

Medicinal Mud

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I woke up Sunday morning feeling absolutely terrible. I tried to talk and it sounded like Johnny Cash. I've been fighting off some illness for the past couple weeks, and it just isn't going away.



I got up and ran some errands in the morning (a benefit of doing the last race of the day) and just felt worse and worse. Leaning on the shopping cart got me through the store, but I was feeling horrible. I decided I'd go home and take a nap instead of race.

I got home 15 minutes after the time I wanted to leave for Barton Park. Put groceries away, kicked the idea around, and decided I'd go out and race anyway. Barton Park is too fun to skip.

After some belated bike maintenance, I took off late, arriving with less than an hour before my race. No time for a pre-ride, but I've done this course enough to know about what to expect. I was being such a wienie, I almost didn't take my single speed to the pits. But since I went through the trouble of putting it together and bringing it along, I did.

I arrived at the start area on second call, and planned on lining up in back. But nope, #3's were the first ones in line today, so I was third or fourth row I think. I got in line, took a deep breath, spit out my gum and clipped in. I started to feel better.

The whistle blew, and we were barreling down a gravel road, mud flying everywhere. I eventually settled in a large pack of 10 guys or so. I was pretty excited about that because this was definitely a course you don't want to ride alone on. An untimely chunk of mud in the eyeball and lack of concentration yielded a gap on that group. Trying to bridge up to them, I went into a short technical section way too fast and went over the bars, bike tangled in Barton vegetation.

I untangled the bike, ran up the little hill, and was joined by a couple chasers. We rode together for a while, and everyone was having a blast. Eventually, I looked back to see my teammate Jerome catching up to us. Jerome is a Frenchman with a thick french accent. He is fun to talk to, and fun to ride with. We call him "Mr. Big Powa" on our team because he is insanely strong.

"Hello Jerome!" I yell out.

"Allo Aiyreek!" He yells back. "I am here!"

Jerome eventually came around and pulled my hurting self around the paved sections. I could hang

on his wheel okay, but no way could I have gone that fast myself. We arrive at a tricky downhill right turn, and Jerome yells back "I am not so good in zis section!" So I come around and lead through the tricky stuff. He comes around and puts the hurt on again through the pavement, and we push on to the finish line.

After the race, we muddy cyclocross racers stood around catching our breath. Caked in mud, we shook hands and complimented each other on a good race. We were nowhere near the front (I think I got 22nd) but that didn't bother any person I talked to. We were just happy to have gotten out there and pushed it hard in the mud. This was by far the best racing experience I've had so far this year.

Post race clean up involved finding the biggest mud puddle I could find, and sitting in it. Truth be told, this is another part of Barton that I like so much. As I washed my face off with muddy water, I realized I felt great. I left the race course feeling like a different person.

Lots of crashes today, and some folks were seriously injured. If you're nursing some road rash something more serious, I wish you quick healing. Our beloved **Kenji** took a hard fall in the gravel and broke his collar bone. That's no fun, so be sure to wish him well. Another guy really got banged up and had to go out in an ambulance. I don't know his name but I sure hope he's okay. Get well soon.

And finally, a quick thank you to Melanie Rathe for her baked treats. As I was heading out, she was running around unloading some seriously good stuff. Sometimes, this woman is too good to be true.

Photo courtesy of **SoSoVelo**