

Tetrathlon speech: 2012 Pony Club annual conference

LUKE K: BLACK / LUKE M: RED

Good afternoon your Royal Highness, Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen. My name is Luke Klimacki and this is Luke McMullan. We are both soon to be deceased members of the East Down Pony Club following this speech.

Luke is a third year Geology student, studying at the University of Edinburgh, and I am final year Actuarial Student studying at University College Dublin, and we are both chuffed to have been invited to talk at this prestigious event this morning.

It was back in late winter of 2001, on the frozen rugby pitches of Newtownards, during the running phase of *one of the many tetrathlon training days organised by the North Down Pony Club*, when I first met a skinny scrawny Gaelic Football player going by the name of Luke McMullan.

At the same time, meeting Luke, he reminded me more of a fat rugby playing prop than a Tetrathlete, and I questioned whether he would make it to the end of the run, or not!

We went on to find out at this first competition that I was very much the stronger swimmer, lapping my skinny names sake a couple of times in the pool, and then Luke returned the favour by lapping me in the running over what seemed an incredibly long 1500metres.

This difference in our physique (as you can probably see from the pictures above), however, ended up being a blessing in disguise. It made each of us realize what was possible, and over the coming years, Luke became a much more competent swimmer and I became a much better runner.

Now, what brought us to the Pony Club in the first place, as for most boys, were our Mums. They were the driving force behind everything equestrian related and wanted us to get the competitive enjoyment out of horse riding from a young age, which they themselves didn't have the opportunity to. Myself and Luke were lucky to been introduced to each other being around the same stage in life and of similar backgrounds and upbringing.

During our young teen years, we found ourselves expanding into all areas of the Pony Club. I was given The Pony Club manual for Christmas. Well, not really; I don't think my parents would have been that cruel! But still went on to do my D test, Riding Road Safety and Pony Club Camp within the very first few years. This expanded into competing at every Area competition we could.

For us though, what made all of the trials and challenges which come hand in hand with horses worthwhile, was the sport of Tetrathlon. Who wouldn't want to shoot guns, especially being from Northern Ireland, with our colourful history, along with swimming and running, in terrible weather, and do arguably what the majority of Eventers live for, cross country riding.

Our friendship also had the added twist that we were both from different community backgrounds, and it would as such, broaden our horizons. I was from a unionist area of County Down, near Carryduff, and Luke was brought up in the nationalist town land of Castlewellan.

We both were introduced by each other to our different interests, and I would go and watch Luke play Gaelic Football for his local club, and he would travel to Belfast to watch me play rugby for my school.

We were also lucky to be exposed to the sport of tetrathlon in the middle of a Golden Era in East Down Pony Club. Cahir King, a legend to me and Luke, achieved a Gold Medal score at the Tetrathlon Championships in 2000, a feat which was stuck in our minds for many years. We still find it funny that we hold this guy in such high esteem, but we have both only actually met him once!

Also, the East Down Senior Tetrathlon Team of 2004 were crowned as UK National Team Champions in Moreton Morrell. The blistering runs and massive swims of our Senior Boys exposed the possibilities of what could be achieved and also, what we had to beat!

My Dad, being the creative character he was, thought it would be a good idea for us to pull tires up my driveway. This at the time sounded like a great idea and lots of fun! But boy was it tough, but we did however learn to embrace the pain, and helped push each other on. We learnt 'many a thing' about ourselves during these training sessions.

Also, the then DC of our Pony Club, Peter Dewdney, coached swimming sessions every other Sunday, and Myself and Luke also both joined our local swimming clubs.

So come the age of 15, nearly every day of the week was spent training at one sport or another; and after a lot of pain, sweat and probably tears, the results started to show; safe to say our parents were kept busy!

In 2005 and 2006, Myself and Luke competed as Intermediates. These years were very successful for us, we were crowned UK National Team Champions, and I was crowned the Individual Champion of 2006. The success we enjoyed at Intermediate level was encouraging, however we both had the appetite to really push ourselves and play with the big boys in the Senior class.

This success continued into 2007, the UK Regional competition returned to Northern Ireland for only the second time in its history and giving us our first taste of real Senior competition. We managed solid top 10 finishes which included a quality one star cross country course around the Necarne, during some biblical Irish weather so severe, it nearly threatened the running of the Championships two weeks later at Hartpury. We did however overcome this obstacle in England, and all challengers, to bring home the Senior Team title back home to County Down, Northern Ireland, for the second time in our club's history.

In 2008, an International Year was upon us. We felt we were up to the task of making the team, but we had to prove ourselves to the selectors as both competent horsemen as well as highly motivated and talented athletes. This took the form of achieving our Pony Club B Tests to which we owe a lot of credit to our instructors, some of whom are here in the audience this morning. We also had to prove ourselves physically during the gruelling four day selection camp at Millfield School in Somerset, as well as showing we would represent the UK Pony Club with aplomb at an International level.

We made the team! ...and in doing so, were the first male Northern Irish Tetrathletes to do so in over a decade, putting Northern Ireland back on the Tetrathlon map!

Riding on our international success, we bounded into the 2009 season. During this year, most likely our penultimate year, and no longer carrying the young gun status, training took on a more serious intensity, and that wasn't just for ourselves. We both started competing on the Eventing Ireland circuit, at Novice One-Star Level.

That August, we travelled to Kerriemuir in Scotland to compete at the UK Regional competition and again made the trip to Hartpury to compete at the UK Championships, eager to prove ourselves once again.

And boy, did we pull it out of the bag! Me and Luke McMullan both came in the top 3, and achieved Gold Medal scores. Now this may not mean much to most of you, but it represents for us, a massive personal achievement, awarded only to those who a score of huge 4400pts, which includes a faultless ride around the challenging Hartpury Cross Country course.

Once again, in 2010, an International Year was upon us, and who wouldn't want a two week trip to sunny California? I'm making this sound very easy; this was probably even harder than the first attempt. Again we attended the Millfield Selection Camp and again we were both fortunate to be awarded tickets of a lifetime for the plane across the Atlantic!

We had the extra bonus that Luke was elected Captain for this trip and as you can see from the pictures behind, we did everything! We visited Yosemite National Park, Lake Tahoe, and went White water rafting, among many other things! Oh and before I forget, a little bit of tetrathlon thrown in at the end, in which both the UK Boys Team and UK Girls Team were victorious!

That is our story, however on reflection; we have taken so much more from the Pony Club than just the memories above! Now I'm talking from experience, as I'm currently in the middle of applying for jobs, but prospective employers love to hear about the sport of tetrathlon in interviews, along with all the successes that we have brought from it.

The Pony Club has helped us mature into young adults, with a good work ethic, self discipline and a real positive attitude towards life! This could be due to the fact that, "nothing is a better leveller than a horse!"

Now that we're up here, on probably the largest stage of our lives, this is the perfect opportunity to show our gratitude and thanks to all those who have given so much to the two of us over the time in the Pony Club. DC's past and present, everyone who has crossed our paths in Area 17, in particular, Simpson Cochrane and Lithgow Currie.

I want to extend this thank you to all of our friends from England, Scotland, Wales and the Republic of Ireland, many of you who are in the audience today, including the G's J's, James Allenby and Gill Allenby, James Helyer, John Flood and Gillie Summers.

Furthermore, none of this would be possible without the key to the Pony Club, "the parents"! We offer a special thank you to you all, especially our own.

Thank you for your time, and we have a short video we'd like to share with you from our time onboard the reason we are all here, the horse!!