

Marathon running isn't marrow to Joe Ó Muircheartaigh's bones, but he put himself through



Members of *The Clare Crusaders*, who ran the Dublin Marathon on Bank holiday Monday in aid of Children with Cerebral Palsy sufferers in County Clare.

From left: Marina Mullins, Emily Mellet, Barry McGuire, Tim White, Frank Cassidy, Seamus Fitzgerald, Brendan Doherty, Cormac O'Sullivan, Simon Whelan, John McCarthy, Frank Doherty, Tom Kennedy, Joe Ó Muircheartaigh, Ray Staunton, Gerry Quinn, Dermot Whelan, David Lucey, Howard Flannery. Missing from picture: Antoine O'Looney, Dominic Moloney, Kevin Barry, John Kelly, Martina Callinan, Bob Lyne Jnr, John Squeri, Michael Dennehy, Mike Cloutis, Alan Logue.

The Torture



THE alarm is set for 6am, but this was one race I was always going to win. I'm awake, while the world sleeps. I look at the mobile – it's 5am and my Che Guevara screen saver is smiling down at me. 'Che,' he seems to be saying with his big, fat, f**k off Cuban cigar in hand, 'you mad'. 'Tell me something I don't know'.

6.30 am

BREAKFAST call, but it nearly never happens. The first step on marathon day is a very tentative one – so tentative that I slip and fall down the 13-step stairs. Unlucky for me, but lucky that I'm used to falling on my arse and fall back as I'm going forward. Carpet burns, grazes and a sore arse are my rude awakenings.

7.30 am

READY for road – the 'Big Brother' microchip to track my every step is tied into my lace; the arse soreness is easing while the only burns I'm thinking about is burning up the roads around Dublin. Still mad Che.

8.30 am

THE *Clare Crusaders* are gathered at Bewleys on Grafton Street. Half an hour to start – there are stretches and photocalls. The only call I'm worried about is the one from nature. It's in my waters – what to do, where to go.

8.45 am

THINKING of an old football friend I knew in Dublin many years ago. Haggis and the rest of us blue-blooded Gaelgóirí in the Clann Choláiste Mhuire club were journeying up O'Connell Street one night in '87 with the intermediate cup in hand. Nature called Haggis around the GPO. "Can't go here," he said patriotically and turned back and let nature's call come outside the British Homes Stores. I did the same – Bewleys may not be the GPO but it's still sacred – so I crossed the road to Marks & Spencers instead. Nature called.

9.00 am

AT the start line – this is when the fun run is

supposed to begin. Mr Motivator, aka Howard Flannery, said it would be fun, but it's pouring rain, it's cold as the gun is loaded on Nassau Street. Others are smiling and laughing, but I know the tears and pain will come later. The gun goes, we're off.... Down Nassau Street, over to Pearse Street, on to the quays as we cross the Liffey on Capel Street Bridge. Soon we're astride the Mater Hospital. The men in white coats could be holed up there – ready to storm the streets and take us away. How bad!

9.40 am

IN the Phoenix Park and we pass the Zoological Gardens. We hear the animals – they're locked up but we're the ones that should be behind bars for putting our bodies through this. Must be fun though, because the animals behind the wire seem to be laughing. Who's in the funny farm now they're surely saying.

WE leave the Park behind us at Chapelizod Gate – then we cross the Liffey and my left knee stiffens. Apt really. It was along the Liffey that I hurt it in the first place – a drinking injury way back in '87 in the Garda Boat Club. And, to further remind me of the force, Inspector Tom Kennedy is at my shoulder.

INSPECTOR Tom and myself are shoulder to shoulder for 16 miles – we pass the halfway point in 1:41.24, but he just moves through the gears and goes away around Terenure. Water en route doesn't give life anymore – instead I'm beginning to experience what the burning fires of hell would surely feel like. Running, but burning and there's no quenching the fires inside.

11.15 am

ONE man is getting sick, another leans against a tree, but somehow I stay going, but want to stop when one misguided Yankee supporter on the sidewalk roars 'good jawging'. 'Jogging', I roar back, 'jogging isn't torture, this is'. I want to go back and hit him.... Other supporters are different though. 'Come on *The Clare People*'

torture around the the streets of Dublin to complete the distance. This is his diary of the day.



The Clare People's Sales & Marketing Director, Irene Hamilton, presents The Clare Crusaders with a donation of €5,000 to assist children with Cerebral Palsy in Co. Clare.

Trail

are the Clare champions'. 'I knew we'd put one over on the Champion', I say...It gives a pep to my step, but it only last about ten steps. Then it's back to grinding out the yards that go so slow. It's one foot in front of the next – there was me thinking I'd trained for this marathon madness. Not hard enough mate.

11.40 am
YOU think of Mr Motivator at these times – 'Get the miles in if you want to enjoy it' he roared as he shadow boxed out the Kilrush Road one day. He even did the Ali shuffle that day. His words float into by brain, but sting like a bee. I'm stinging now.....We got the miles in with Mr Motivator, but there was never enjoyment. Enjoyment would be doing what Dermot Whelan did during a break in training. He went to Vegas and played the roulette wheel. Come to think of it, even playing Russian Roulette would be better than this. One bullet, four chambers – you live, you die. I'd take my chances and roll up for that any day over this day.

12.00 pm
INSTEAD, my insides are rolling and roaring with pain. The Wall comes at around 19 miles – it's seven miles high, but I have to keep climbing. Talk to yourself, roar to yourself, anything to keep going.

12.10 pm
'CRYING inside', Cormac 'born to run' O'Sullivan said one day. The crying was on the outside now. Some sobbed, others made anguished cries. Near tears came around UCD – not out of nostalgia to my old alma mater, but because I knew there were still six miles left.

12.24 pm
MORE pain around Trinity, where I wanted to stop and walk for a while. Not at Trinity though – the indignity of stopping outside the place that us UCD old boys hate would be worse than the pain....I didn't stop – instead

I crawled down Nassau Street and the crowd was ringing in my ears.

12.30 pm
385 yards to go and I was cursing the monarchy. It was to ensure that the marathon could start at King Edward VII's Windsor Castle home and finish in front of him in his royal that 385 yards were added to the marathon distance for the 1908 Olympics.

12.33 pm
No pain, no gain they say – but I was gaining nothing as I hobbled towards the line and looked for help on the way. 'Where's Sham when you need him'. Kilrush man Dr. Michael Bolger was the one who famously helped Italian Dorondo Pietri as he crossed the line in that 1908 marathon, only to get disqualified. The crowd helped me and got me home – and I wasn't disqualified.

3:33.31 was the time, when you factor in the 28 seconds it took me to pass the start line. Over and out on my feet, I was just shattered. The 100 yards beyond the line to collect my medal and gear bag was the longest journey of my life. Nothing had changed really – Che was still smiling with his big, fat, f**k off cigar in hand. Just what Dr. Che would have ordered. A smoke, Cuban cigar, Silk Cut, any kind of smoke. Exhaust fumes would do.

SITTING down, I couldn't get up for an hour.

Elated? No! Happy even? No! Greatest sporting moment? You'll never beat winning a county final chap! Rather have experienced the Ennis townies winning the championship the day before than this? Yes, but the townies will win again – I'll never run a first marathon again.

3.00 am, Tuesday, November 1
The day finishes as it started. I'm full of stout and fall on the stairs. Going up, I come down. Meant to be really! Elation had sunk and soaked in with the pints though.



Further donations to aid Children with Cerebral Palsy can be made through Joe Ó Muirheartaigh at The Clare People, Carmody Street, Ennis.