

Peru National 200 Meter Match Sprint Championships

The Peru National track Championships were held in Arequipa, Peru in mid November. One of the most exciting races is the 200 meter match sprints where riders jockey for position for two laps and then make a wild sprint on the final lap.

Riders qualify for their position in the finals after being timed in a flying start 200 meter sprint. The 3rd and 4th fastest racers pair off for the 3rd place bronze medal and the fastest two riders race for the championship. Depending in the track and conditions a good time is 12 to 13 seconds and the riders are usually separated by a tenth of a second.

Two weeks previous there was a velodrome race in the city of Lima. Race favorite Estephany Valdivia missed qualifying for the championship with a third place time. Even though Estephany is only 17 years old she skipped racing in the Junior division and was racing against the senior women.

This week at the National championships Estephany knew she had to post one of the top times to get into the finals. Before the race she I was talking to her as she warmed up on the rollers in the pit crew area. The 200 meter sprints was her favorite event. The bike handling and tactics involved against another rider in the final event are her strong point. As a 17 year old she has an aggressive riding style that many of the older racers find intimidating.

I asked Estephany about her tactics and she said her coach Danial (who was Cuban National champion) taught her to ride aggressively if she was going to compete internationally. Estephany



said she knew the rules and if she could intimidate other riders with her bike handling tactics of forcing another rider out of position against the outside wall she would do it. Her favorite outfit is an all black skin suit with a black helmet and dark visor. She wants to be known as the Intimidator.

There would be six senior women competing in the 200 meter flying start time trail. Each racer drew straws to determine their position. Estephany's main completion would be from Annhel who is on Estephany's track team in Lima. The other top riders were the sisters Alesaandra and Samantha who are on the national track team in Arequipa. Two weeks early Alessandra beat Annhel in the Lima race finials when Estephany missed the cutoff for the best qualifying times.

Today there was a lot of anticipation to see who would post the four fastest times and race for a medal. Alesaandra went first and recorded a time of 13.5 seconds. Then Annhel posted a time of 13.8 seconds. Samantha did a time of 13.7 seconds. Two other riders were slower at 14.0 seconds. Estephany was up last and she know she needed a time of at least 13.6 seconds to compete against Alessandra in the finals.

As Estephany circled the track for her warm up lap before her flying start she had the fluid pedaling stoke of a seasoned rider. Her chunky thighs are a thick as her waist and she has the build of a well muscled football running back. Since I saw her last year she has added almost ten pounds of muscle with daily weigh lifting workouts.

Estephany circled the track and started picking up speed for her final 200 meters that would determine her time. She stayed high on the steep backing and then dove down to the inside edge of the track. She held a smooth line at 35 mph around the banking of the final curve. Many riders fight the g-force in the corner and waiver in their lane. Estephany stayed on the inside edge and didn't move off the two inch line. She crossed the finish line in 13.3 seconds with the fastest time of the day. She would be racing against Alessandra in the 200 meter championship.

I have known Alessandra and her sister Samantha for over ten years. I met them at a race in the jungle city of Iquitos. Through their contact with the racing federation they are the ones who started our support of bicycle races in Peru. Alessandra was 22 years old and an up and coming rider on the national team. Her sister was 17 years old and a promising junior rider. Now they were both ten years older and still on the national team. At 32 years old Alessandra's is well past the cutoff of 25 years old the cycling



federation recommends for their riders. She has stayed on the team because of her strength as a sprinter and ability to help other riders during road races.

Today the championship would be a showdown between Alesaandra, the old veteran and Estephany the upstart junior taking on the senior riders. I had mixed emotions about who I wanted to win. I have seen how Alessandra has sacrificed to stay on the national team for ten years. We have talked a lot about her struggles and emotions to make cycling her life. I have known Estephany for four years since I met her at a race in Lima. I was impressed with her attitude and maturity at that time. Since then we have supported her with equipment and funds for traveling to bigger races in South America.

We have talked a lot the mental side of cycling. Her life is cycling without any friends or a social life. She lives at the Lima training center and is able to eat at the sport center cafeteria. She is a marketing student at the university but her first priority is racing her bike. Every morning she is at the velodrome or gym or sometimes training on the road. She is totally committed to being on the National Team and qualify for the Pan American games next July.

As Alesaandra and Estephany prepared for their showdown the crowd at the velodrome was anticipating an exciting race. It was late afternoon and heat of the day was finally not so intense. Estephany had raced in all the other five women's events scheduled. She had ridden over 100 laps of races so far. I could tell she was tired. Alessandra had only ridden in one shorter event earlier in the day.

The 200 meter sprint was scheduled as a head to head matchup. The first one across the line win regardless of time. There would be two matches. If each rider won a race then a third race would determine the winner.

As Estephany and Alessandra lined up for the first match I hoped both riders would do well. I had seen how both riders had made cycling their life. The next five minutes would decide their future.

Estephany and Alessandra lined up for their first match. At the starting line each of their coaches held them steady while they were clipped in their pedals. Alessandra had the inside lane. Estephany was lined up about ten feet off to the right. When the official tooted his whistle the riders rolled forward a few feet and stopped with their feet in the pedals. Each rider wanted to stay in the back position. The first two laps would be a cat and mouse game of trying to get in the best position for the final half lap sprint.

The riders soft pedaled slowing around the upper back of the track. Alessandra was in front and Estephany stayed far enough back not to get pinched against the outside wall. Estephany was known as the Intimidator for her race tactics and bike handling skills. She knew how to control the race as the riders completed the first slow lap.

The second lap was slight faster as Alessandra kept looking over her shoulder. Coming around the second lap the official rang the bell for the final lap. The pace quickened and Estephany stayed behind in the draft of Alesaandra as their speed topped 35 mph with 100 meters to go. Then Estephany swung to the outside and started to pass. Down the home stretch Estephany gained on Alessandra until they crossed the finish in a photo finish. The cameras showed that Estephany had won by several inches.



Match number one went to Estephany. Match number two was up next. As the racers lined up for their next heat the official walked over and broke the news to the riders. I could see Alessandra throw down her helmet. The news wasn't good. The schedule of events today had taken too long today. The ambulance

crew needed to go home. The rest of the events would be canceled for today. Estephany and Alessandra's Race would be the first race on the schedule for tomorrow. The build up for the sprint finals would have to wait another day.

The next morning the velodrome gates were open at 7:30 am. Riders and teams were beginning to arrive at the pit crew area on the infield to get ready for a second day of racing. Alesaandra and Estephany were schedule as the first event of the day. Estephany held a 1-0 lead in the match. The first rider with two wins would be the new 200 meter match sprint champion on Peru.

Their match was schedule for 8:00 am. But this is Peru and start time could be any time in the next hour and a half. Estephany was already warming up on the rollers. She might be warming up for 10 minutes or more than an hour. When I asked when she would race she shrugged her shoulders and said "sometime today".

After 30 minutes Estephany and Alesaandra got on their track bikes and starting riding laps around the velodrome. I noticed they were careful to stay on the opposite side of the track and not talk to each other. The competition between the old rider and the new blood was obvious.

After another 30 minutes Alessandra and Estephany were told to clear the track. They went back to their rollers in the pit area. The race organizers were getting ready to start the events for the day. The national anthem was sung. More speeches were made. Alessandra and Estephany were in the background riding their rollers and not listening to the ceremony.

Finally the riders were called to the start line. Estephany had the inside position and Alessandra was outside along the railing. As the race started the riders played the cat and mouse game similar to the first race going around the first two laps. Alessandra was staying behind until the final sprint. As the riders came toward the finish Alessandra came around and nipped Estephany at the line. The series was now tied with one win each.

After a ten minute recovery the riders were called to the line again. Estephany had the outside position as they rode slowly around the first lap. At the start of the second lap Estephany dropped to the inside and force Alesaandra to ride higher on the track.

Estephany boxed in Alessandra and forced her closer to the railing. Estephany flexed her elbow against Alessandra. Alessandra then flinched and went up against the railing. The crowd gasped



and Alessandra's coach started screaming on the infield that Estephany should be disqualified.

Actually the rule is that the riders can lean and elbow each other as long as their hands are on the handlebars. Alessandra was allowed to push back but she flinched and tried to move away. Estephany the Intimidator was taking control of the race. As the riders quickened their pace on the bell lap the riders were side by side through the final turn. Estephany pulled away in the final 50 meters and won by a bike length. Estephany was the new National sprint Champion.

I felt bad for Alessandra but happy for Estephany. Both of them had performed well enough that the coaches invited both of them to stay on the National Team and keep training for the Pan American Games next July.



As I watched the races for two days I got to know several of the riders. Their stories were interesting of how and why they got interested in cycling. Most of their living conditions at the training center are very basic. They sleep in the barracks style rooms on cots under the stands at the velodrome. They cook their meals on an electric hot plate and eat at a card table.

It will be interesting to see how they prepare for the Pan American Games during the next six months.