

2011 World Masters Cyclocross Race Report

I flew into Louisville early in the week on Monday the 9th to try to get a few day of riding in on the course and to avoid the nightmare that is today's flying scene. Hard to believe but I had no major issue with flying and spent some layover time in Laguardia in NYC.

Made it to Louisville late Monday night and stayed at the official race Hotel the Galt House right on the banks of the Ohio River (they even had their own historic paddlewheel boat parked on their dock). Tuesday morning I was ready to get the the course which is about 3 miles from the hotel in a small park on the river that has been the location of several Grand Prix National Cyclocross Races for the past couple years. This of course was the Master Worlds, the first time ever held outside of Europe. It is a 2 year contract and next year will include the Masters and Elite Race in Late January and Early February.



The Cyclocross season of course starts in late August early September and goes in the US until Early January. My season was extended this year and I think this will be about my 30th day of racing this season. I started in a small park and Springfield MA and ended in Louisville, KY. Though I have competed in several National Championships, this was the first Worlds that I have been in. It was exciting to get this opportunity.

I connected up with Mark Wysoki, who had driven a whole enclosed trailer of bicycles down to Louisville from the Nationals In Wisconsin the previous week. I decided not to race in Nationals this year since it is really expensive to do both Nationals and Worlds and requires 2 weeks vacation. Mark had shipped both my bikes, one as my pit bike and the other as my prime racing bike.

In cyclocross it is important to have a pit bike since you are allowed to exchange bikes 2 times usually per lap and if the conditions are muddy and or you flat your tires, you will have a chance to finishing your race.

Tuesday I got on my bike and headed out on the course. It was still in set up phase buy most of the course was marked with posts awaiting taping. Cyclocross Courses are typical 2-3 Kilometers and include sections of dirt pavement, uphill runs, short steep climbs, sandpits, barriers that require shouldering the bike and this course had what is called a flyover. Sort of a bridge over the course that you climb up and ride down the

other side and also go under. Makes for some really cool eight loops. This course looked to be an interesting one. It was right on the banks of the Ohio River and was in a small 10-20 acre park that was mostly river bottom floodplain mud, a field and a small long burm about 30 feet high. It had 2 artificial sandpits a single set of barriers on a runnup and several sections that went up and down an off camber hill/burm. A real

Tom Stevens Classis (Tom is the most famous Cyclocross course designer in the US and has a particular affection for crazy off camber hills and runnups).



In the mass start cyclocross races the first lap is timed and then divided into the total length of the race which for my race is 45 minutes of torture. Course are usually 8-10 minutes in length and we usually do 5-6 laps. The conditions of Tuesday were awesome with 50 degree weather and very few out on the course

yet. It was a bit worrisome to see so much standing water in the fields though.

Wednesday (image left) the weather took a bit colder and wetter, but got out on the course and it had been changed several time since the loop was longer than expected. Still this was going to be a hard course if we got a lot of rain since there is essentially no drainage whatsoever.

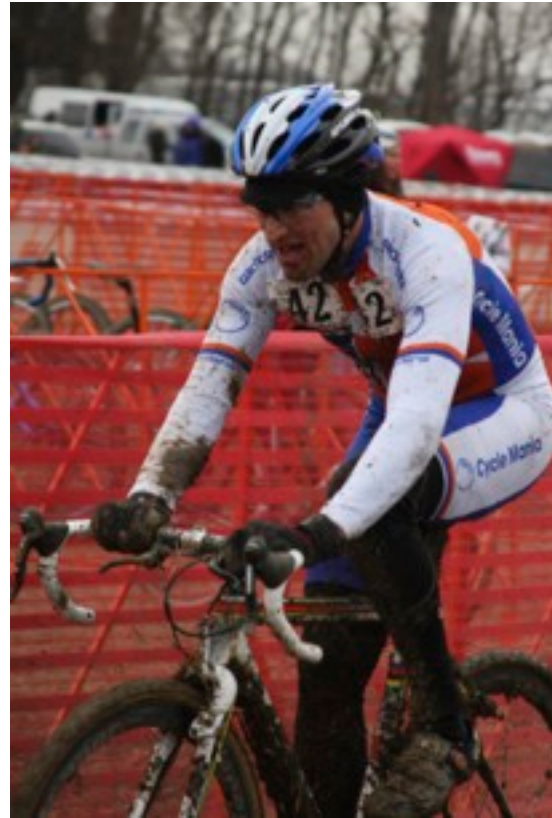
Thursday it had been raining all night and into the morning. Getting to the course, condition were setting up to be epic. Inches of standing water turned into half a foot of mud and what once was a field of grass, morphed into mud wallows only a pig in summer would love. There was little time to get a lap in on the new course, but I did manage a lap. There was no point in doing more since your bike filled completely with mud and I had only a short while to get the bike clean before my race.

In the morning I helped John Grenier as his pit crew. This was good to get a sense of the course and the conditions and how John did in his race. There were 2 heats that AM with the folks I arrived with. This included Bruce Shwab and Jeff Fisher. John and Jeff ground out a good race through the thick mud and John switched bikes once during the race and liked the tires on his second bike better. These condition were really horrific and make riding seem like torture. Plowing through mud and having it build up on your bike makes your nice light carbon bike add 10 lbs of dead weight. There were spray hoses but the line was long and you had to be fast in the pit to get ready for the next lap. John plowed through with a decent finish around 40 and so did Jeff. Bruce finished his heat in similar position.

My race was really hard. In fact the conditions worsened so much that we only ended up doing 2 laps on the course for this 30 minute qualifier. As Forest Gump would



say, we had mud of all kinds, from wet slimy to liquid to thick and hard downhill mud with soft gushy on top. The uphill runs were like sticking your foot into wet cement while carrying an anvil on your shoulder. The hardest part was that there were no



recover sections, this was all out effort at maximum heart rate for 30 minutes. I finished in the 42 and was satisfied that my start

position for Saturday would be in the top 4 rows.



Friday was interesting since it got bitter cold and everything froze solid. The race directors must not have been used to cold weather since they left all the water hoses connected to the truck overnight and left the course as is before it got cold. This was a really bad mistake since everything

turned into concrete. Especially the course.

Were every line of each rider dug deep into inches of mud, the ruts froze in place. Making the course scarred with lines in all directions that would grab your wheel and could rip a tire off the rim. I feel my strength in cyclocross is my technical abilities over my fitness or power, but I felt pretty humbled by these conditions. John, Bruce and Jeff and I ride out to the course in Down Jackets and everything we had on Friday to watch the 30-35 masters race and were entertained by the course conditions and impressed with the Belgian who won the race. Every rider fell, it was a matter of how many times. The Belgian, keeping with his national heritage (the real birthplace of cyclocross), won hands down.



Saturday was the big day for me and I promised to pit for John in the AM once again for his championships race and he would do the same for me in the afternoon. The conditions had gotten harder if you can believe, the frozen ruts were now melting in the 32 degree sun, and the thin surface of mud was like slip pudding on ice cubes. Making riding almost impossible unless you cross each rut at a strong angle. This meant zig zagging was to be the norm. Which Means riders all over the course. Falling was the norm, it was how many times less you did over the other guy and how bad your falls were. everyone fell. I mean everyone. John and Bruce and Jeff made out pretty well with new to cross riders Jeff and Bruce doing pretty good in the crazy stuff. There was riders going all over the place with course tape being knocked down left and right. Officials tried to improve a few deadly spots by putting sand in the grooves. It helped a bit but was not perfect.

My race started well, until we got off the pavement and onto a frozen rutted field,

bam riders down. In the long sandpit I managed to make it across and worked my way through the field. I was in 35th spot I think. Riding took every skill I had in cross, and running was even harder since your foot had to fit into predefined steps made the day before and frozen in time. This was no joke, you could easily break an ankle foot leg or more on the concrete with grease coating. My technique did not look pretty, but I made the whole first lap without any mishaps. In the second lap, fatigue started to set in a bit and I was caught behind a rider that obliterated the tape fence then decided to ride parallel to me outside the course. Knowing he had to come back in some time was not comforting, though what he did was illegal, I tried to give him some room, but he broke through right at a stake which cracked in half and flew into my bike. Luckily I only had to get off the bike to fix, but it threw me off a bit. Then it started to snow. Things were getting greasier and all the lines on the edge of the course were getting damaged by other riders, so I was force onto new ones and this is not a good thing. Lap 3 I was going well but was making some stupid mistakes, there was this not so hard turn onto the pavement and I seemed to never get that turn right, one time I had to quickly jump off the bike just to make the ridiculously small hill, arg.

By lap 4 I had made a bad fall in what I thought was an easy line in a field, but there were no easy lines and I lost all my speed and had to run a few feet. The temperature was exact enough that the sun melted mud was building up on your frame and then freezing solid in what seemed like how they make dehydrated food. Only it was pounds of mud. I signaled to John I wanted to try my other bike. I came into the pits for a change and was happy to have a lighter bike, however my tires were not the nice Challenge brand "Limus" model deep mud tires but "Griffos" which are meant for really light mud. So I had a clean bike but a more slippery one, sure enough 4th lap I went head over teakettle into the tape and onto my back. That one hurt a bit and I think I re-injured the rib I broke in October. I got up again, but lost some composure and a few places. I struggled to make it back on course, made it over a tricky sand pile. Next lap I changed bikes back to my Stevens (see above image) with the good tires, it helped and I made a few places and finished the 5th and last lap. Coming through the line I was one of the last riders not to be pulled (they will pull riders that might get lapped since it makes the race harder for the leaders and officials). They place you as you came in and it is normal to have over half the field pulled with really fast leaders. I had made 39th place, not pulled and was still able to count to 20 on all digits. While not my best performance, I was happy. There were some really good riders in these fields and it was fun to race with riders from Belgium, Spain, Japan the UK and other countries.

All in all it was a wonderful experience that I will not soon forget. Great to be able to ride with some other riders from Maine and also have Lucia make it down to cheer me on. My friend **John McGrath** who took the racing shots, thanks John!

Paul Weiss

OA/Cyclemania, Portland Velo Club, Masters Cycling Team

Lucia took
this last
shot.....

