When they returned a water fight ensued although a hasty truce was called to end the carnage, albeit after everyone was already drenched... (Another team effort saw us impersonating cleaners – as we tidied up our indiscretions!)

After Bashir and Jackie returned back, informing us that the band did improve, not that it could have got any worse, we retreated to one of the bedrooms where we just chatted and tried to find something to watch on TV. As a team we all got on really well, forming ties, which will last for a very long time. A



healthy mix of competitiveness and team spirit meant that as a group our time spent together was always amusing and lively. After a final picture with the Italian's we headed for bed, still reliving the events of a pulsating day.

As committed athletes... Sunday did not involve a lie in, instead we were up and ready by 8 for a morning run with Bashir and Jackie. The nearby forest was perfect with some nice off-road trails to enjoy. Breakfast again acted as discussion time with ideas thrown around as to how we would spend the day. We opted for a game of Rounders on the sports pitch to start with, which created some hilarious moments. Team's Carl (Jonny B Dad) and Rob (Rachel J's Dad) lined up in an aggressive match with winning in any manner possible the only aim! Cheating, 'sledging' and physical abuse (Rob smashing the ball into 'Robson's' shoulder) were all common place. After holding a commanding first innings lead, nerves obviously hit 'Team Rob', leaving them unable to score the few points required. Obviously no gloating occurred at all for that would be both unsporting and immature, although I have reminded Rob on his teams failings on numerous occasions since in case he managed to forget!!



At 1pm the parent supporters left us for their long journey back, leaving us with just a few hours left of our trip. A crazy golf course nearby took our fancy, giving us one last chance to show our competitive streaks... A range of techniques and styles were on offer although I'm not sure you'll be seeing any of us very soon on the PGA Tour! As writer I feel that to do my job properly, the results must be given with who the winner was having no bearing on this decision whatsoever! 'Jimmy Lad' (James) took the win, followed closely by 'Garcon' (Billy), then not-so-closely 'Alf' (Jonny) and 'Robson' (Rachel R). 'Manuel' and 'Jerome' (Ashley and Rachel J) took the sensible option of watching rather than actually taking part.



After a few games of cards we set off for lunch, hitting our biggest language barrier yet! The people spoke as much English as we did German, ie none, leaving Billy again with the job of sorting out the mess. We did manage to get our orders in eventually and before we knew it we were heading to one of the organiser's houses(who has a PB of 3-31 for 1500m !!) where we got a minibus to the airport. This time the journey was only 2 hours long, although it felt much less due to the thrilling games we played to pass the time... Classics such as 'I-Spy' and filling the alphabet with a certain topic were just some of the things we did during the journey!!

We arrived at the airport at about 5.15 giving us plenty of time to check in our bags and head to the right gate, although the airport did its best to confuse us by changing the gate, only to move it back again a few minutes later! More games of cards followed with various accents being used. It was at this point that the girls started their Irish accent which they continued for the whole journey home... They seemed to find it hilarious although you would have to ask them why, for no one else quite understood why it made them laugh so much!! The plane left at 7pm and the journey back was very funny and loud with plenty of jokes. As Bashir said himself, the difference between our flights there and back was very different. He and Jackie thought they had a quiet and shy group originally, but we managed to change that view by the end! We got back to Manchester by 10pm, drawing our trip to a close. We had time for a couple more photos before meeting our families and returning back to our various places around England.



To conclude, I must say a big thank you on behalf of all of the athletes to the parents who took the effort to come and support us and of course to Bashir and Jackie who not only made it all happen, but also made it extremely enjoyable and successful. It was a great opportunity and we all gained a huge amount of experience from competing in a different environment against a range of quality runners. Not only on the racing itself, but also on the preparation side, helping to give us the best possible chance of performing on the day. Hopefully we will be able to put these to use in future International Running events! Finally thanks to all my team mates who certainly made the trip that extra bit special. As I have said before, we all got on so well, which made the 3 days so much better than if we had just been as group of individuals, rather than a team.

Written by James Ellis