

## Collingwood Conquers Stawell

When the sun arose on Good Friday marking the beginning of another highway congested, chocolate filled Easter long weekend several Collingwood Harriers packed their spikes, braved the traffic, avoided the chocolate and made their way down to Stawell to compete in this year's 130th edition of the Stawell Gift.

Paul Viney, Paul Munro, Justin Murphy and Simon Blyth competed in a number of events across the weekend with Anthony Weiland & an unfortunately injured Patrick O'Keefe providing great support from the stands.

Simon kicked things off early Saturday morning fronting up for the Front markers mile. Results over previous years suggested a time just inside 4 minutes would be required to take out the race. Off a handicapped mark of 205 metres, (Thus meaning the distance required to cover to complete the race is 1395m) and on the back of a solid block of training, Simon fancied his chances. However at the start line Simon was as nervous as cat with a long tail in a room full of rocking chairs. Alas he completely ignored coaching instructions and under a cloud of nervous energy blew up mid race due to completing the first lap in near four minute mile pace. Simon finished mid field and somewhat disappointed with a 4:15 run. The race was won in 3:58.

Justin and Paul Munro were next up early Saturday afternoon in the Back Markers Mile. The back markers race had an undoubtedly higher quality field several of whom managing to post low 3:50's 1500's throughout the recent amateur season. The field also featured an invite Kenyan athlete, Collins Kiprotich CHEB, to run off scratch with a PB 1500m in the low 3:30's. Quality field. Much like the front markers mile the Backies would need to run close to or under four minutes to take out the win. With Justin off 115 metres & Paul off 120m it was inevitable that they would run much of the early part of the race together. Unfortunately for Paul he was left out front with much of the field happy to tuck in behind and benefit from his work (i.e bludge off him). As Paul started going backwards with 600 to go, (Sorry Paul) Justin made his move surging forward to sit in second or third for much of the last lap. With the Kenyan running a 52 second first lap, he blew up and was not a factor late in the race. With 200m to go Justin switched on the afterburners and headed for home. He and another runner gapped the field with 100 to go and it came down to a race in two with Justin unfortunately not quite able to out sprint Jerome Whitley from Tas. A super run, Justin finished a close second in a time of 4:01:39. The winner taking it out in 4:00:81.

Paul Viney tried his luck over 400m in the front markers race later in the day. Having had an interrupted lead up with Achilles problems Paul wasn't too optimistic about his chances of advancing through to the final. Never one to talk himself up I didn't believe a word of it knowing he'd bobbed up and won on a number of occasions over previous years with little or no indication he was in form. Paul is always thereabouts in the finish and once again acquitted himself well off limited preparation. With Australian 400m hurdle champ Lauren Boden chasing him down the home straight it was always going to be a big ask though. Paul finished his heat in fourth place in 49:34 easing across the line. 48.155 took out his heat and a ridiculous 46:964 took out the final. Someone slipped under the handicappers guard there!

On Sunday afternoon Paul Viney & Justin had a run around the 550 Handicap. With Paul not having run enough over the distance for a reasonable handicap and Justin winning too many 550m races to

have a reasonable handicap, both struggled to be a factor in either of their heats. Never the less is was a nice day for a run.

Monday afternoon saw Justin and Simon have a run around in the 800m heats. Justin is always a factor over 800m. He wins every second time he runs, the stewards handicap him harder and he just comes back and wins anyway. Machine. Justin ran in heat two coming home in second place in a time of 1:49:907 only beaten by his new nemesis Jerome Whitely. With the winner of each heat qualifying for the final and the three quickest non winning times qualifying for the final Justin had to wait patiently for the completion of all 7 heats. Just as surely as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west his time was good enough to make the final. In heat 3 Simon ran a controlled first lap saving a burst for the last 300m but was too far behind to really be in it. Just not a quick enough runner to be a contender off his current handicap. Probably needs another 4-5 metres to be a chance. A nice run in 1:52:195.

Soon after Paul Viney had a run in the 300m veterans handicap. Having won over the distance earlier this year Paul had a tough 28m handicap. He ran a ripping race to finish fourth crossing the line with a full head of steam and probably moving quicker than all bar the eventual winner of the heat. His time was 36:383. The heat was won in 35:521. The final was won in 34:171.

Monday, Stawell gift final day, the big day. Actually, not sure there was much of a care factor for the sprint final. The whole weekend was about middle distance results for the Collingwood gang. (Except of course Paul Vineys 300 & 400m sprints, we cared about those results). None of us are sprinters, none of us care about sprinters. The gift was won and run, some guy hurt a hammy, fell over and then, I quote, "Went to get pissed" and then finally we could get on watching the more important races of the day.

Justin had qualified for the Backmarkers 800m Final and Paul Munro was entered in the backmarkers 2 mile.

Off a tough mark of 40m in the white jersey, (Only the back marker behind him) for a Stawell 800m final Justin would need to run the race of his life to be in the mix for a win. To make things just that little more difficult nemesis Jerome Whitley was back again lining up at the start next to him off 40m. As expected all took off at a cracking pace with Whitley again making Justin work perhaps a little more than he may have liked through the first lap. Pushing up the back straight with 250m to go the field was stretched nearly 20 metres from first to last and the pace lifted significantly to push for the line. Justin was 13 - 15 off the lead and moving well. He kicked hard over the last 150 to draw within a few metres of the lead heading down the home straight. Unfortunately in field of such quality everyone else has a great kick as well! A number of the front markers with better handicaps were able to hold back a little to enable later and stronger finishes, Justin slipped back to eighth across the finish line. Justin eased through the line in an impressive 1:49:767 off his 40m mark. Nemesis finished ahead in 6th place. The race was won in 1:47:431.

Still no wins for the Collingwood gang.

Cue Paul Munro.

What can I say? What a run. Geez he was impressive. If you can get You tube footage have a look at his last 1k. It's fair to say he destroyed the field.

The last run of the carnival was the backmarkers 2 mile featuring Craig Mottram off scratch. Again this was a high quality field featuring a couple of athletes having run at either junior or senior, Vic / national titles. With Mottram off scratch, I thought Paul Munro would need every one of his 310m metres. As it transpires he probably only need 280m. One suspects the way he finished he could have gone quicker had he needed. The race started with Mottram knocking off a 61 second lap and then settling into 64-66 second laps following that, it looked ominously quick. Meanwhile the rest of the field plugged away out front settling into their own pace. For several laps the field tapped out a reasonably paced race slowly grouping together as handicapped races tend to do. With Mottram looming ever larger and about to pick up his first scalp, Dan Hornery at the back of the field, something was afoot at the pointy end. Matthew McDonough (off 260m) had just bridged the gap to Paul out the front and although Paul looked to be moving well it's not usually a good sign if or when a back marker catches you with so far to go. Apparently Paul took something from the moment because it triggered an immediate response. With just on 1k to go Paul took off and immediately put space between himself and McDonough again. What looked like it may be just a burst of enthusiasm was in fact a well timed and sustained kick for the line 1 k out! Suddenly it was apparent Paul was moving far quicker than anyone else in the field barring Mottram of course. Could Paul hang on at this fantastic pace to the line? McDonough was hanging in gamely still close enough should Paul break. Or would Mottram just be too good and simply get him anyway? Well, after peeling off 600 meters in style he headed through the bell looking very comfortable and continued his tempo right through to the finish line completing the win in 8:32:93. Matthew McDonough looking like he was going to break every step of the last k hung on gamely to keep Paul honest finishing in 8:36:02. Mottram of course floated through the field looking like he was out on a Sunday recovery run finishing 3rd in 8:43:28. Can't wrap up the run enough, it was terrific. Well done Paul.



A good weekend was had by all. Thankfully the weather was brilliant. We watched Rambo, The Tigers had a win, Carisbrook beat Maryborough, we drank beer, bourbon and yes, Gin.

Lastly, a Quick Stawell Gift tip. Should you plan to head down in the coming years, be sure to keep the Milk bar proprietors on side.

Thanks for reading and all the best for this coming AV cross country season.

Go the Harriers!!