

## Bill's Most Excellent Blackburn

Gil and I had Bill out for his first row outside the harbor. By the time we got to the end of Sheffield Island the SW wind was kicking up the waves up to two feet. Bill was a sailor. He had seen waves before. Never rowed in them though. I knew he kept a close eye on Gil and me to see if we showed any signs of concern. The Alden Ocean Shells could more than handle the conditions. So could Bill. Welcome to open water.

Six years later. Bill and I went out together for some higher intensity training for The Blackburn Challenge. Bill was loving his new Maas 24 Carbon. We did a 45-minute training piece, starting outside Norwalk Harbor and going around Sprite Island and then Cockonoe Island. Four minutes hard at a 25 strokes per minutes, one minute easy rowing. This until we got to 45 minutes. We knew that for The Blackburn we would want that pace for 3 hours or so, without much in the way of rowing easy for a minute.

"It would be harder to do that workout alone out here," Bill said

For The Blackburn 2009 I printed up a Race Plan. Something I haven't done before, at least not in detail. I had my stops planned, my stroke rates and notes on my "Mindset" and effort levels. I had notes on how much efuel drink and how much "Sustained Energy" drink I would consume. The older I get the more I like having plans for stuff. There was even a spot where I said, "Here I pass someone."

I sent Bill and our friend Rob emails of my Race Plan. It turned out to be a good race plan. It turned out to be a perfect race plan. (*Foreshadowing here*)

Bill and I have done lots of races and rows together. Bill is not particularly built for rowing. In some of Bill's earlier successful races and rows, I recall he joked "not bad for a short fat guy." He doesn't use that phrase anymore.

The weather report was making me nervous. At one point, the forecast for the Blackburn had 80% chance of thunderstorms during the scheduled race. Bill had more faith than I did. "I don't believe it.," he said

Bill was right. By Saturday morning 6:00 am, the heavy rain and thunderstorms had passed by.

My race plan was for a 3 hour 5 minute Blackburn. Last years was 3 hour 7 minute. I was very happy with last years result.

It was crowded at the start. I lined up behind Tim Willsallen. I knew he would jump out quick and not be in my way for more than a few seconds. Kinley Gregg was next to him. I think Bill was a few boats away. 3,2,1 GO!

I started right on the plan. Stroke rate 28 spm for 3 minutes, then drop to 26/27 until I see 20 minutes gone by. Then drop to 24/25 for the duration. By 20 minutes most of the pack was ahead. I expected that. My race plan predicted 9th place out of 15, for the 1x sliding seat racing. Not too ambitious sounding, but if you knew the Blackburn..... And if you knew the competitors ahead of me.....

Bill was close by. He likes to go out strong. I have done that and sometimes it works, and sometimes you crash. I hate to crash. Bill typically stays near me for a while. He has a good idea of my pace. A number of races my pace had been to fast for Bill to stick to. This year he knew the whole race plan. I was not going to overwork the first half of the race. One of my "Mindset" notes is "the race starts here" at the halfway point, which is Straitsmouth Point.

It helps you to keep going sometimes when you are pacing someone. Bill was staying side-by-side or a little ahead all the way to Straitsmouth. I followed my plan, stopping at 50 minutes to hydrate, even though I don't feel thirsty by this point. If I don't stay hydrated I am prone to cramping. Hate that cramping.

Bill pulled into Straitsmouth just ahead of me. We shout out our numbers to the official's boat. This is an extra long stop for me. " We are right on the plan" I yell to Bill.

Time to gulp down lots of the Sustained Energy drink and The efuel drink. I see Bill has taken off already. I am in no hurry. Take your time. Get hydrated up and energized. The race starts here.

Now we go into "the big wave area". I had that called right in my race plan. Some pretty well behaved and not too steep waves, but more than enough to make a 13" wide at the waterline boat feel like it was in open water.

Bill was doing well piggybacking on my race plan I thought. I didn't feel like I was racing him. Just do your own race and don't worry about Bill. Bill is likely to slow down soon. This I know from experience. I have found in many races when you are rowing near someone, one of you might feel like you are in a head to head race and the other might just be doing their own thing.

Bill is keeping ahead. He is loving his Maas. My Peinert Dolphin is right at home also. The Maas is a small 1" wider at the waterline. I believe the Maas is easier to row in the waves and the Peinert Dolphin a little faster in flat water. I start putting in a little more effort. The waves get a little easier. Things were going according to plan. Except this was the area the plan was to pass someone. No one was accommodating to this part of the plan. Well, soon I will probably be passing Bill, I thought. He is doing great. I can spot his green shirt in my rower's mirror. I keep to my plan, except for the pass someone part. I stop, according to plan. Bill stops when I do I notice. Takes off when I do. I haven't gained on him yet. Plenty of race left. Just stick to my plan. I wasn't racing Bill. I was doing my own race.

I know it is 2 or 3 miles to the Breakwater, which is the start of Gloucester Harbor. About time I pass Bill, but if not, my plan was for a push in the harbor. Bill was doing well. Last year I had come in 50 minutes ahead of him. No doubt I would be passing him soon.

Last hydration stop before the breakwater. I was 5 minutes off the race plan maybe, but feeling pretty confident still. Time to push. I saw Bill seemed to be getting a better line than I was. I'll catch up to Bill by the Breakwater I was thinking. Bill kept the inside track and made it there first. Now I feel the race. Still time to pass Bill. The plan saved something for the push in the harbor. Two miles to the finish. I stop at the end of the breakwater. There are people cheering on the competitors. I hydrate. I start to worry about stopping too long. I start the last leg. The last leg all right. Wam. My left thigh gets hit with a cramp. I have to stop. Knead the cramp. Grab the efuel with the extra electrolytes (the endurolytes). A concerned safety boat comes over. "Yea I'm OK, just a leg cramp." They got there quickly. Like a good waiter, unseen, but there when needed.

OK, the race ain't over yet. I know Bill is tired. What a good race he is having. This cramping is annoying. Some rowers are taller than others, some have better bigger hearts, and some need less hydration. Some have different strengths or weaknesses. Some have back problems or , etc., etc. Whatever it is, when you get to the Blackburn "You run what you bring."

OK, I am going again. The cramp has smoothed out. I see a tugboat that had been following us into the harbor. I do believe that the tug stood back and went out of their way to not interfere with the race. That is a change from years past when a few four foot wakes and brushes with death were not uncommon in the harbor. I think the

Blackburn and its financial benefits to Gloucester are more appreciated these days.

Where's Bill? A half mile to go. The race ain't over yet. I am definitely racing Bill now. Plus I see Klnley's orange shirt a few minutes back in the harbor. Pick it up. Wow, looks like Bill is going to beat me. Do two minutes at a 28. Finish strong.

"Number, Number" I heard. Jeeze, let me finish the last stroke and get through the finish first.

"Fifty Eight" I yell. Fifty-Eight happens to be my age! "Five Eight" , "Yes, Fifty Eight"

Bill was on the good side of the finish line waiting. After about a minute Bill rows over to where I am massaging my cramping leg.

"Wow, Great Race Bill!!!!"

I finished about 8 minutes slower than my race plan. The currents and winds made for a slightly slower course this year, maybe three minutes slower. So my race plan was a good plan for me. And a perfect plan for Bill. Bill finished 9<sup>th</sup>. That had been my plan.

I am still trying to figure out how Bill cut 41 minutes off his last year's time. Beat me by 34 seconds. Some rowers are taller, some shorter. And some rowers can row beyond themselves. Bill "Bulldog" Russell" is one of these. This was a peak performance for Bill.

"When one rows it is not rowing which moves the ship: rowing is only a magical ceremony by means of which one compels a demon to move the ship"- Nietzsche

Bill had his demon working for him that day around Cape Anne.  
Long Live Open Water!

Wayne Lysobey