



“Rumours of my demise have been greatly exaggerated”

Covid 19 Freedom Run. A new event name but in very familiar surroundings. Held in Lilliput Adventure Centre in Westmeath, about an hour from Athy, this is a place I’ve come to love in recent years. There is nothing not to like about Lilliput and the events that Franky Wright the owner/host puts on.

It ticks all the important event boxes. Great location, superb course, fantastic staff, friendly & relaxed vibe (from host/staff & participants). Great value for money & the bling & post race grub is always impressive and plentiful.

I’ve shared race reports on events here before & lots of the race day detail & logistics can be found in those (shared in FB & club website). This report is more a personal account of the day. An important day for me. It marked a return to doing something I’ve missed greatly and worked slowly towards getting back to for the past year or so. After a tricky period of poor health last year, which resulted in me having to accept some downgrading of physical ability & reassessing of personal goals and sporting ambitions it was time to accept the “new normal”. As the Fine Young Cannibals once sang, “I’m not the man I used to be,” but I’m not quite ready to be thrown on the scrap heap just yet. While my semi-slim, fast finishing, PB chasing days are a thing of the past (Not that I was ever that fast!) the main goal of enjoying the day while putting in a proper effort remains the same, and that was the plan here.

On the car journey to Lilliput, shared with my running buddy & good friend Seamus Rowan I’d said I wanted to target a 4:45 marathon finish. That is the “new norm” for me. The plan being to do a steady first half, ideally sub 2hrs, but to really just enjoy the feeling of running in a race again and then approach the 2nd half with a bit more caution and care. Target a 2:45 for the 2nd half by adopting a run/walk strategy, manage the heart rate and physical stress the priority. The auld ticker isn’t what it once was & I’d like it to keep ticking for a while yet!! So, decked out in the obligatory ATC kit I took up my favourite starting spot, in the middle of the (socially distant) pack for a Covid compliant rolling start to the marathon.....

Where’s Wally.....



We found out just before the off, that the course had been slightly adjusted from the original plan. Due to road resurfacing issues, it was switched from a 21k x 2 route to a 7k x 6 route. This really suits me. I love laps. It’s not to everyone’s taste, but I find it easier to handle. A series of short runs rather than one big long one. Distance is the same but the mental approach is very different & I find much more manageable.

There were approx 70 participants, including some marathon legends & loyal Lilliput supporters.

Dave Brady, Oggie Winters being just two of the several in attendance that I get a buzz off meeting. I greatly admire these men and true to form they were friendly and welcoming as always. There was a really obvious feeling or air of gratitude from all too. People regularly sharing their thoughts about how great it was to just be back running with people/friends. Franky had gone to great lengths to ensure the event was fully Covid compliant & people did appreciate his efforts. I think everyone was just grateful to be given the freedom to run again. Certainly felt that way. Smiles everywhere, no one worrying about injuries or niggles or PBs or any of that sh1te.

So shortly after 9am, off we went. No sooner had I started and I was firmly reminded that things have changed for me. I was ticking away at a reasonably comfortable effort for the 1st lap. A couple of years back that would have seen me up with the front pack (in this event). On this day it saw me joining the more casual runners towards the back!!! The lap has an out and back stretch too which allows you see everyone ahead of you, and as the 2nd & 3rd Laps unfolded, I noticed I was slipping further and further behind the stretches out field.

Time to just put that stuff out of my mind and concentrate on the task at hand.

I had a reasonably satisfying first half. Crossing the timing mat just under the 2hrs for the 21k. I rewarded myself with a stretch, change of top & change of pace/approach.

I walked the next 2k while scoffing bananas & jellies. I had felt the sting of a blister or two forming too so decided to stop at the first aid station on the 4th lap. Ended up taking a fair while to source and apply some plasters/dressings but it needed to be done. I've always suffered from blisters, doesn't matter what socks or runners I wear. Anyway, they can be nasty little b@stards and fair sore but never enough to consider quitting. I dealt with them and rocked on. Well shuffled on more like.

So laps 4-6 consisted of fairly regular stops and stretches, walking for 1-2km and jogging for 2-3km at a time. This was necessary to control the heart rate, or allow it time to drop down plus it was a nice way to take on some fuel. I've always found that once my HR is over a certain point (say Zone 4) it is impossible to digest anything, including water. Efforts to stay hydrated always resulted in a sloshing belly and additional effort. Fuelling/hydrating while walking however works a treat. You're still moving forward but filling the tank at the same time. Obviously not a great strategy in a 5k or 10k race and it greatly impacts your time & average pace etc., but defo worth incorporating into longer events. Longer events are my gig now.....



So the COVID 19 Freedom Run was a run of two halves. Both challenging & rewarding for different reasons. The new norm is something I'll have to get used to but it's worth it to be "back in the game". I've really missed it. Every aspect of it, the physical and mental health benefits of a good auld run are huge, that's obvious to anyone who runs. The social engagement, the time spent with like minded people is a massive draw for me too. It's something I've learnt to appreciate and focus on more and more. The banter and laughing, the catching up with friends. The simple fact of being

outside and appreciating your surroundings. After being cooped up for so long, having the opportunity to get out and enjoy a breath of fresh air is literally and metaphorically.... a breath of fresh air!!!!

Methinks Seamus enjoyed his day out too.....



If you see me unconscious at the finish line, please stop my Garmin!!!!

I'll be back in Lilliput in a few weeks for the August Bank Holiday Celtic Warrior Event. My absolute favourite Irish based Triathlon event. It's becoming more popular with ATC members too, with folks coming down to participate and/or support fellow members. Bringing the family with them for a good day out. I can't over sell it to anyone who hasn't been & is considering it this year.

Hope to see ye there.....