

METRO LEAGUE 1 REPORT

Some people say you have to have rocks in your head to go to Mitchell Park. And if you didn't have them there on arrival for round 1 of the 2013 MetrO League, you certainly left with them in your head.

As the mercury shot towards 30 degrees and the bellbirds' shrill monotone doubled as a start clock, Garingal organiser John Anderson and setter Glenn Horrocks ushered in a new year, new teams, new rules, new participants, a new ML co-ordinator... and the same old Mitchell Park – steep in places, open fast running here and there, and loads of rocks.

There were some very slow times as bush rookies were hit with a learning curve as steep as the climb from Cattai Creek to the main north-south track. "Do I really have to keep track every little black dot on the map?" they sighed.

At the other end of the competition our elites simply chanted the mantra: ignore the small rock and concentrate on the big stuff. It's a tip well worth following when we return to Sydney's north-western fringe for Round 3 in late May.

Now, onto the match-ups.

The closest results came in Division 3. SHOO and IKO drew 26-26, IKON cursing James Stuart's missed punch and SHOO the fact they were a runner short. SHOO's Doug Jay flew around in 27m20s, the fastest time of any ML runner across all 5 divisions. Elsewhere, the newly demoted GO Molochs pipped Bennelong Bandits by a point (28-27). The difference? Out on course for almost an hour, Mark Brindley pipped Samuel Tsang by 9 seconds in the battle for match points 3 and 2. In the final contest the margin was just three points, with the GO Skinks getting up over the Uringa-Central Coast Kites, who were also cursing a shortage of manpower.

With 29 teams all up, including a new combined universities outfit in Division 1, the draw handily allowed for a club day feel.

Big Foot swept WHO in Divisions 1, 2 and 4; the Feet's Patrik Gunnarsson nailing the quickest time of 28m19s around the 4km Division 1 course, and Cath Chalmers first past the post in Divn 4 (2.8km) in 29m46s. Host club Garingal (fielding a massive 9 teams again this year) took 3 of their 4 contests with Uringa-Central Coast but were soundly thrashed 40-15 in Division 2 and failed to place in the top 5 runners for that match. Ian Jones (UR) flew around in a division-fastest time of 34m18s, then headed off immediately to Nowra. That's commitment !

The new Unis team was missing a couple of out-of-town recruits and called up Garingal's Colin Currie, who really gives meaning to the term 'mature-aged student', having recently

enrolled at Sydney Uni at a time when some his age are retiring and buying a Harley Davidson. Colin finished with a smile, as always, but the students went down 31-24 despite Matthew Hill's impressive 31m8s lap of the Park.

Setter Glenn Horrocks proved adept at judging time and distance, as all the individual winners were back within the stipulated 35 minutes. Some old heads still returned times substantially longer than expected. And the splits make for very interesting reading. Chris Jacka (BF, Divn 2), another one of the Macquarie Uni hockey crowd swelling the O ranks, was seventh fastest to the first control in Divn 2 in 1:07, then took half an hour to the next one. It was that sort of day when the heat and unfamiliar environment made life very confusing at times.

It was also a day to hail some of our younger competitors – Garingal's Division 5 'Legless' team were all aged 15 or under and few had experience at moderate standard, let alone in this rugged terrain. They all completed their course and enjoyed a 35-10 win over the UR-CC Kestrels, who fielded just two runners – one of whom, Paul Batten, had the consolation of a 10-point run (28m42s).

The fact that there were just five 'mp's from 129 ML runners on such a tough map meant pretty much everyone went home a rock star.

Next round we are at inner-city Callan Park on April 21 for a total change of scenery; more like a big sprint course on which errors of just a few seconds could cost several places. And a reminder that clubs who find themselves short on the day may borrow a 'surplus runner' from another club, provided the 'ring-in' competes in the appropriate division. This rule change for 2013 will allow more people to enjoy the camaraderie and competition of Metro League. Club captains will be advised of the process very soon.