

July 20th, 2009



The 'Change a life' guys have been training run/bike/paddle for three months now So driving down into the Valley of a Thousand Hills early yesterday morning to collect the guys, I kept thinking 'Finally.... its been a long time coming'. There was a nervous buzz in the crisp morning air as the guys loaded the trailer with canoes and bikes. Once fully loaded, the trailer looked like one of those modern metal artwork displays – with bikes secured within and hanging off the sides.

Destination – Albert Falls Dam.

The 'Change a life' ranking determined from weekly Multisport timetrials is the following: Eric-1, Thomas-2, Zonele-3, Lucas-4, Nhlanhla-5, Kwanda-6, Richard-7, Mkhonzeni-8, Tom-9, Skhumbuzo-10.



Conditions were perfect for the first event in the Jeep Apparel Multisport Series, consisting of a 5km Trail run, 20km MTB, 5km Paddle.

With over 500 athletes participating across the 4 categories, the days racing was set to be a cracker.

Ready, GO.... Multisporters took off on the 5km trail run like there was no tomorrow. After the first kilometer, the pace settled down. My high hopes for Thomas were dashed when he took a tumble and thereafter limped along. After 3km, Kwanda, Nhlanhla and Eric had worked their way into the top 10. Lucas, Zonele and Richard were in the chasing group close behind. Once the initial climb was complete, Eric opened up the taps on the gradual downhill and charged into the transition in second place. I barely had time to remind him to follow the blue arrows on the bike and he was gone....

Nhlanhla came in 5th, followed by Kwanda. I waited for Lucas to leave on the bike and then hopped on mine to follow the race. Not even a minute up the road, there was a blue arrow pointing right, which the lead biker missed and continued straight. With the chasers affected by tunnel vision, Eric and company followed suit (into the sunset, never to be seen again). Not being in race mode, the blue arrow up ahead was easy to see and so instructed Lucas to turn right, and from thence the race redirected onto the correct course.



Zonele is the strongest 'change a life' biker, but was unable to test his riding pedigree against the rest as he flatted twice and dropped down the rankings. Richard managed to pass Thomas out on the single track. Having lost heaps of time, I was thrilled to see Eric, Nhlanhla and Kwanda had not given up, they were still giving it their all.



Graham Bird was first back in transition and wasted no time hopping in his canoe for the final 5km paddle. He crossed the finish line first, in a time of 1h38.58. Lucas got onto the water in 6th position. Now in familiar territory, he 'locked target' on the boats ahead and managed to catch and pass two of them, finishing 4th overall and winning his age group.



Richard Cele raced steady, coming 18th, closely followed by Thomas Ngidi – 20th. Thomas is my second fastest athlete and expected a better result and so could sympathise with his disappointment. Hopefully his injury isn't too serious. Mkhonzeni placed 27th, placing 3rd in the U/19 age category. Kwanda - 30th, Nhlanhla - 43rd, Eric – 52nd, Zonele 65th.



Tom Ngcobo and Skhumbuzo Ngidi won the Two Man Team category.



Jeannie Bomford won the women's race comfortably ahead of Jean Hackland in second place and Retha Shaw in third.

Lessons learned

- Never give up - race finish is primary objective, race position secondary objective
- Valuable time lost in transition
- Pacing yourself
- Fixing mechanicals more efficiently

All in all, the 'Change a Life' Team had a positive impact with everyone at the race. They were impressed that these novice athletes took on the long course in their maiden attempt. People were asking, "where have these guys come from?" Others answered, "Its those Dusi boys...."

We really look forward to the next event in the series, which takes place at Shongweni Dam on Sunday, 9th of August.

Thanks to Computershare 'Change a life', for creating a new chapter in the lives of the boys from the Valley of a Thousand Hills. Also, thanks to USN and Hi-Tec for their tremendous support.

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