

Sandwiched in between the Friday night street sprints and Sunday's road race, the Rock Hill omnium offered the Continental Criterium. We lined up Mark Griffin, Blair Palmer, Michael Satterfield, Dave Petree, Lonnie Brooks, Rodney Simpson and me.

First, the moral of the story. Before you offer to help even your closest friends try to win a bike race, check the weather forecast. If it calls for high winds, feign illness, an unexpected family obligation, something. I felt like Olive Oyl trying to hang on in some windswept road race by the North Sea. Or, as Roseanne Rosanna Danna used to say, "I thought I was gonna die!"

Not quite that bad, but still bad. There were no competing races in the southeast. Evidently there were no competing races anywhere because there were racers and teams from all over. Smith Barney (SB) once again would be the powerhouse. They came in to the weekend having won 6 races in a row. No wonder with their lineup. They were led by former pro John Atkins, Pat Raines who won two of the three races he entered against us in Greenville, and Rick Creed, highest ranked masters racer in North Carolina. To add insult to injury, they also had more guys in the race than anyone else. This is nothing new.

The course is 9/10 mile around the Winthrop University lake. It's a great venue. It would have been greater at less than 180 bpm, which is what it would be like for almost the duration of the 18 mile race. It flew from the beginning. Michael covered the first selection, but the field's pace quickly doomed the move. That furious initial pace allowed the next selection, only 4 laps into the race, to be the crucial one. Indicative of the improvement of this year's team, we had two men in the move, Blair and Mark. Despite the continued high pace in the field, the break stuck. At some point on the gradual uphill leg of the course, Blair came out of the break. Mark hung in. Despite the high wind, the break averaged over 25 mph and would have lapped the field if they had not backed off in the closing laps. At the line, Mark took 3rd place, with Atkins taking the win.

Behind, the field finally resigned itself to racing for what was left with 6 laps to go. I reached the final corner second wheel, with Michael in tow and Dave close behind. This became 1st wheel with maybe 400 meters go as Michael undoubtedly hoped for a better leadout than the one he was about to get. With 200+ meters to go and a tough wind, he had to jump early. Even so, only two riders (Ronnie Hinson and Barney Baxter) would catch him, as he snatched one of the remaining money spots. Dave finished near the front of the sprint, which gave him 5th place among the 45+ riders, an excellent result against the likes of Hinson, Baxter, and Canon. I was extremely pleased not to be steamrolled from behind by someone as I rolled in over those last 200m.

With Mark 3rd, Michael 11th and Rodney 19th in the 35+ race and Dave 5th in the 45+ race (the 35+ and 45+ divisions raced together but were scored separately), it was a solid performance. It was telling, I thought, that after notching those results, guys were not celebrating results that a year ago would have been personal bests. What used to be "great" is now just "solid." Strong progress, I'd say.

MLM