

UCI Masters Cyclocross World Championships, Louisville, KY, Jan. 12-15

Race Report by Men of Steel Racing's Todd Andersen, finished 7th in the Men 50-54.



Day 1 Wednesday:

After driving in rain for most of the trip from Fort Wayne, IN, to Louisville, I arrived Wednesday afternoon around 3:30 p.m. to survey and pre-ride the course. After an hour of walking and watching others attempting to ride through the soupy, sloppy, and in some sections sticky peanut butter like goo, I decided to keep my two nice, clean and race ready rigs safely in the car. I didn't believe I was going to learn anything on the bike that I hadn't already seen walking the course.

Day 2 Thursday:

Arrived bright (o.k. dark) and early at 7:30 a.m., I was the first one there and snagged a primo parking spot close to the flyover and pits, savored my Starbucks and thought about pre-riding. After walking the course I decided to keep my bike clean and learn the course as I went. It wasn't going to be fast and it definitely was not going to be pretty. At 9:30 a.m., it was 45 degrees; I decide to keep the knee warmers on and went with a light glove and arm warmers. I was positioned second row middle, gun went off and it was a mad dash down the asphalt start/finish straight and a sweeping left into the grass and down the first hill. We were 10 ride and going 25 to 30 mph an hour. I stayed wide on the right hand side and shot into third position before going into the S curve and first jump, hit the first sand pit which was 3/4 under water and took the sweeping left hander heading towards the pits.

I looked back and 4th was 50 - 75 feet back with 5th another 100 feet, the field another 500 feet back from that. I focused my eyes forward and plowed through the mud like Satan himself was chasing me. I reached the flyover, the first 100 feet was completely submerged, I jumped off my bike, threw it over my shoulder and ran the stairs as fast as my legs would carry me. I jumped back on my bike at the top and hit the water and the mud at the bottom of the ramp like a pig doing a swan dive. I plowed through the rest of the mud cake course pushing 6-8 mph until I reached the first barriers and run up. I slogged through that mess and reach the second sand pit; the sand was so deep it was up to your calves. I snaked my way through the low section of the woods back past the pits and headed back to the woods for the dreaded mud bank.

This section consisted of a muddy run, 180 back down the back which was rideable, then a 180 back up which was stepped off 1/2 way up about every 5 feet with jagged concreted slabs that jutted out waiting to tear your ankles off. At the top it was back on the bike and attempting (every failed) to ride a 100 ft section of off camber that was 6-10 inches deep and had the consistency of creamy peanut butter. Then it was back down a 30 ft drop to curve around and run back up so that you could ride back down it, do a 180 in the other direction and run back up 6-8 inches of creamy thick mud (oh by the way 90% of this area was bypassed and removed from the course on Friday, lucky bastards). It was a flat section with a few S curves which dumped you back onto the asphalt and a 500 ft sprint to the start finish line. That was lap one.

On each lap it became a little muddier, (is that a word??) a little slower and your bike a little heavier. Did I mention I was still in third..?? On my third lap the 4th place rider caught me, or maybe I was going so slow I caught him. He and I exchanged places several times, trying the first the best line or should I say the line where your bike sunk the least. It was brutal to say the least. I believe I was the only rider in the top five that didn't grab a clean bike in the pit. I don't have as much confidence in my pit back as my race bike (note to Mylien: purchase Todd a replica of his race bike for the pit for 2012).

By the third and final lap (UCI officials determined due to course conditions after Thursday's qualifying would consist of only 2 laps, lucky bastards!), my legs felt like lead and I have no idea how anyone could identify one rider from the next. The 4th place rider and I were still duking it out. Halfway through the third lap I put the hammer down and placed a gap between him and me of about 75- 00 feet. Unfortunately, on the last running section through the woods 4th and 5th caught me and passed me in the running section (note to self, purchase leg lengthening machine in off season). I was happy and exhausted to roll across the finish line in 5th.

After picking up my race number (9) for the final at 1 p.m, I headed back north to Fort Wayne.

Day 3 Friday:

10 a.m. Dave McComb (trusted companion/mechanic and pitman (man those guys drink a lot of beer), picks me up and we head back down to Louisville in the snow and 30 mph west winds.

We arrived in Louisville @ 3:30 p.m. to walk a frozen rutted (remember all that mud..?) course that resembled the Alaskan tundra. A.K.A the 2012 blizzard of Louisville.

The UCI officials were out and making final changes to the course prior to the following days finals. They essentially moved the course over by 10 feet in either direction where they could or moved one side of the tape by 6 inches in order to provide a narrow path past the jagged frozen ruts that would eventually grab your wheel and sling you across the trail like a Kentuckian spit'en chewing tobacco out his car winder.

Day 4 Saturday:

Up about 6 a.m., breakfast off to the course, temp @ 21 degrees and sunny.

If you can imagine a shortened course, frozen, ruts 2-6 inches, maybe 8 inches deep in some places, you are there! It was going to be much faster than Thursday, but much more technical and dangerous.

At the starting grid I was sitting comfortably right behind Steve Tilford. All I had to do was sit on his wheel and I would be on the podium. The firing of the starting pistol woke me from my day dream and we were off!! I was 8 -10 back when we hammered down the straight away in my big ring 46 x 12 sprinting for the first corner, down the hill I stayed right along the barriers trying to stay out of the deepest ruts at 20 - 25 mph's. I was being jarred so severely that I could barely see where I was going and bouncing off of ruts and those around

me. After passing the deepest and most severe ruts we were starting to enter the first S curve when chaos ensued. One guy in front of me went down taking the one next to him down as well, I had no where to go but to bunny-hop the guys bike directly in front of me. I made it over most of it and endo'd after striking a rut. My bike flew over me and landed over a course post like a horse shoe on a stake. I jumped up grabbed my bike, it took a little effort to get it off the post, I looked up to remount my bike and saw about 25 guys hammering down the field in front of me. I threw my leg over my bike and the chase ensued.

I slowly started picking through the field in front of me hoping to reach my goal of top 10 before time expired.

Dave McComb lost no effort in shouting his encouragements and letting me know what place I was in and how many seconds ahead me the next rider was. On at least one occasion, Dave mention Steve Tilford was only 2 minutes ahead and I could catch him if I picked up the pace (those were not his exact words, but close #!\$%#*!!!). I was amazed the more riders I passed the more people yelled "go Men of Steel!!!" On the run up sections in the woods (the couple that remained, that was prime real estate for fans) there were several guys I raced within the Indiana series who would yell words of encouragement especially when I could run pass 3-4 riders.

As you are already aware of, I finished 7th and could not be happier to be in the top 10. I was approached by several individuals after the race offering congratulations and asking about Men of Steel.

I would like to thank all those who encouraged me to participate and supported me. I want to personally thank Dave McComb, what a great guy to have in your pit, watching your back and fun to travel with. Chuck South for his cheering and support, Steve and Mike Souers for showing up and cheering us on, Sarah and her husband, for cheering me on, letting me know my position and taking photographs. Men of Steel Racing for your support throughout the year and this event and everyone else for lending support, gear, clothing etc. (Pat Herrick, Chad Tieman) and last but not least Rita, Kyra and Kyle who encouraged me to participate, attend races and are the next generation. I love them more than they will ever know!!