



# **Melbourne Midday Milers March Madness Relay Barwon Heads - 2007**

## **Chapter One - The Gathering**

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The sun was making occasional appearances through the scattered clouds as the runners assembled in the car park for the 2007 edition of the Melbourne Midday Milers March Madness. This was the third time that the event had been held at Barwon Heads which meant there were some established stage records to target.

The seeding list this year was so top heavy that it looked like an upside down iceberg. When a multiple relay winner & dual stage record holder like NFM finds himself seeded as a number 4 then you know there are going to be some fast times run through the day. Surprisingly, everyone arrived at the assembly point at the appointed time. Well everyone except the runner with the shortest distance to travel. Last to arrive was LG who had journeyed all the way from the adjacent car park, but even he was only 10 minutes late.

Selections got under way with Vaughn & Thorny heeding the seeding order by picking up Troy & Robb respectively. Mullet decided he knew better though & overlooked Steve Paine in favour of Slips. The first gamble of the relay. How important would it turn out to be by the end of the day? Dr. Dan's eyes lit up as he snapped up Paine, but then he in turn overlooked Mitho in favour of AL Prez. You've got to wonder what Mitho has to do to get selected in his rightful place. So Mullet grabbed Mitho (ouch!) which pretty much evened out the teams in relation to the seeding order. The next 2 picks were by the book again with Thorny taking Arthur the Bruce & Vaughn selecting Handman. But then Vaughn decided that he could select out of order just as well as the top 2 seeds, & he bypassed Lawry in favour of Max. Thorny must have thought that Vaughn had seen something that the organisers had overlooked, because he left Lawry hanging as well by taking GG. Paul couldn't believe his luck as he gratefully welcomed Lawry into his team knowing how motivating it is for a runner to be overlooked. No doubt Lawry would spend the day trying to make Thorny & Vaughn pay for that slight. Dan then considered his final selection very carefully before picking LG (who was the only runner left). Everyone was grateful that GGO would not have to run, or all of the schedules for the day would have been revised.

Now that everyone knew who to love & who to sledge, the teams organised their cars & planned their strategies. Disaster nearly struck the Yellow team of Dr. Dan, Paine, AL Prez & LG before the warm up, with 2 of the team obviously in unfamiliar Territory in the back of LG's Ford soft-roader. It seemed that LG had neglected to disable his hitch-hiker retention devices, aka child locks, & the guys couldn't get out of the car. That was only a hiccup though. There were no other incidents getting to the start, which was a relief seeing that Mullet was driving the Team blue car. It is traditional at Barwon Heads for the teams to go for a massed reconnaissance lap together. Thorny's Team Green "Tree Huggers" decided that they couldn't wait for the others though & they set off on their own. Vaughn's Team Navy "We're Harboured Doubts" decided that if it was good enough for the greenies, then it was good enough for the Navy & they set off alone as well. Dr. Dan's Team Yellow & the Mullet's Team Blue "Can't Bridge the Gap" hung tight though & were joined in their lap by Ganly who wanted to remember what it's like to run with a group of dedicated, fit Milers. It obviously cured him of this foolish notion though as that's the last running he did for the day. While waiting for the start Dr. Dan decided that his singlet looked more like a mini skirt, so he gave it the Scissor Sisters treatment thereby becoming the only runner in the field to have a matching singlet & headband. In an obvious attempt to psych out the opposition, Dr. Dan tied his new headband Mr. Miaggi style & "Daniel-san & the Karate Kids" was born.

## *Chapter Two - Off and Racing*

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With all of the preliminaries out of the way it was time to get the racing started. Following some last minute instructions from Chief Marshall Ganly (which were the first of many such instructions that would be systematically ignored by the runners), the first runners lined up for their lap of the Bluff course. It was clear that all teams were adopting a similar strategy, with all of the number 3's lining up.

The race started with the 4 runners heading up to the top of the Bluff. The first controversy of the day reared its head at the first turn though, with ATB taking a "more direct" route than the others through the scrub, saving an alleged 10 metres in the process. Just over 2 minutes later the runners came back past the start-finish line on their way down the hill, with Mitho, AL & ATB together & Handman just a couple of metres behind. As the runners came back into view passing through the caravan park we could see that the 3 leaders were still in a tight bunch & Handman had dropped off a little. Coming into the 1<sup>st</sup> changeover it was Mitho in a time of 7:37 by a fraction of a second from ATB. AL Prez was 5 seconds back with a further 14 to Handman.

Slips set off for his lap of the Bluff with Gerard Robb hot on his heels & Paine just behind. Troy Boy gave them a bit of a start, but by the time they came past on their way down the hill it was obvious that he was making up ground fast. While we were waiting for the runners to come back into view we heard that late Relay scratching "Jaymondo" Eagleton had been sighted in the Brighton Bay 10k - coming second. That news brought a bigger groan from the group than one of former El Prez's speeches. Meanwhile the racing had tightened right up with Paine handing over in 1<sup>st</sup> a mere 2 seconds ahead of Robb. Troy Boy was just 1 second behind him & Slips only 2 seconds further back. After all of the 2's & 3's had completed their 1<sup>st</sup> legs there was a scant 5 seconds covering the field. We soon realised how good Troy Boy's run was, as it was revealed that his 7:12 was a new stage record. So with the first stage only half done & the number 1's still warming up, a record had already gone.

Getting back to the on track action & LG was running like a man on a mission, but as he passed on his downhill leg it was clear that the chasing pack of GG, NFM & Lawry weren't going to let him get away. By the time the group reappeared we could see that the Yellow singled LG had been dropped off by the pack, which to be fair was expected. As they handed over to the number 1's, it was the twice overlooked Lawry who'd taken his team from 4<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup>, just 1 second ahead of NFM & a further 4 seconds back to GG. LG came in a further 17 seconds back after completing the shortest leg of the day, courtesy of Dr. Dan taking the tag at the start of the designated changeover zone. Or at least Club President (& coincidentally Yellow team member) AL Prez said that the tag was within the zone.

The gap at the start of the final circuit of the Bluff from Mullet to Dr. Dan was 24 seconds. The question was whether Daniel-san could close the gap at all. As the runners came into view at the caravan park the Mullet had a strong lead from Thorny, with Vaughn trying to hold onto Dan. Dan's time of 6:57 smashed Troy Boy's briefly help record, but honours for this stage ultimately went to Mullet. Paul's official time was 6:55 (6:53 if you ask him, but his team Racebook tells a different story). That's 24 seconds quicker than Smoothie's old record over just 2.3km! The gaps after all runners had completed the Bluff were Can't Bridge the Gap 11 seconds ahead of the Tree Huggers, 13 seconds further back to Daniel-san & the Karate Kids, with another 9 seconds to We're Harboursing Doubts. Thirty-three seconds in total as the teams hit the highways & byways of the Bellarine.

Mitho headed down Bluff Road for the final time with a handy lead over ATB. AL Prez & Handman were chasing, but the gap was stretching & it was now needing longer straights to be able to see all 4 runners at the same time. There was no change to position through the stage, but there was a change to the gap. By the time Mitho tagged the next Blue runner his lead was 21 seconds over Green. Yellow were 27 seconds back, with the same gap again to Navy. The strong headwinds on this leg sadly meant that NFM's 4yo record wasn't threatened.

Slips took off along the coast with Robb chasing. Going through the 2k area Paine was looking smooth as he surged past the higher ranked Green runner. Troy Boy wasn't ready to give up the chase though & he did some gap closing of his own. As the teams waited to cheer their runners on in the aromatic surroundings of the Geelong outfall, the wiser officials beat a hasty retreat around the corner to the comparatively pleasant changeover point opposite the hayshed, which has apparently been recycled into a water recycling plant since our last visit in 2005. At the changeover it was still Blue leading by 25 seconds from Yellow, just 7 seconds ahead of Green & a further 37 seconds to Navy. Troy Boy's effort on this leg had a touch of déjà vu about it. He managed to beat the 4yo record of DDD by 5 seconds, but still failed to get his name in the record books, as Paine had already lowered the mark by a massive 22 seconds. Paine's effort was even more incredible because  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the stage was run into a stiff headwind. So Paine, who was ranked 7<sup>th</sup> & picked 8<sup>th</sup> was performing as the top #2 of the first half of the Relay. The records for 2 of the 3 completed stages had been beaten. One twice & the other 3 times.

Lawry looked comfortable out in front with a big lead from the Goodman cousins. As NFM was preparing to start his leg he brazenly asked what we'd give him if he caught the others (he was 37 seconds behind remember). He was promptly told to stop dreaming. The stage progressed pretty much as expected with GG passing cousin Luke & matching Lawry. Team Yellow were flirting with danger again as LG was running in the middle of the road around a bend with oncoming traffic bearing down on him. Luckily for everyone - especially LG - disaster was averted with nothing more serious than a possible adrenalin rush. GG's stage time of 13:13 was 5 seconds quicker than Marvin's existing record, but not quite enough to get him the record as Lawry was one second quicker. A great battle was looming between these 2. However, even Lawry's time wasn't enough to get him into the record books, as NFM produced a "gob-smacking" 12:57. A full 15 seconds faster again! That meant that the gaps at the final changeover before the run into Barwon Heads for the break were: Blue in the lead by 33 seconds from Green who had moved back into 2<sup>nd</sup>. A further 17 seconds behind were Navy, with Yellow making up the field another 26 seconds back. The gap from Paul to Dan was 76 seconds, but Dan looked very determined.

Heading into Barwon Heads Mullet was flying. He wasn't the only one though, as Thorny was clearly all fired up by having someone to chase down. Further back down the road Daniel-san was taking no prisoners as he put his head down & set off to close the gap. Smoothie's 2003 record of 14:01 for the 4.35k journey was looking like an endangered species. Thorny showed his class by equalling the record, but he'll have to swap sob stories with Troy Boy & GG, because his glory wasn't even short-lived. Paul was more like a flying fish than a mullet setting the new stage record at 13:45 as he finished with a very handy lead going into the break. However, as it turned out that time just managed to get Paul a place on the list of runners to hold a stage record for a fleeting instance, as Dr. Dan was out to make up for Big M taking honours at the Bluff. Dan's 13:27 was an astonishing 18 seconds quicker than Paul's own sensational time, setting the stage for a battle of epic proportions to be staged after the break.

At the halfway mark the leaders were the Blue of Paul's "Can't Bridge the Gap", but it was the other teams that had the gap to bridge. Thorny's Green "Tree Huggers" were 49 seconds behind in second place & a bare 9 seconds in front of the Yellow of Dan's "Daniel-san & the Karate Kids" with the promise of some great battles between the 2 "Bug Guns" to look forward to. Vaughn's Navy "We're Harboursing Doubts" were struggling 49 seconds further back, putting them 1:47 behind the leaders & with it all to do.

As the teams settled down for a rest & a snack the officials pondered how the afternoon would go. Blue were obviously in a commanding position, but the second half of a Relay is renowned for throwing up surprises. (Whether Spewy is running or not. ☺) Stage selection becomes much more critical with a few tough beach legs. Then there's fatigue to consider. Had anyone spent all their bickys already? Who was going to be able to run the day out. Did the Relay debutants Thorny, Robb, Handman & Paine appreciate how much harder the 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> legs of the day can be?

All these questions and more will be answered after the break.

## *Chapter Three - Heading to Queenscliff*

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During the break it was decided that for the first time in Relay history there would be a staggered start for stage 9. The advantage with this was that all of the teams would be able to see exactly where they were in relation to the other teams, & the first team across the bridge at the end of the day would be the winner. This decision met with great support from 3 teams, but it left the Blue team feeling ... well ... blue. Still this wasn't a democratic election & the decision wasn't up for discussion, so the teams made their way to RAAFS Beach for the restart. Walking over the sand dunes to the start line it was obvious that both the incoming tide & fresh off-shore breeze were going to present some challenges for the beach runners as the day wore on.

Justin gave the teams further instructions to ignore & we got under way. The Mullet took off first for Team Blue & was a speck in the distance as all 4 members of Team Green toed the line. Tactics were apparently going to play a bigger role during the concluding half of the Relay. It was another number 1, Thorny, who set off after the Mullet, meaning that those 2 teams were adopting at least a similar strategy. Team Yellow had other ideas though & they pitched their #2 into battle against the #1's. Paine had the comparative luxury of starting only 9 seconds behind Thorny which meant that he could pace himself off the green singlet. Last to leave RAAFS was the Team Navy runner. They'd adopted the same strategy (for now at least) as Yellow, by starting with their #2, Troy Boy. There was no chance to watch this stage unfold as the cars had to stick to the road, from which the beach couldn't be seen. Somehow the officials who had waited to start the Team Navy managed to beat Team Blue to the changeover despite giving them nearly 2 minutes head start. By the time their next runner was ready to go, the Mullet was approaching the end of his leg. His 15 minutes flat for the stage was the fastest of the day, but well off his own 2005 record pace. Next in was Thorny with a 15:23, but 8 of his 9 second gap to Team Yellow had been eroded by a great run from Paine who clocked a 15:15. That time even overshadowed Troy Boy's great effort of 15:17. What all that meant was that team's Blue & Green had already used one of their 2 remaining #1 stages without gapping Yellow. That's the sort of stage that can become very important in the final analysis.

Heading back out onto the road Mitho held a handy 1:12 lead from the Green & Gold (Yellow) teams who were separated by a mere second - in Green's favour. The strategies of the individual runners were starting to show some differences as well. Handman & one of the other runners used the steps to ascend the dune leading off the beach at the start of the stage, while the other 2 tackled the sand path beside the steps. By the time Handman had gotten out on the road, the gap between 1<sup>st</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> that was 2:04 at the changeover had already started to stretch out. Meanwhile Tree Hugging ATB was putting some space between himself & AL Prez as they climbed the sharp rise on Bonnyvale Road. Approaching the end of Bonnyvale Road the officials found Mitho blindly running along wondering which way to go. In fairness to him though it must be said that his team were not there to help him through the tricky navigational section where you get to the end of Bonnyvale Road & turn right. As the runners made their way down the very busy Shell Road we could only hope that they would have the sense to follow Justin's instructions to stay on the right hand side of the road. Mitho was the first to disregard the instructions, with AL Prez following suit. The discipline of following instructions to the letter when orienteering showed with ATB though, which gave Ganly some consolation. The record for this stage, named "Fenton's Corner" in honour of Justin's uncle & aunt who live on the corner, was shared by Mitho & AL Prez at 12:47. With both of those guys repeating the stage it would be interesting to see how their times compared both to each other & to 2005. Mitho was first in & his time of 12:37 was good enough to take the record outright. AL Prez wasn't to be outdone though & he also lowered the old mark. He lowered Mitho's new mark as well with a 12:34. Apart from giving AL Prez some bragging rights over Mitho none of that really mattered though, as ATB completed the leg in 12:29 despite having picked up a stone in his shoe early in the stage. Handman's time was over a minute off ATB's & Team Navy were in serious danger of disappearing out the back of the field.

Lawry bolted off through the scenic salt pan section with a handy 1:04 lead over GG. LG was just 6 seconds further back & would need to try to hold onto the back of cousin Glen. NFM again found himself chasing the pack nearly 2 minutes later. Lawry displayed a greater ability than some of the others by keeping right, but the main interest on this stage would be in the head-to-head battle between he & GG. After the 2 earlier stages, Lawry was a meagre 9 seconds ahead of GG on aggregate. Believe it or not, NFM was 16 seconds quicker than Lawry & it was his 2003 record of 12:06 that they were chasing on this stage. Lawry changed over first with a time of 12:31. Well off the record. Next in was GG, & while his 12:24 closed both the gap to Team Blue a little it meant that the only runner with a realistic chance of breaking Max's record was Max. Next in was LG with possibly his best leg of the day and then Max bringing up the rear for the Navy. NFM's time of 12:21 was the fastest of the day, but well off the record.

The Blue team's lead was just under a minute as Slips headed into Queenscliff. He must have been worded up by Mitho about taking extra care with directions, as seconds before taking the tag he was seen studying the course map & been reminded by an official to turn left at the roundabout **350m** up the road. Chief Marshall Ganly must have sensed something as the officials got moving as soon as Slips started running. Sure enough, **250m** up the road & Slips was pleadingly looking over his shoulder & gesturing about turning **right** at the roundabout. No harm was done though as the officials got to him in time & sent him the correct way (which wasn't right - it was left 😊) up Fellows Road. Maybe it's understandable though that Slips got a bit confused. At least he remembered that he did have to turn, unlike his team captain's effort on Monument Track at the NAR.

The officials then split up, with Ganly marshalling at the dangerous Bellarine Highway crossing & GGO hobbling up to Murray Road to ensure that Slips didn't run straight into Swan Bay. Team Navy played their trump card with Vaughn taking on the other teams middle order runners in an effort to get back in touch. That meant that this stage had 1 number 1, 2 number 2's & 1 number 3. Ganly had warned the runners that he would stop them if necessary at the highway & their times would be adjusted at the end of the day. Slips was delayed for 5 seconds, while Robb & Vaughn each had a 2 second wait. Someone was looking after AL Prez though as he charged across the highway without having to change stride. Taking the turn into Murray Road Slips had a 61 second lead over Robb, with AL Prez 42 seconds back. Vaughn was closing & was now only 41 seconds behind AL Prez with 2.5k still to run in the stage. Vaughn had also taken over 30 seconds out of Slips lead & Team Navy were now 2:16 off the leaders.

At the changeover to start the last 4 stages it was Slips clearly in the lead with a stage time of 13:19. That was adjusted down by 5 seconds to 13:14 because of the delay he had at the highway crossing. Not a bad time for the lowest ranked #2 & only 9 seconds off Denti's 4yo record. Next in was Robb, but his 13:41 (adjusted to 13:39) wasn't the highlight of his day & allowed Team Blue to extend their lead. AL Prez was the slowest for the stage, but he was also a #3 running against much higher ranked runners **and** he'd only had one stage rest. His 13:51 wasn't far behind Robb either. Team Navy were left to wait for their captain to see if the gamble had paid off. Vaughn's 13:07 (adjusted to 13:05) equalled the stage record & meant that he'd picked up only 9 seconds for his team against the leaders. Definitely looking like a case of a runner going too hard too early, & giving the critics plenty of track-runner sledging fodder.

All of that meant that with 4 stages to run "Can't Bridge the Gap" were way out in front with an adjusted 1:16 lead over "Tree Huggers". A further 56 seconds back were "Daniel-san and the Karate Kids", with "We're Harbering Doubts" 23 seconds behind them. By now the bookies had stopped taking bets on Blue, but the race wasn't over. With teams now on quite different strategies & fatigue possibly creeping into the equation, any relay veteran knows that it isn't over until it's over. Paul had taken a classic sort of approach & organised his stages so that all 4 Team Blue members still had one to run. Thorny had done the same with Team Green as had Vaughn with Team Navy, although they'd arrived at this point a different way. Dan still had one ace left up his sleeve. He still had 2 stages to run himself, with his Team Yellow number 2 & number 4 running the other stages. Al Prez had finished his allotted stages & was now just another spectator, waiting (like you) to see how it would all pan out.

## ***Chapter Four - Head to Head to the Heads***

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Mitho had the unenviable role of again playing rabbit for the chasing hounds, but at least this Out and Back stage gives the leader a chance to check out the chasers after the turnaround. Talking about the turnaround, in the now accustomed absence of navigational support from his team, it was up to the officials to dash to the turnaround point to make sure that Mitho didn't end up on the ferry to Sorrento. Mitho looked in control, but only time would tell if he'd manage to hold off the others. Next to round the marker was ATB looking very focused & clearly gaining ground. The gains he was making on Mitho were nothing though compared to what Dr. Dan was doing. He'd brought the unadjusted gap to the leader down from 2:15 to 1:21 in just 1.8km! Had he done a Vaughn though & gone out too hard? Hold that thought. By the time Handman turned around, Team Navy were 3 minutes off the lead & didn't look like they had any answers.

The 3k journey to the next changeover allowed limited viewing of the runners, so there was plenty of suspense as the teams wondered how things were going on the trail. The Yellow & Blue singlets came into view locked together, with Dr. Dan taking a slender lead into the changeover. This was the first time that the Yellow singlet had been at the head of the field since LG was bolting down Bluff Road early in the 3<sup>rd</sup> leg of the Relay. Smoothie's 2003 record for this stage stood at 15:54. Dr. Dan stopped the clock at 15 minutes flat! The adjectives fail me to adequately describe that run, but was it all a matter of too little too late? True Dan had taken a 2 second lead, but he looked a wreck as he hung off the safety fencing at the crossing. Not that Mitho looked any better, but at least he didn't have a gruelling 5.6k on the beach into the wind to look forward to. Mitho was done in every way, but was Dan? Before we go on, we should have a closer look at that lead. Team Yellow did tag 2 seconds ahead of Team Blue, but don't forget that there was still a 5 second adjustment to be made due to the highway crossing. That meant that Mitho had managed to hold onto a 3 second lead on adjusted time. Sadly, there was no such adjustment available to bring the other 2 teams back into the hunt. ATB produced a brave 16:53 to clearly outpoint Mitho by 24 seconds, but they were still 58 seconds behind Blue on adjusted time. Handman ran a game 18:02 for the stage, which compared reasonably well with Mitho's time, but Navy were now camped so far behind that it would have taken a miracle to get back into the race.

The final road leg got underway with the number 4's doing battle for the 4<sup>th</sup> & final time. LG's slender lead didn't last very long with Lawry passing him & heading into the distance. GG found himself in the familiar role of having cousin Luke's bright yellow singlet to focus on & NFM was also in the increasingly familiar role of rounding out the field. As the officials paused to admire the stunning views from Pt Lonsdale Road across the blue waters of Bass Strait to the Rip Lawry went past looking good. Well, good for Lawry at least. 😊 GG was closing fast on LG & NFM was nowhere to be seen.

At the changeover point it was decided that the highway crossing adjustments would be served before the penultimate stage so that whoever crossed the finish line first at the end of the day would be the winner of the entire Relay. Not just of the afternoon section. If you remember back to stage 12, Slips for Team Blue's effectively copped a 5 second penalty while waiting for traffic. Green's Robb & Navy's Vaughn both stopped for 2 seconds, but Yellow's AL Prez got a clean run. So Blue had effectively already served their time & could just proceed when tagged. Green & Navy had to tag & wait for 3 seconds before leaving, and Yellow had to wait for 5 l-o-n-g seconds before taking off. Lawry was the first in as expected & Slips bolted up the sand dune as soon as he was tagged. Lawry's time of 15:40 was good enough to knock off Louie the Lip's 2003 record of 15:53. Another stage down & another record set. This day was living up to expectations on the clock.

Next to arrive was GG who'd left LG in his dust. If you've been paying attention, you'll remember that in the head-to-head battle between Lawry & GG, it was the former holding a 2 second lead. That meant that GG needed to beat Lawry's record breaking time by 3 seconds to justify Thorny's faith in selecting the old war horse over the ... er ... other old war horse. As the dust settled, & a puzzled GG wondered why Robb stood around waiting for 3 seconds before dashing up the track to the beach, the clock read 15 minutes and forty seconds for GG as well. So while GG did equal the stage record that had just been set 55 seconds earlier by Lawry, he had failed to justify his captain's faith in him. Shame GG, shame! Maybe you should have shaved down.

LG was next in, stopping the clock in 17:01 which meant that he'd given away over a minute to Team Blue. LG had one thing in common with cousin Glen. He was just as puzzled about why Paine waited 5 seconds before setting off in pursuit. Finally Max came into view, looking totally deserving of the moniker NFM as he huffed & puffed his way to the outstretched hand of his waiting captain. I don't think Max realised though that Vaughn waited his 3 seconds before starting off. He was just too stuffed.

So with 2 stages left to run and all time adjustments done & dusted, Team Blue were in a commanding position. Their 55 second lead over the next team looked good with the in form Slips on the beach. Paine was a further 24 seconds back, with Vaughn 2:08 behind him. With the 4 runners on the beach, there was nothing for everyone else to do but head to the final changeover point & wait. Some teams had less time to wait than others though, as they decided to take the scenic route & not follow Ganly's clear & comprehensive directions. Not surprisingly Mullet was one of the offenders as he proceeded straight ahead where he should have turned. (Now where have we heard that story before?) Not to be outdone though LG drove straight past the car park entrance on the way to who knows where. Fortunately though this was a long stage, so there was plenty of time for the teams to get organised before their runners arrived.

Coming over the top of the dunes at 6W we were confronted by the sight of a thin beach covered in seaweed. This was going to be a tough 5.6k for the final runners. The record of 18:08 for the penultimate stage was set by KSC in 2003. How would that stand up against this year's times. At least one of the macho men on the beach thought he was a chance to knock it over. Well we waited, and we waited, and we waited.

With nothing better to do it was time to spice things up with some good-natured banter. Sledge of the day was probably the comment to Paul at this stage to beware of a mullet jumping out of the surf onto his back. The 18 minutes came & went & still we waited. Eventually we saw Slips fairy stepping his way through the seaweed trying to keep his feet dry. Not too far behind him was the Yellow singlet of Paine who looked like he was in plenty .... of pain, that is. Slips stopped the clock at 22:51, demonstrating just how tough the beach legs were this year. Compared to KSC's 2003 time Paine's was pretty ordinary, but his 22:07 meant that he'd closed the gap to the leaders by a huge 44 seconds! Just over a minute later Robb made his final tag for the day with the barefooted Vaughn a further couple of minutes back. The gap from Dan to Thorny at the changeover was 1:03 & a further 2:10 back to Troy Boy.

There was no doubt now that there were only 2 teams in the race for outright glory. Team Blue were in a very commanding position. Not only did they have a clear 35 second lead at the final change, but Paul should have been relatively fresh as his previous run finished over 1 ½ hours earlier while Dan had had less than 40 minutes break since his last run. In the head-to-head battles between the guns, Paul drew first blood at the Bluff by 2 seconds, while Dan took stage 8 by 18 seconds. Both Paul's & Dan's third run times were the same: 15 minutes flat. So on form **and** on seeding order you'd give Dan the edge, but 35 seconds over 5.6k? That's a big margin. The big advantage than Daniel-san had though was that he had the big frame of the Mullet to home in on.

There was one other factor that had crept into the minds of the competitors. With the tide so high, would it be possible to run under the bridge? So the officials beat a hasty retreat to the old bridge to assess the situation & devise a contingency plan if needed. We needn't have worried though, as there was still plenty of room to pass under the bridge & complete the course as planned. A quick jog back to RAAFS & the two runners were visible in the distance. With about 4k completed, it appeared that Dan was running with Paul. As they say in motor racing though: catching is one thing, but passing is another.

As the spectators gathered at the finish line & the officials dashed across the bridge, Dan could be seen at the Point with a gap of about 50m over the Mullet. Incredible! He hadn't just caught Paul, he'd gapped him. Paul still had one last card to play though. With nothing to lose, he gambled on the soft sand route & straight-lined the Point. Brave or foolish? We'd all find out soon enough, but in Paul's case he really had no choice but to try.

You could almost see the Dismay on Dan's face as he glanced over his right shoulder to see that Paul's gamble had paid off. They were shoulder to shoulder again. With only a short run to & under the bridge, then the climb onto & across it. There was nothing in it. After nearly 60 kilometres of racing the Relay was going to be decided by a sprint finish.

The 2 combatants were side by side going underneath the bridge & both took the same circuitous path onto the bridge. What would have happened if one of them had taken the steeper, but much, much shorter path straight up the side of the bridge *as instructed in the race book*? We'll never know, but at least one of the runners is likely to be haunted by that thought in his dreams for a long time.

As they charged onto the bridge, dodging fishermen & their gear it was obvious to all that the man in front was going to be almost impossible to pass on the very narrow footway. That didn't discourage them from giving it everything though. The 2 runners had proven themselves to be the class of the field all day & we were treated to a finish, the likes of which are normally reserved for elite, championship events. With Paul in front we probably wouldn't have been able to see the much slighter built Dan chasing him down, but we didn't have to worry as it was the Doctor in the lead. Try as he might, there was no way that Paul could find a way past & as they crossed the finish line it was "Daniel-san and the Karate Kids" taking out the Melbourne Midday Milers March Madness Relay 2007 - Barwon Heads, by a mere 7 tenths of a second.

Over 3 minutes behind the leaders Thorny brought his Team Green home onto the last step of the podium. A further minute or so later Troy Boy came into view. Perhaps it was past relay experience showing out, or perhaps it was common sense, but as soon as he came out from under the bridge Troy made a sharp right turn "up a steep but short track to join the bridge's pedestrian walkway". Amazing.

#### **The official times were:**

1 <sup>st</sup>	- Daniel-san and the Karate Kids:	3h33m47.0s
2 <sup>nd</sup>	- Can't Bridge the Gap:	3h33m47.7s
3 <sup>rd</sup>	- Tree Huggers:	3h37m23s
4 <sup>th</sup>	- We're Harbering Doubts:	3h38m50s

For the historically minded, the winning time in 2003 was Smoothie's "Team 2" (exciting team names that year) in a time of 3h35m01. Over a minute slower than this year's **second** place.

As the runners thought about what might have been if they'd adopted different strategies or just run faster, the BBQ got fired up & a box of Carlton Draught made an all too brief appearance.

AL Prez got to make his first Relay speech which left NFM standing amongst the rank & file, finally coming to terms with what the rest of us have been putting up with for years. There were congratulations all round, medals to the winning teams & the compulsory team photo. It was a good thing that the photo was taken quickly, as LG's medal rejected him & tried to donate itself to one of the local sand crabs. Then it was time for the announcement of the runner of the day. As much as there were plenty of great efforts, there can only be one winner of an award like this. This year the clear winner was Stephen Paine with 4 solid stages & running consistently above his seeding. A further award for gutsiest runner (didn't I just say there can only be one?) went to Dan "Dr. Dan, Dan the Man, Daniel-san" Hornery.

Congratulations to all who ran & thanks to the organisers, seeders & officials. Special mention to Mr. Ganly senior who drove the course a week earlier to give Junior Ganly up-to-date details on changes, like the hayshed being replaced by a recycling plant.

