

**MELBOURNE MIDDAY
MILERS
MARCH MADNESS**

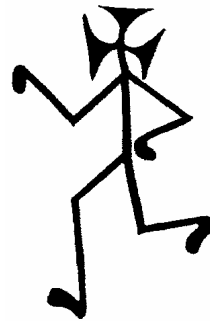


BARWON HEADS

5Ms



RELAY



2009

Prologue

After an unheralded build up that started on 5th of January when AL Prez put out the initial call for expressions of interest, the day of the 2009 Melbourne Midday Milers March Madness (5Ms) finally arrived. If printed & laid end to end, the number of eMails & Forum posts discussing this event in the lead up would have made a paper trail that even the most navigationally-challenged Miler could have easily followed. :)

The weather forecast for the day was for basically cool conditions & on shore breezes, with the chance of showers. The latter part of that forecast certainly proved true enough, as I used the wipers intermittently in my epic drive from my brother's house in Ocean Grove :) to the assembly point.

I was greeted in the car park by a surprising sight. Two years earlier, I'd arrived at the car park at about the same time & could have parked in any spot I wanted because it was deserted. This year however, I only had a couple of spots to choose from as the rest of the car park was full. It wasn't too long before my questions about the car park were answered, as members of the local footy team came running across the bridge on the path made famous by the epic battle between Doctor Dan & PM at the 2007 incarnation of this event.

While the lads went through their boot camp type exercise routine, I watched the clock tick past 8am & wondered where everyone else was going to park. Fortunately that turned out to be a non-issue though, because in the space of about 3 minutes the session went from full on training to jumping in cars to head somewhere else. That left the car park virtually deserted & the first hurdle of the day had been overcome.

So the competitors arrived car load by car load, until everyone was in attendance. In addition to the record field of 36 runners we had NFM, Hutz & Alan (AB) Barkauskas in attendance to act as observers/officials/photographers. All 3 had also brought their running gear & had been prepared to fill in as emergencies if the need arose. They all seemed relieved however that there was no such need.

Team Selections

The captains & flogs separated & the selection process began. AL Prez had the 1st pick & took Bevo, then Luke (Toby) Yeatman selected Thorny. So far the captains & seeders had agreed. There was never any question of that pattern continuing for very long though, & sure enough Smoothy bypassed Dozer in favour of O'Keefe. TW quickly snaffled Dozer, while the other Troy (DeHaas aka TDH) put things back on track by selecting Adrian (Choco). Next on the seeding list was Mitho, but he's never yet been selected as seeded. Surely this time he'd get some respect. It wasn't to be though, as first Fat Ass bypassed him for Nic, then House selected his "Friend" Cans. PM then selected Slips & the Doctor took Andrew (Taco) Bell before finally selecting Mitho. PM again ignored the seeding list taking Lawry, while House selected way out of order to pick up another "Friend" in Dizzy. Fat Ass got things back on track by selecting Hynes & TDH followed suit with Bacchus while TW & Smoothy selected Grunter & Ron (Biggsy) Thomas. Toby took GG, & AL picked Juanita to leave the bottom 9 on the list as the remaining, unselected runners.

AL skipped one Sandy teammate (LG) for another in the person of Tristan. Toby picked up LG, then Smoothy skipped Biggers in favour of the sprint specialist Harris. TW followed suit by picking GGO before TDH allowed Biggers to salvage some pride. Fat Ass selected EM, while House welcomed Jugs into his fold & PM skipped his Sandy teammate in favour of Dale (Raf). That left Slow Miler in Dan's team, relieved to not have any expectations placed on him.

The teams then did their best seagull impressions as they tried to score the fastest coloured singlets from the kaleidoscope of colours provided once again by the generosity of AB. Then it was into the team cars for the trip to the start of the Relay at the bluff.

The Bluff

A unique feature of the Barwon Heads event is that all team members run a reconnaissance lap of the first stage. This is done partly as a warm up & partly to avoid a recurrence of the incident many years ago where Metronome took a wrong turn through the caravan park. This year the lap wasn't quite done as a group, but everyone did manage to make their way around, & once the last of the stragglers got back to the start/finish area it was time to give the runners a very brief ... ummm ... briefing & put them in the hands of the officials.

The runners toeing the line first were Mitho for the purple team (*3 Plus 1*); Lawry for light green (*What Race?*); Dizzy for team white (*Juggernauts*); Hynes for the red team (*3 Sticks & a Chick*); Bacchus for dark green (*In Da Haas*); Grunter for team light blue (*Troy's True Blues*); Biggsy for maroon (*Marooned*); GG for the brown team (*2 Good Runners & 2 Good Men*); & Juanita for team yellow (*Go Tiges*). No surprises there, with all of the #3s running head-to-head.

What was a surprise though, was that at the end of the short, sharp 2.3k loop stage it was Dizzy handing over to Cans in the lead, narrowly ahead of Hynes who tagged Nic. Mitho was next in to send Taco on his way, with Bacchus hot on his heels tagging Choco. Those 4 were pretty close together, but they'd opened up a decent gap to Lawry, Biggsy & Grunter who sent Slips, O'Keefe & Dozer on their way. Another gap then to GG who tagged Thorny & Juanita who sent AL off in pursuit of the pack. Dizzy had claimed a few scalps already & justified House's faith in him. The rest ran more or less to seedings.

At the halfway point of the "timetrial" stage, Cans had moved the *Juggernauts* into the lead as he tagged Jugs. O'Keefe was close behind for *Marooned* as he sent Harris running, & Dozer had moved *Troy's True Blues* into 3rd tagging GGO. There was nothing between *3 Sticks'* Nic G & *3 Plus 1's* Taco as they tagged EM & Slow Miler, with *In da Haas'* Choco tagging Biggers a few seconds later. Hot on his tail was *2 Goodies* Thorny tagging LG & *What Race?'s* Slips a further 10 seconds back as he sent Dale off. Rounding out the field was AL for *Go Tiges* who had closed the gap a little as he sent Tristan on his way. Hard to separate the best run from this group with O'Keefe & Dozer separated by just a second. AL was looking much more like a #2 than a #1, so he had to hope that Bevo would be able to pick up the slack.

Moving into the next change & GGO put a big move on Harris on the final climb to move *Troy's True Blues* into the lead for the 1st time & send his captain TW off on his lap. Harris sent Smoothy on his way a few seconds later, with Luke tagging Luke 12 seconds later. EM & Jugs were locked together as they tagged Fat Ass & House, with Biggers tagging TDH shortly after. Tristan had made up a couple of spots as he tagged his #1 elect Bevo, then Slow Miler came in to send Doctor Dan off. Dale rounded out the field as he tagged PM who had it all to do with a deficit approaching 2 minutes to the leaders. Honours for this group would have to go to GGO, but the question had to be asked if his uphill, sprint finish had taken too much out of him.

The first team to compete the timetrial was *Troy's True Blues* with a 7 second lead. Smoothy brought *Marooned* in next, ahead of House's *Juggernauts*, Fat Ass's *3 Sticks & A Chick*, & Toby's *2 Good Runners & 2 Good Men* locked together. Dan brought *3 Plus 1* in next with a record breaking run, ahead of Bevo for *Go Tiges*. TDH was next home for *In da Haas*, while PM had closed the gap for *What Race?*.

Hitting the road

From here the runners hit the coast road for an undulating 3.75k stage. As expected, all of the #3s who'd started the event off were head-to-head again for this one. Grunter was looking a bit more comfortable than he did on the 1st leg, but Dizzy was closing in & tagged Cans just ahead of Grunter tagging Dozer. Hynes tagged Nic in 3rd & Biggsy was next in to tag O'Keefe. Fifth place was Mitho tagging Taco, followed by GG who tagged Thorny. Bacchus was next in tagging Choco, with Juanita & Lawry locked together tagging AL & Slips respectively. The clear winner of this group was Dizzy for the 2nd time, knocking 15 seconds off the previous stage record!

Stage 6 is a dead flat, 3.95km leg with just a couple of right hand turns to negotiate. Dozer quickly got past Cans & handed GGO a lead of 33 seconds. After having the luxury of stalking his prey in his opening leg, now GGO was very much the prey himself. O'Keefe was next in to send Harris off in pursuit, with Cans right behind him as he in turn tagged Jugs. Nic was a bit further back as he tagged EM, ahead of Thorny who tagged LG. Taco was just behind as he sent Slow Miler off, then there was another gap to AL who tagged Tristan. Rounding out the field was Slips tagging Raf, & Choco who tagged Biggers. Dozer, O'Keefe & Thorny all broke the existing record on this stage, with Dozer & O'Keefe officially dead-heating on time.

Stage 7 is 3.7km & basically flat. GGO was running scared & he somehow managed to extend his team's lead by the time he handed over to TW for the run into Barwon Heads for the break. Harris had consolidated his team's 2nd place as he tagged Smoothy, with LG making up 2 places before handing over to Toby in 3rd. EM tagged Fat Ass a mere 1 second ahead of Jugs tagging House, then it was nearly another minute before Tristan tagged Bevo. Biggers had made up a couple of places as he tagged TDH, with Slow Miler tagging Doctor Dan shortly after. Raf was over 2 minutes further back as he tagged PM who must have been wondering what had gone wrong. Honours for the group again would have to go to GGO for the fastest time on the stage.

Now it was TW's turn to run scared & he did it well, opening up his team's advantage to a very handy 1:05 at the break. The fast finishing House, Fat Ass & Toby finished together, with Smoothy just behind. Then it was over a minute to Dan, who'd clawed back 2 places & 30 seconds, ahead of Bevo, TDH & PM. The gap between 1st & last was just under 5 minutes, & the chasing teams would clearly have to find something to overtake *Troy's True Blues*. The wild card though was that both Grunter & GGO from the leading team were already feeling very second-hand & just hoping that they'd get through the day in one piece.

The break offered the usual opportunity for runners to recap the completed stages & plan their strategies for the 2nd half of the event. Competitors took on whatever fuel they were comfortable with & also made good use of the nearby facilities.

On the Road Again

The afternoon stages had a bit of a different look this year. Due to the Victorian Surf Life Saving Championships being held at the Ocean Grove club the same day as the Relay, the organisers had decided to take a cautious approach & replace the 1st & last afternoon stages with a couple of extra stages of the stretch of beach that is traditionally the penultimate stage. That meant that some navigation was required to get to the start of stage 9, but fortunately everyone seemed to manage that alright.

Tactics were clearly going to play a part during the afternoon, with some teams having nothing to lose by making some radical decisions. As a result, the line up for the start of stage 9 consisted of a #1 (TDH), a #2 elect (AL), 5 #3s (Slips, Dizzy, Hynes, Grunter & GG), & 2 #4s (Slow Miler & Harris). This stage has a hill that is a bit steeper than Anderson Street & considerably longer, followed by a quad-jarring downhill. So it would be interesting to see which tactics worked the best, although a decision on that couldn't be made based solely on the stage times.

In order to keep the runners together it was decided to have a massed restart. So the runners took off from the beach over the rather steep sand dune, with some runners opting to use the steps & others choosing the sandy path beside the steps. There probably is no right or wrong for that scenario as each runner has different strengths, although the sightseers did provide additional challenges for the runners who chose the steps. With #1s, #2s, 3#s & #4s running together it's hard to pick a stand out. Setting a stage record would normally do the job, but as AL was a #1 (or #2) running what was traditionally a #3 leg I'm going to give it to Dizzy. A #3 who again showed no respect for those seeded above him.

Let it Rip

Coming into the next changeover point AL had a 12 second lead over TDH as they tagged Tristan & Biggers respectively. So the #1 who had elected to run as a #2, had actually beaten a #1 in a head-to-head stage. :) Slips, Dizzy & Hynes were each separated by a mere second as they handed over to Raf, Ganly & EM. GG tagged cousin LG, with Grunter next in to send GGO on his way. The halfway point leaders had dropped 1:20 on that one stage, so it was definitely game on! Harris tagged Biggsy, with Slow Miler handing over to Taco to complete the field.

Tristan extended his team's lead on the road before handing over to Juanita, while Biggers had maintained his team's 2nd place as he tagged Bacchus. EM was in 3rd ahead of Jugs, who handed over to Nic & Cans. LG tagged Thorny, fractionally ahead of GGO tagging Dozer, but *Troy's True Blues* had dropped another 6 seconds. Biggsy was next in shortly after as he tagged Smoothy, with Dale & Taco locked together in 8th as they sent Lawry & Slow Miler on their way. Fastest runner for the stage, & new record holder was Taco, but with #2s, 3#s & #4s running together it's again hard to pick a stand out. I'll give it to Tristan, as he was the fastest of the #4s (the normally competitors for this stage) & he had the added challenge of doing it from the front.

The next stage is another flat stage & has the distinction of finishing 3.9km from the start opposite something that is no longer there. :) Fortunately though there were enough old hands around to know where the changeover should be. Thorny had managed to take his team into the lead on the road, narrowly ahead of Smoothy & Bacchus, as the 3 of them tagged Toby, O'Keefe & Choco. Dozer had pulled back over a minute of his team's on-road deficit as he handed over to TW, while Juanita was close behind as she tagged Bevo. Cans was next in to tag House with Nic a little further back as he tagged Fat Ass. Lawry & Slow Miler rounded out the field as they handed over to PM & Dr. Dan.

The highway crossing on this stage posed some challenges for timekeepers. In order to avoid the dangers of runners taking unnecessary risks, the clock effectively stops as runners arrive at the highway & restarts when the runners get moving again. After much deliberation it was determined that the new record holder for this stage is Smoothy. Thorny was initially credited with the record (having broken the old mark by over 30 seconds), until the marshals realised that Smoothy had been standing beside Thorny as they waited to cross the highway. So once the adjustment originally made to Thorny's time was also applied to Smoothy's time, it was determined that Smoothy had taken the record by a single second. However, given that Smoothy was a #1 & Thorny a #2, my vote for runner of the stage goes to the latter.

Exactly where all the teams were placed at this point was a bit hard to work out. You need to start with the times from this changeover & adjust for both the gaps after the morning stages & any highway crossing stoppages. You can do the analysis for yourself if you're the sort of person who skips to the end of a whodunit novel. All I'll say is that things had tightened up in the lead.

The lengthening gap between 1st & last on the road caused a minor problem. While waiting for the Doctor to start chasing the pack, Toby & the others were racing off to the turnaround point. This isn't the easiest section to follow the runners either, with the result that the runners were already on their way back by the time the cars made it to the Queenscliff station. No-one got lost though, so the cars quickly made their way to the next changeover so as not to get caught out.

House was the first runner in, tagging Jugs & breaking the old stage record in the process. Hot on his heels was Toby tagging LG, with a small gap to TW who sent GGO off. Barely a second later Fat Ass tagged Hynes & within another second Bevo had tagged Tristan. Hynes made short work of the 3 runners ahead of him as he stamped his authority on the stage, which was understandable seeing he was a high #3 running against #4s. Meanwhile Tristan had also made a move on GGO, Jugs & LG. Back at the changeover & there was a bit of a break before O'Keefe started Harris off, then a gap of over a minute before Choco came in to tag Biggers. PM wasn't far behind to get Raf moving, then it was over 3 minutes back to Dan who tagged Mitho. That put the purple team over 5 minutes behind the leaders on the road, with no chance of winning.

You'd think that setting a stage record would be worthy of being nominated as runner of the stage, but House's new record was matched by Fat Ass a few seconds later. So maybe they could share the honour, except that a certain Doctor Dan broke it again & his is the name that will appear in the record books. That makes it a tough call, but on the strength of his relatively lower seeding, I'm going to give this one to Fat Ass.

The final road stage goes down the main street of Point Lonsdale & incorporates some of the best coastal views in the state, but the runners weren't too interested. As Hynes disappeared into the distance, Tristan & LG had opened a slight gap over Jugs & GGO. The former 2 took a long way around the footy ground corner though which allowed the latter 2 to catch up. As Tristan pulled away again, this time it was GGO who followed him with LG & Jugs dropping back a little. In the last dip before the stage finish, GGO applied some local knowledge & made a decisive move on Tristan.

Hynes had already been finished by over a minute from his record shattering run though by the time GGO crossed the line. Tristan was 15 seconds back, with the same gap to LG & a little further back was Jugs. Harris was next in, ahead of Biggers. While out of contention, Mitho had still managed to turn a 3 minute deficit into a 2 minute lead over Raf. Another tough decision for run of the stage, with a record breaker from a #3 while GGO again outclassed the other #4s.

On the Beach

The plan for the final 3 stages was to run them out, back & out again as stages 14, 15 & 16. Considering the logistical difficulties however, it was agreed by the captains & organisers to have a massed run with the 27 runners yet to fulfill their quotas for the day. A fact that seemed to have escaped everyone though, was that one of those 27 would be Mitho who had just run his guts out through the streets of Point Lonsdale in a time that would have smashed the previous record for the stage. The other significant impact of this change to plans was that the officials wouldn't be able to stagger the runners start times to allow for the lunchtime gaps & highway stoppages. So first team across the line would not necessarily be the winner this year. Exactly what the gaps were at this stage wasn't really known, but it was clear that *3 Sticks & a Chick* had taken the lead from *Troy's True Blues*.

And so it was that 27 runners lined up on the sand for the 4.6k beach run. There was a concern that the officials wouldn't be able to get from the start of the stage to the end in time for the finish, so Hutz positioned himself on top of the dunes while GGO acted as stand-in starter.

As most of the runners took off the good Doctor decided that he'd rather play in the sand, becoming an obstacle in the process. All of the other runners cleared him, except for Nic. As Dan stood up, he managed to take Nic out. Meanwhile GGO & the other non-runners who had been at the start were making a mad dash over the dunes to their cars to try to get to the finish in time.

As it turned out, there was no problem with timing. Even with one official (who won't be named) proceeding to the stage 9 start rather than the stage 16 finish, all interested parties made it to the beach with time to spare.

First to appear was Doctor Dan who had obviously decided at some point to do some serious running. PM was next, narrowly ahead of Fat Ass. House followed, just ahead of TW, while Bevo just held off Dozer. O'Keefe had daylight both ahead & behind him as he came in ahead of a tight group headed by Grunter from Thorny, Taco & Smoothy. (If you've kept up with the teams then you might have worked out that all 3 of light blue's beach runners had placed inside the top 9, with Grunter producing one of the most ahead-of-seeding runs of all time.) Next in was Slips, TDH, AL & Dizzy, who had again upset a number of runners seeded above him. Mitho followed showing signs of having just run back-to-back stages, with Toby behind him vowing to never again run on sand. Lawry was next, from Cans, Bacchus & Choco. Nic was the next runner in, but his race had been compromised by losing touch with the group at the start. Juanita led GG home, with EM a couple of minutes further back.

That made 26, which was one short of the number of runners who started the stage. As the officials were reviewing the results trying to work out who they'd missed, someone worked out that Biggsy was still on the course. Sure enough after another couple of minutes Biggsy appeared down the beach to complete the field.

Final Wrap

The red team took a slight lead into the final stage, but it had come at the expense of leaving their #4 to battle it out on the beach. A gamble that clearly didn't work. Hitting the beach in 2nd place & getting all 3 runners home placed inside the top 10 it was pretty clear that *Troy's True Blues* had won the day. All that was left to do was to head back to the BBQ at Barwon Heads, formally tally the results & make the presentations.

Once back at the BBQ the officials gathered the timesheets & set about determining the final placings:

- 1st place, in a time of 3:31:12, went to *Troy's True Blues*;
- 2nd place, in a time of 3:36:07, was *The Juggernauts*;
- 3rd place, in a time of 3:38:11, was *Go Tiges*;
- 4th place, in a time of 3:38:22, was *3 plus 1*;
- 5th place, in a time of 3:38:33, was *2 Good Runners & 2 Good Men*;
- 6th place, in a time of 3:38:40, was *3 Sticks & a Chick*;
- 7th place, in a time of 3:42:49, was *In da Haas*;
- 8th place, in a time of 3:43:56, was *What Race?*; &
- 9th place, in a time of 3:46:10, was *Marooned*

and that's just how they would have been feeling.

Apart from the purely objective task of adding up times, the officials were also faced with the slightly more subjective task of selecting the runner of the day. This is a tough enough job at an average relay with 5 or so teams, but with 9 teams the job was much tougher. A few runners could consider themselves unlucky to have missed out on the inaugural "AB Award". Amongst the honourable mentions was Doctor Dan who broke 3 existing stage records & ran the fastest time for the new stage. Dozer & Grunter both performed above expectations, with Dozer getting his own name into the record books. Bacchus also performed consistently above seeding. There can only be one winner though & this time it went to Dizzy.

The job of putting one of these events on is fairly involved & takes quite a bit of time & effort from a number of people. There's the initial course design; driving over the course a week before the event to avoid unwelcome surprises; a form guide; getting runners to commit & seeding them; getting replacement runners at the last minute; race books; officiating on the day; photos; the Mullet Productions video; this report; the event singlets; the BBQ & refreshments; the medals; & of course the runners. So many people combine to make these events what they are, & so on your & my behalf I thank them (us) all.

If this report is the closest you've come to the action, then you've missed out. The next Relay is the Nigel Aylott Relay at Romsey, scheduled for November 8. It should be in your calendar already, but if it isn't then write it in now & make sure that everyone you know doesn't schedule anything inconsiderate like a wedding on that day. Until then.

The End