

Report for Lexus Croydon 10k (Held 16th October 2005)

By Robbie McIntyre

Swede Peter Fallenius fought off the challenge of two local lads to lead home a field of over a thousand runners in Sunday's Lexus Croydon 10k.

However, long before Peter had set foot on the Lloyd Park course the race had begun with disabled athletes Clare Forbes and James Gower setting out for an early start. Starting an hour before the rest of the field this allowed them both to finish amongst the bulk of the competitors. James made his way with the use of crutches whilst Clare tackled the course with the aid of her father Eiffe and cousin Lee. Having already become the first female to complete the London Marathon on two artificial limbs in nineteen hours this race offered perfect preparation for her aim of completing the New York marathon and allowed her to raise much needed money for the Douglas Bada Foundation.

Whilst James and Clare were working their way around the course the Wolfe Clinic were taking the rest of the runners on a thorough warm up to background music provided by Radio Mayday. As the fully stretched athletes reached the start line they were greeted by Croydon Harriers two Commonwealth athletes Donna Fraser and Martyn Rooney, there to start the race with the help of Mayor Maggie Mansell.

Once the athletes were successfully away it was clear which runners were there to win. Within 2 kilometres Belgrave pair Peter Fallenius and Richard Ward had broken clear of the field with Croydon Harrier Jonathan McCallum for company.

Between the second and third Kilometre down Shirley Church Road the youngest of the group, local lad Ward, put in an early bid for victory, creating a thirty metre gap to second placed Peter. He in turn pulled thirty metres clear of McCallum but the local favourite spent the third Kilometre working hard to close the deficit, putting in what he later described as his fastest phase of the race. By the time they had reached halfway at Addiscombe Road he had caught Fallenius and had Ward in his sights.

Had McCallum's race preparation not been curtailed by a recent chest infection he may well have converted this budding resurgence into a spectacular drive to victory, but in reality his lack of training took its toll. By the time he reached Trinity School after six kilometres he was back in third, leaving Fallenius and Ward to battle it out for first. It soon became apparent that forty-one year old Fallenius had expended less energy than his twenty-three year old clubmate and as they turned onto Chepstow Road to begin their eighth kilometre he put in what was to prove the decisive break. The Swede eventually crossed the line in 32 minutes and 50

seconds, not as quick as has been required in previous years but enough to give him over half a minute lead on this occasion. Despite calls from the crowd encouraging McCallum with the observation that Ward was tying up Belgrave's second placed runner crossed the line with a twenty second cushion from the Croydon Harrier.

Fallenius was pleased with his efforts, observing wryly that "you can do no more that beat everyone else who is running". Previously a 3 minute 45 1500m runner in his native Sweden the veteran has recently reinvigorated his career, and this victory was a clear testament to that. Despite coming from the same club as the man who followed him across the line he and Ward had never previously crossed paths. Ward also has impressive track credentials having recorded 1:50 for the 800m and 3:44 for the 1500m. At twenty-three he is coming back from the trials of breaking his arm in eight places and suffering glandular fever. If his performance here is anything to go by he still has a promising career ahead of him.

Completing the top three elite runners, former Commonwealth Games 1500m runner McCallum was relatively pleased with his efforts. His stunted preparation had in turn stunted his expectations and third place left him hopeful that he is in good enough shape to retain his Surrey League Cross Country title after he managed a tentative 6th in the first of the series the week before.

The three men were presented with their prizes by Donna Fraser and Martyn Rooney, both of whom are looking to strike gold at the Commonwealths in March, both in the 4x4 and Fraser also in the individual 200 and 400 metres. Were it not for a recurring Achilles injury, which has blighted his track career of late McCallum may well have been joining them in Melbourne. Along with the rest of the top fifty the first three men received complimentary tickets for Crystal Palace V Coventry, with the Croydon 10k working this year in conjunction with Palace's Centenary celebrations.

As the first-placed runner Fallenius also took the 40-49 Vets group by well over a minute from Herne Hill Harrier Victor Maughn who, 8th overall, had a comfortable lead over 3rd placed 40-49 runner Croydon Strider Tony Sheppard. Between the two finished the top two Junior Men Josh Hart (Epsom Oddballs) and Martin Harry (Sutton and District).

Notable as the third Junior man was fourteen year old Ben Robson. Part of Mike Fleet's training group along with Martyn Rooney, international Rooney is tipping the youngster for big things, and he crossed the line in an impressive 26th overall. Fleet's group also had success in the kid's 3k race as two more of his athletes, Josh Alexander and Keri Davison took first place in the boys and girls races.

Croydon found further success in the 50-59 category as Croydon Harrier Julian Dillow took first from Croydon Striders Robert Ewan and David Batten.

Croydon did not have a stranglehold on the Ladies event however, as Kelly Vennus took first in a highly impressive overall position of 23rd, clocking a time of 37:45. She was followed home by two ladies from the 35-44 category, Marie Johnston and Croydon Strider Helen Furze. Gail Arnott of Beckenham RC prevailed in the 45-54 category in a time of 48:19, a full minute ahead of Cambridge Harrier Lucy Hine. The 55+ race was won by Bromley AC's Anne Unseld, and Croydon Striders got back in on the action to claim second in the shape of Patricia Edwards.

Despite taking the top two positions Belgrave did not do enough to secure the men's team trophy, as the superior strength in depth of Croydon Striders and Croydon Harriers saw them take the top two positions, the Harriers falling agonisingly short by just eighteen seconds. The Striders completely dominated the Ladies team event however; not simply satisfied with taking first place they took second for good measure.

Many parties must be praised for the most successful 10k to date, not least those who added colour by dressing up for the race. Notable were Graham McCormack and Paul Haile in Gorilla suits and Andrew Forrester, who in the form of an oversized carrot is fast becoming a Croydon 10k veteran. Lexus must be thanked for their sponsorship of the event, and this year also for their participation. General Manager Peter West finished exhausted in 1:09 with eighteen year old international Martyn Rooney for company over the last hundred yards. Martyn's insistence that West run right through the line, etched into his brain through years of insistence by coach Mike Fleet, shaved at least a few seconds off Peter's time. Also responsible for a smoothly run event were St John's Ambulance, Waitrose (who provided bottled water), Tramlink Personnel, Metropolitan Police Z Divisions and 1st Selsdon and Addington Scouts. Radio Mayday and the Wolfe Clinic ensured a great warm up, allowing as many runners as possible to raise money for Mayor's charities Croydon Youth Development Trust, the Pet Aid Hospital and Croydon Cat's Protection League. Runners were rewarded at the finish with goody bags from new running shop Runathon (to be found on Surrey Street). Ultimately, the biggest thankyou must go to Martin Rowe, who organised the event in conjunction with Croydon Council, Cultural Environmental & Leisure Services and once again produced a wonderful Croydon 10k.

For those who missed it this time and would like to compete the next Croydon 10k is pencilled in for April 9th 2006 with details to be found at www.croydon10k.com.