

Ben Dubois - Winner of the World's Richset Mountain Race!

Interview by Russel Dessaix-Chin

Congratulations on your stunning win in Nigeria, Ben. Tell us a bit about the race.
This was the inaugural running of the race. The aim is to make Obudu Ranch Nigeria's number one tourist destination and they thought an international race was a good way to publicise the place. I think quite a few athletes were sceptical, Nigeria being the home of internet scams and all, but the endorsement of the president of the World Mountain Running Association was good enough for me. I decided that it was worth the risk and so it came to be.

Were you expecting this result? What sort of lead up races and preparation did you have?
I am not sure if I was expecting to win. Certainly I had a very good year and felt the form was good before going over. I had done a couple of sub 15 minute 5k tempo runs and was racing very well on the bike, so I knew I was sharp. It was really the culmination of a solid 12 months of work. I raced poorly in Cape Town a week before which rattled me a little but it was brutally hot there, I just had to forget about it and refocus.

How did the race pan out for you? At what point did you know you had the race wrapped up? Were there plenty of African competitors? There was a great deal of prize money on offer, so that would have been very attractive to them.

I knew that the majority of Africans would be inexperienced and would start too fast so I had to make sure I didn't get caught up in that. Everyone feels good to start but if you go lactic too early your race is over. You can't get it back under control on a climb unless you virtually come to a stop. I started very slowly and pretty much laughed as I watched people exploding further up the road. By only 2km I was forcing the pace and at halfway only a Nigerian and Robert (Czech runner) were with me. Robert dropped soon after and the Nigerian I lost on a steeper section with 3k to go. He continued to chase though, I thought I had a kick if needed but the gap at the finish was only 6 seconds. I was never sure that the race was mine.

What were the post race ceremonies and functions like?

A circus basically. There were about 15 TV stations plus radio, newspapers, etc so there were about 2 hours of interviews before the presentation. The Governor of the state,

who is held in fear and awe, presented the awards. I had a few drinks with him later, he's actually a cool guy.

What are your plans for the summer? You do have a strong background in the less mountainous races as well; do you plan on entering any of the "flatter" track meets?

I am already quite deep into my preparations for the next European season. It's a very long season, 7 months, so I need a big base. I wouldn't mind having a crack at a 5000m or two. The trouble now is that I do so much cycling, which doesn't do much for leg speed, particularly now when I am doing big mileage and a lot of hills. It's frustrating in a way to be fitter than I ever have been but to have nowhere near the same leg speed. It's not the same now because I am used to racing at 5 mins/km or slower, with a much slower stride rate, the demands are very different. By February I'll be doing over 1000kms per week on the bike, including 2 races each week, so my legs will be pretty rubbery most days. I don't have the same enthusiasm for track that I once did and when you aren't running fast it's a harsh and lonely place.

You had an excellent season in the European Mountain Running circuit last year, what do you think has helped you reach this next level?

In 2004 I decided that it was "now or never" and took the risk to spend a season in Europe doing track races. Things didn't work out real well on track, I wasn't putting it together so while I was there I did a few mountain races for fun where I finished without distinction. I came back flat broke but I learnt a lot about what it takes to be really successful and I was determined to go back properly prepared with clear and achievable goals. 6 months here in Australia, training consistently harder than I ever have before, harder than I thought possible in fact, and I was ready. I started well and kept improving which only served to increase my confidence as the season progressed. The thing is that I haven't been injured or even sick since about mid 2003 which certainly helps. Having a plan is critical then you just train as hard as you possibly can.

Will you be going to Europe again this year? Tell us about some of the races you plan on competing in, and where you will be based.
I will base myself in Erlangen in Germany



again. It's a great place for training, plus I have friends there now, I know where everything is and it's central within Europe. Some World Cup soccer games will be played just down the road in Nuremberg, which will be good to watch if there's time. I will do the full Grand Prix series - 6 races, plus about 10 smaller races and maybe a road race or two. I was out-kicked in the Bavarian 5000m championships in July so I will have to avenge that as well. World Trophy is in Turkey in September then I will finish in Nigeria again. It's a long season because I plan to head to the States in April to sharpen with some road races before going to Germany and the season proper.

You have been touted as the new Paul Crake, what do you think of that, and do you plan on doing any stair runs in the future?

I don't want to be the next anybody, I run for me and I don't care what people think. And stairs, there are some I would like to do, although as yet they haven't fitted in around other races. They are a different sort of race though. I won't deny that Paul is probably the best stair runner the world has seen.

And lastly, what are you going to do with all that money (US\$50,000)???!?!?

Well, I promised my Mother a new kitchen to start with. Most I will put away, I have never really had a full time job so I have no superannuation to speak of. It will allow me to pursue my goals for the next few years without having to worry about winning races to pay the rent or put food on the table so I guess it was actually a huge relief to win the money. I plan to rent a house in Germany where anyone is welcome to come and stay free of charge and hopefully have an easier time of it than I did when I first went over.

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