

Waterford born Swedish gaelic footballer turns hand to cross-country skiing

BY GER LAWTON

WHILE most local hurlers and footballers are still slogging through the muck and half-lit back pitches in pre-season training mode, one Waterford man was recently involved in a novel way of preparing for the new GAA season, which will soon be kicking into gear for most club teams.

Waterford man, Keith Hearne (who grew up in Hillview and played hurling and football with Roanmore), and three fellow members of the Stockholm Gaels GAA team, have spent the last three months in grueling preparation for 90km cross-country skiing race between the Swedish villages of Saelen and Mora.

The other Irish members of the team, who also took part in the challenge, were

Karl Lambert of Wicklow, Don Conroy of Dublin and team coach and Swede Par Hellstadius (who's married to an Irish woman).

Stockholm native Par is the only experienced cross-country skier in the quartet, with the Irish-born trio strapping on their skis for the first time around Christmas. Since then, Par has coached them every weekend to prepare them for the massive which they completed on Sunday week last.

"It's not just about fitness, the training was pretty difficult for us as we had to master the basic technique as well. Otherwise you just slide and fall all over the place going downhill and it gets dangerous," says Keith Hearne, who completed the Reykjavik marathon last year as well as winning the Scandinavian gaelic football

championship with the Gaels.

"It's been pretty cold lately. The sun went down when we were training one evening and the temperature dropped to about -15 in the space of a few minutes. Even my teeth were numb," said the 32-year-old IT consultant, who lives in a suburb of Stockholm with his Swedish partner, Malin Leander.

"I'm probably more at home with a hurl than a pair of skis, but a hurl wouldn't have been much use to me in this challenge. Our day began with breakfast at 5am and then we began the race shortly after seven and we made it over the finish line just over nine hours later, which I'm told is very respectable.

"I found the first 60k quite handy and the last 30-25k

was a bit grueling, similar in feeling to the last 10k of a marathon. Had I known before completing that it is one of the longest cross-country ski events in the world, I may not have entered, who knows, but the support of the three others lads made it all a lot easier and we got through it."

Next up for Keith is a return to Waterford next week, to Tramore to where his parents now live and he's in no doubt as to what he's most looking forward to.

"I'll be back in the Déise next week for a few days and the thing I'm most looking forward to is some blaas for breakfast. I can't wait," says Keith Hearne.

The champion footballers and their Swedish coach joined over 12,000 others in what is one of the high points of the amateur

sporting calendar in Sweden.

Back to the GAA and despite being known as a corner-back, Keith popped up with vital goal when the Stockholm Gaels won the Oslo tournament on the way to becoming Scandinavian champs last year (Keith is far too modest to give me that kind of information so thanks to Phil for that).

Whatever the future in the skiing world holds for Keith and his Irish team-mates, one thing for sure is that they will all be in great shape when they start the defence of their Scandinavian Gaelic football title in Gothenburg on May 14 next.

Right: Waterford native Keith Hearne who is making a sporting name for himself in Sweden.



Over 200 competitors flock to Tramore Duathlon

Saturday week last saw the fourth running of what is now Ireland's largest Duathlon on the seafloor in Tramore, when over 200 competitors took to the start line in glorious Spring sunshine.

Following a week of dreadful weather the omens were not good for a favourable day on Saturday. However morning broke and the southeast was resplendent with Tramore Bay acting as the perfect setting for this early season challenge. There were athletes of all abilities present from all over the country and all were eager to tackle the 3 km run, 16km bike and then 3 km run.

The race got off to a frantic start as the large field sped out through The Gap and headed

towards Riverstown. Brian Murphy of Carrick AC was the early pacesetter as the rest of the field struggled to stay with his blistering pace. Brian led into T1 but the chasing pack was not far behind as Jim Baldwin and Martin Kirwan of Waterford

Tri were within striking distance and indeed found themselves hotly pursued by Carrick man Kevin Shelley, Carlow Tri's Keith Heary and a host of local athletes all keen to shine on home turf.

No time was wasted in T1 as the athletes quickly substituted their trainers for cycling shoes and made a quick exit. The bike course has been improved this year with the recent resurfacing of the main Tramore Road. New

roads or not there was a strong northerly wind to deal with but as they say, "it's the same wind for everyone."

Defending champion Martin Kirwan used all his experience and power in the bike leg to establish a healthy lead over Keith Heary with Kevin Shelley back in third closely followed by Eddie O'Donoghue. In the ladies category there was a titanic tussle developing between 'supervet' Niamh Richardson, Catherine Brown of Carrick Tri and her clubmate Diane Behan. There were also strong performances from local stalwarts of the Triathlon scene as Garry McCarthy again showed his endurance and experience as he gradually made his way up through the field.

Local Tramore lads were also to the fore. Tramore "Metalman" Triathlon winner in 2010, Tadhag Cronin was holding a top 10 spot and a relative novice of this event Paul Ogle was also well placed in the top 15.

As the race leaders headed out on the final run leg Martin Kirwan was in pole position and it was a lead he was not going to let slip as he romped home in a new course record of 45.23, knocking 36 seconds off his previous record which he set in 2010. Can anyone stop this man! Keith Heary maintained second and Kevin Shelley was third.

In the ladies, Niamh Richardson pulled away from Catherine Brown to claim the ladies title with Diane Behan in third. Stefan Green

was first of the male Vets and Carrick tri won the relay event. This year saw the largest participation of juniors ever and is a sign of the popularity that the sport now has. Pierre de Lesatar was the first Junior over the line with a remarkable time of 51.41 which was 21st overall.

This year's nominated cause was Down syndrome Ireland. A big thank you to Sportiff Waterford Cycling Club who helped out with the marshalling, Tramore Order of Malta, Tramore Garda, T-Bay Surf Centre and indeed our lead sponsor, Spokes Cycles.

Check out www.transitionevents.com and www.spokes.ie for all results and photos.

See in the summer for the 3 Bay Challenge.

Spokes Duathlon in Tramore

Photos:
Gary O'Mahony.

