

The Chequered F1ag



A Formula One blog by Stephen English
www.stephenenglish.ie

Lorenzo lays down a marker

WHETHER it is Augusta National hosting The Masters this week, or Wimbledon in tennis there are always certain tournaments and venues that hold an extra special place in the hearts of competitors and fans. Jerez and the Spanish Grand Prix are held in such reverence by motorcycle fans.

MotoGP is a sport dominated by Spain, riders from the country dominated all three classes last year and with five races being held annually on the Iberian Peninsula it is impossible to think of MotoGP without also thinking of Spain. Of the five races held in the region each has a certain factor that appeals to fans.

The Portuguese circuit of Estoril always produces exciting races. The Catalan Grand Prix in Barcelona brings the sport to one of the world's cultural centrepieces. The Aragon Grand Prix takes place in Northern Spain and is the newest circuit on the calendar. With top of the range facilities teams and riders rave about the venue. The final round of the year is Valencia and the fireworks capital of Europe never fails to produce excitement. Valencia also has the added boon of usually has a title decider or two each season.

Jerez though is held in an esteem that is impossible to match. The circuit has an allure to each Spaniard racing in the three categories. Each wants to win this race above all other and as a result the racing is even more intense and this year, once again, it lived up to its hype!

The day started with rain clouds moving in from the coast and ended with Jorge Lorenzo diving into a pond of water as the reigning champion celebrated a superb victory in front of his adoring compatriots.

Pressure cooker atmosphere

Racing in front of a home crowd is one of the most thrilling, and nerve racking experiences, that any rider can have, for Spanish riders it is even worse than normal. In a land where motorcycle racing comes a very close second to football, this is one of the biggest single weekends of the sporting calendar. To understand the love that Spain has for MotoGP it is worth noting that for years they have idolised the youngest riders in MotoGP and 15 and 16 year olds lead numerous marketing campaigns.

When Dani Pedrosa first came into MotoGP he was immediately made the public face of Telefonica and now Marc Marquez is held in a similar light. As a result of such treatment it is understandable why local riders feel the need to push extra hard in their home race. This season Hector Faubel and Efrén Vazquez both pushed too hard in the closing stages of the 125cc race in their efforts to stand on the rostrum.

Vazquez crashed out of a relatively safe third position after making a small mistake at turn two. It was the second year in a row that the Derbi rider felt the pressure of racing at home and crashed out of a podium spot. Faubel, racing in his 150th Grand Prix, crashed on the final lap of the race while running second, to Nico Terol, and looking like he could take the lead.

There is a pressure cooker atmosphere in Jerez that makes riders push themselves past their limits. Vazquez and Faubel are far from the first local riders to make such a mistake, and they will not be the last.

Lorenzo continues to astound

Jorge Lorenzo was impervious to such pressure and took a superbly judged victory in the premier class race on Sunday. The reigning champion did not have the fastest bike in the damp conditions but, unlike his rivals, he stayed on track and did not push his tyres past their best.

In his first two years in MotoGP Lorenzo was prone to having a huge crash but the maturity that he showed last year is continuing to develop and the way in which he nursed his tyres throughout the 45 minute race was unbelievable. When his rivals were crashing out of contention Lorenzo serenely picked his way past Rossi, Stoner and Simoncelli to take the win.

At half distance it looked as though Pedrosa would challenge for the win but when Dani got within one second of Lorenzo the race leader started to press for the first time and quickly opened a commanding lead as Pedrosa floundered for grip and fell back for the leader into the clutches of Ben Spies.

The American struggled throughout the weekend but found himself in position to take second with six laps remaining. A small mistake from Pedrosa gifted the Yamaha rider the chance to follow his teammate Lorenzo home. Unfortunately Spies crashed five laps from home and handed the position back to Pedrosa who had a steady race to the flag.

Lorenzo's decisions to race conservatively throughout the race left him with the title lead after the opening two races of the season. It is ominous for his title rivals that Lorenzo has not had the fastest bike at either of these races but has finished second in Qatar and won in Spain. There is little chance of Lorenzo making silly mistakes and throwing away points so the challenge facing his rivals could be immense.

Stoner has taken two pole positions in 2011 and is riding superbly but his retirement leaves him 20 points behind Lorenzo. Stoner, world champion in 2007, is a rider of exceptional speed and his dominance of Qatar should not be forgotten, but a failure to convert early season dominance into a title lead has been the downfall of many riders in the past.

His teammate, Pedrosa, on the other hand has numerous question marks hanging over his fitness. Dani is still nursing the effects of an accident last year and will undergo surgery this week. In both opening races he has started strong before fading at half distance, clearly feeling tired from his injury. His title hopes are certain to hang on whether he can regain full fitness by the next round following the surgery.

Valentino Rossi is struggling aboard the Ducati but the team will have an upgraded bike available for the fourth round of the championship. His title hopes are dependent on whether the new bike is fast enough. It is very early in the season and it would be wrong to read too much into this wet race. But the form of Lorenzo in these early races will give his rivals sleepless nights in their four week wait until the Portuguese Grand Prix and will also have engineers working round the clock in Japan and Bologna.

CYCLING/MOUNTAIN BIKING Cuchulainn Cycling Club

Top class mountain biking at Bellurgan Park

ANOTHER weekend, another top class race hosted by Dundalk's Cuchulainn Cycling Club.

The mountain bikers put on the first round of the National Points Series, staged at the club's custom built mountain bike circuit at Bellurgan Park. The circuit is without a doubt the best off road racing circuit in Ireland and was built in conjunction with Bellurgan Park by the members of Cuchulainn.

With well over 200 riders competing throughout the day, all commented on the excellent facilities and organisation. Many a Saturday, Sunday and midweek evening was spent by cyclists in the forest with tools in hand mapping out the circuit under the watchful eye of Tony Kelly. While not building the course the same riders were training on it and their results speak for themselves in the first round of the series.

In the Senior Three race it was complete club domination with five riders inside the top 10 of the large field. Gary Shiels took his second win of the year, edging out clubmate John Grace with only a second between them. Stephen Kellegher was in 4th, David Dollard in 9th and Daire McCaughley in 10th.

The main event, the Senior One race, was won by Dublin's double Olympian Robin Seymour. The club's Aidan McDonald was less than a minute off the podium in fourth. Irish Cyclocross Vet Champion Gerry McCabe



A rider readies himself to tackle the wooden bridge at Bellurgan Park last weekend. INSET: Cuchulainn Cycling Club's Gary Shiels and John Grace who came first and second in the Senior Three Race at Bellurgan Park.

was unlucky to crash out on the last lap.

In the Senior Two race Alan Bingham suffered a similar fate, but good riding by Johnny McCabe saw him capture 4th spot. In the Senior Four race there was another podium for the club newcomer, Niall O'Flaherty taking an impressive 2nd position, with Chris Quinn back in 5th.

In the ladies club competition Sandra O'Hagan had a fine performance, finishing well up the field. Finally at underage level Aaron McCann netted another 3rd position for himself.

Meanwhile on the road racing scene Dermot Keelan made his way to Balbriggan on both Saturday and Sunday, coming home with prizes on both days. On Saturday Dermot was the first A4 rider home in the handicapped race, while on Sunday in the sprint for the line Dermot was second rider home.

Also in attendance on Sunday was Sean Loughran and in the same race came 5th.

Dermot is now only a few points off upgrading to an A3 rider, a feat he has completed in less than two months of open racing.

Last Monday night at Oriel Park the club kicked off its underage programme for 2011. Over 25 riders, from ages 12 and younger were in attendance under the watchful eyes of club coaches Sé Weston and Mary Laverty. The course will run for 10 weeks, in conjunction with Cycling Ireland's "Spocket Rocket" programme and see the riders learn many bike handling skills.

The club's next event is hosting a round of the Irish IVCA Road Race on Sunday April 10, this race starts from Felda at 10pm. The veteran section of road racing has seen a lot of growth the last couple of years and the club's Sé Weston and Martin Grey have both been successful, picking up national medals.

Also the FPM Summer Cycling League will be kicking off on Thursday April 14, rider's should go to www.dundalkcycling.com to register for the event.

SOCCER Emerald Casino Dundalk and District Darts League

Champions crowned

Stag's Gold and Martletts win top darts honours

Emerald Casino Division One League

AFTER the last two League matches we finally learned who was to become the Division One League Champions for 2011.

To be fair both Commercial A and Stags Gold brought it right down to the wire with super darts all year, it was however, Stags Gold who prevailed in the end winning their final match 5-1 and winning the League by one solitary point.

A hearty congrats to the new Division One League Champions Stags Head Gold. Commercial A and the Shamrock finished 2nd and 3rd respectively with solid darts both winning their matches 4-2 and 5-1.

All round it was an excellent year and I'm sure the 2011/2012 season will be no different and hotly contested once more.

Emerald Casino Division Two League

After only losing one match all year the Martletts finished the season on top of Division Two playing excellent darts from all members concerned. Congratulations to them and the DDDL wishes them all the best in their new Division next year. Not to take anything away from the other League members, whom many were throwing in the League for the very first time, played extremely well and I'm sure each team will be all the better for next season.

Dates of interest

First off, the open doubles for this year is on in the Commercial Club at 8.30pm this Thursday, April 7. If anyone hasn't filled in the form or returned it to O Fheareons they can pay and play on the night.

Any doubles team combination will be



The Dundalk Darts Select team who will play in the Super Cup in Belfast on April 9.

allowed providing they play from the same pub/club. The cost will be €0 per team and, as stated, will be an open draw/format.

Secondly, a Dundalk select team will be travelling to Belfast to play in the Inaugural Super Cup with another seven teams competing. The DDDL wishes the team all the best in representing Dundalk darts and let's hope they can return with some silverware. This event is taking place on Saturday April 9 and for further details etc or anyone interested in attending please contact Tony Fenton.

World Champion Denis Priestly will be in Dundalk on April 23, 24 and 25 in the following

locations: Lumpers on the 23rd, Commercial Club on the 24th and O Fheareons bar on the 25th. Anyone interested in attending any of the following events please note there is no cover charge in to see him but €0 to play him. I'm sure it will be three great nights.

Lastly, the open singles event will be on also in the Commercial Club on April 17 at 2pm on Sunday. Once more people can pay on the day if forms etc were not left in on time. The open shield event will also be completed this month and please refer to the sheets given to each pub/club for more information on this.

BOXING Dealgan Boxing Club

Six Leinster titles for Dealgan

DEALGAN Boxing Club was successful once more as their young boxers competed with distinction at the Leinster championships held in Kildare last week. With 11 boxers entered between 11 and 16 years, the Dundalk club took six gold and two silver medals at the provincial qualifiers.

With a very fine record in this event, it didn't take long for the first Dealgan boxer to show their class when young Ultan Stokes looked every bit a champion in his encounter with David O'Brien (Curragh) in the final of the Boy 4 39kgs.

With smooth footwork and precise combinations Ultan controlled the bout from the very first bell which culminated in his hand being raised on a 5-0 verdict.

Also at 39kg but at boy 1, debutant Tadge McConville, who came up against some taller opponents in his quest for qualification to the Nationals.

Tadge defied all odds when defeating Michael Joyce (Athy) in the prelims and Stephen Tackleberry (St Brigids) in the quarter final, whilst working behind an airtight defence and picking his scores intelligently.

Ruari O'Neill (St Broughans) was his opponent in the semi but proved too big and strong for the Dundalk lad who must have taken so much confidence from his performances in these championships.

Tadge's sibling Kalum was to fair better in the Boy 3 44kg class, as being the defending champion he proved why he is so highly rated by the Dealgan coaches.

Boxing with his usual southpaw combinations, Kalum stunned Casey Berry (Bray) in the opening round forcing his man to take a standing count. The remainder of the contest was all one way traffic as the Dealgan lad picked his shots with confidence to pave the way to the final against Anthony Stokes (Dunshaughlin).

Stokes, himself a good southpaw, was no match for McConville as he landed with cracking lefts over his opponents jab and prevented his man from closing the gap in the final round with an excellent defence ensuring the defence of his crown on a 6-1 score line.

At boy 3 39kg, former Leinster



Dealgan Boxing Club members who were recent winners at the Leinster Championships. Picture includes: Thomas Quinn, Orla Garvey, Tadhg McConville, Amy Broadhurst, Ultan Stokes, Kalum McConville, Darren Joyce and Patrick McDonagh. Picture: Arthur Kinahan.

champion Thomas Quinn was a little ring rusty after a long layoff. He tried in vain to out punch the taller Hugh Nevin (Holy Family) losing out on a 3-1 score after a very tough battle. No doubt Thomas will be back to winning ways as he showed all the hallmarks of a senior boxer in the making.

Former Irish champion Michael Quinn McDonagh won his third consecutive Leinster crown at 70kg Boy 3 as he had little problem accounting for Sean Walsh (St Brigades).

Working to head and body with sharp combinations Michael opened up a sizable lead by the end of the initial round and continued in that vein for the remainder of his final winning eight points to nil to book his place in the stadium later this month.

11-year-old Darren Gonnely Joyce was taking part in his first

competitive bout when taking on Martin Johnston (Drogheda) in the 60kg Boy 1 semi final.

Darren showed plenty of ability and looked every bit a future champ when out boxing the young Drogheda native. Winning each round the Dealgan coaches were delighted when Darren booked his place in the final with 10 unanswered points.

Unfortunately for Darren, Portlaoise's John O'Reilly proved too experienced in their final bout but he can be proud of his display and will be expected to go on to take titles in the not too distant future.

A very exciting prospect to emerge from the Marian Park club is 16-year old Patrick McDonagh who is progressing swiftly and adding the youth 2 86kg title to his name he most definitely looks like a boxer with a very bright future.

Dealgan ABC is proving to be a

real powerhouse in the world of female boxing, producing female champions each year.

These championships were no different as the Dundalk club were represented by no less than two excellent prospects at 36kg girl 1 in Nicole Agnew and Orla Garvey.

It was the former who came out on top in the final as both club mates traded combinations in a very stylish manner throughout. Both girls did themselves proud showing all the skills needed to excel at the noble art and Agnew taking the title 10-6 with young Orla being the first to congratulate her.

Also in the female section three times Irish champion Amy Broadhurst took the 52kg Girl 3 title and the classy southpaw is looking the favourite to go all the way again in the Nationals.

Hockey Dundalk Grammar School

Grammar girls are champions again

THE Junior girls hockey team from Dundalk Grammar School (pictured) travelled down to Skerries on Monday last to meet Wilsons School in the Meath League final.

They played on an astro-turf pitch, a surface the DGS girls would be used to and sure enough within two minutes of the starting whistle the girls from Dundalk won a short corner but with no goal.

With about five minutes left to half time, Wilsons saw a break in the Dundalk Grammar School's defence, got into the 'D' and scored to take a one goal lead in at the break to leave the Grammar girls somewhat depressed and dismayed.

The second half began and Wilsons defended well. However the Grammar girls had one



thing in mind: to bring the shield home. With five minutes to go they got a break and Sarah Rowntree put the team back in the game.

With extra time and the harsh golden goal

rule looming - golden goal rules allow the team that scores the first goal during extra time to be declared the winner - the DGS girls pushed forward and with just 30 seconds to go Elizabeth Flood

put an end to the team's worries when she scored the winning goal.

The final whistle blew seconds later to put an end to a nerve wracking and exciting game of hockey. At the end of

the day Wilsons fought hard and played well and showed grace and poise under pressure.

As for the team from Dundalk Grammar, their passing was strategic and thought out but their passion and drive could not be quenched. It is also worth mentioning that the junior team is solely made up of third year girls, which means that they meet combined teams from third and fourth year, they are playing against girls that have a whole year of experience and strength above them.

To finish the hockey season with the title is truly a wonderful achievement. Congratulations to the girls and to their coach Ms R Eveson from the Grammar and as for next year, how about three in a row?

Leinster and Irish call ups for local badminton players

NO fewer than six badminton players from the county of Louth have received Leinster and Ireland call ups over the next four weeks. Its a fantastic achievement for the sport in the county and shows the resurging presence the sport has.

Ashling Coyne a college student of DCU and St Vincent's student Michelle McCourt are set to travel to Hertfordshire, England on April 16/17 to play for Leinster in the English Inter County Championships. They will be pitted against some of the best over 17 to under 21 players from the British Isles.

Secondary students John Byrne and Donal O'Leary played for Leinster in the Inter Pros at Baldoye last Saturday (April 2) and this was the first time John played for the province after being selected for squad training at the beginning of the regular badminton season last September.

Donal on the other hand has a wealth of experience at this level and he will continue competing when he turns out for the Celtic challenge which is due to take place on April 9/10 in Lisburn Co Antrim. There he will face opposition from Scotland, Wales and Ulster in a round robin based tournament which will decide the overall victor.

Liam O'Leary will be travelling to Nottingham where the Leinster under 17 panel will be one of forty teams travelling to the event over four days on April 18/21. Liam who is fresh from competing in the national under 17 tournament in Lisburn where he made it to the semi final of all three events he competed in. Liam at the moment is putting in top class performances in the singles category. Liam was the only player at the tournament to take the top seed of the competition to a three set game. Liam also played for the Leinster under 17 squad last Saturday.

Fionnuala McCourt is pride and place at present with the great honour of being selected to represent her country at under 15 level. The St Vincent's student who has been making waves at under age level for many years now will travel with the rest of the Irish squad to Milton Keynes England which is the home of English Badminton on April 29 to May 1.

She will be competing in a Quadrangular event pitting herself against the cream of the young crop of players emerging from England, Scotland and Wales.

She will play in team events over the three days however there is also a individual tournament to take place on the Saturday afternoon and will give her a chance to shine on centre stage. Before she takes up her international duties Fionnuala will have played for the Leinster panel no fewer than three occasions and this will prove a great build up exercise before her trip to England.

She is due to play on April 2 in an Inter pro tournament in Baldoye then its off to Lisburn where she will compete in the Celtic Challenge and then her first of two trips to England to Nottingham on the 18th to 21st. This is the second time the Dundalk native has been picked for the international panel and has shown great dedication and hard work towards improving her game as far as badminton is concerned she has a bright future.

All the above players play in our local leagues and cups so this is great recognition of the standard of player that is being produced in the county and with them all being of a young age there is a bright future within county Louth badminton.

Kernan Equestrian Centre results

March 27 - Horses

80CM - 1, J. Griffin's Kilwinny Duchess (Colleen Maguire);
90CM - 1, F. Doyle's Millburren Lady Zed (Niall Byrne); 1. L. McSorley's Ferro Lans (Conor McEneaney); 1. J. Griffin's Kilwinny Duchess (Colleen Maguire);

1M - 1, F. Doyle's Millburren Lady Zed (Niall Byrne); 1. P. McEneaney's Moonlite Cavalier (Conor McEneaney);

1.10M - 1, E. Hanratty's Right Touch (Siobhan Hanratty); 1. A. Kavanagh's Ballyorney Fionn (Killian Barrett); 1. J. Rooney's Carmenflag (April McCrea); 1. J. Clarke's Victorias Legion (Sean Hanley); 1. P. McEneaney's Moonlite Cavalier (Conor McEneaney);

1.20M - 1, A. Kavanagh's Ballyorney Fionn (Killian Barrett); 1. Vi Young Reicka Ker Ch (Vi Young); 1. S. Hanley's Miss Capone (Sean Hanley); 1. Niall Byrne Regual Touch (Niall Byrne);

March 27 - Ponies

128CM 90CM - 1, H. Patterson's Euro Magic (Ronan Patterson); 2. F. Roche's Cappagh Banjo (Michael Roche);

128CM 1M - 1, H. Patterson's Euro Magic (Ronan Patterson); 2. F. Roche's Cappagh Banjo (Michael Roche);

138 80CM - 1, M. Murphy's Michelas Lady (Michaela Nugent); 1. D. McCaughey's Blackwater Melody (Aaron McCaughey);

138 90CM - 1, M. Murphy's Michelas Lady (Michaela Nugent); 1. T. Forde's Little Maggie May (Eva Forde); 1. M. Barrett's Mister Jump (Niamh Barrett); 1. M. Macklin's Tom March (Eve Macklin);

138 1M - 1, M. Macklin's Tom March (Eve Macklin); 2. M. Barrett's Mister Jump (Niamh Barrett);

148 90CM - 1, D. McCaughey's Lackamore Comet (Sean McCaughey);

148 1M - 1, D. McCaughey's Lackamore Comet (Sean McCaughey); 1, T. Forde's Zambucca (Eva Forde).

Forthcoming events

Horse and Pony Training Shows every Wednesday at 6pm; Horse and Pony Training Shows every Saturday at 10.30am.

Horse and Pony Registered Spring League continues Sunday March 27. Horses at 10am. Ponies approx 1pm. There is no league show on Sunday April 10. Horse and Pony League Show on Saturday April 9. Final on Sunday April 17.

RUAS Balmoral Qualifier Horse Show take place on Sunday April 10. Mini Grand Prix Horse Show on Bank Holiday Monday May 2.

Horse and Pony Summer League starts Thursday May 19. Final on Thursday July 21. Ulster Grand Prix Sunday June 19. Contact James Kernan on 00353(0)868370376 for more information.