

11/4/2009

MSXC Riders:

As promised this letter is a follow-up to the one sent on Monday, 11/2. The intent of this letter is to cover a few things about what went wrong at Iuka, what we have decided to do about it, and why.

The recent event at Iuka MS was expected to be a great event. It was being promoted by an experienced promoter, Mark Akers who has done many excellent events for us, at this location. This event was slotted for a #3 position on the calendar based on those past events. As posted to this maillist and on the MSXC website, Mark had asked us to announce and emphasize that the course was excellent and the parking was fine. For those subscribed to this maillist, you know that is exactly what we passed along.

Unfortunately, the course turned out to have some unanticipated problems which caused it to breakdown. We can all sit around and be armchair quarterbacks and propose that we know what went wrong and how to prevent same. I can assure anyone that until you have done one of these yourself, particularly where you have a problem, you just aren't in a position to know how difficult that is. I have, I do know. I could rehash mistakes that were made at this event but that will server no constructive purpose here. One certain fact is that these events are much more difficult to put on than people think. They are a handful when conditions are perfect, they can be overwhelming when things go bad, for whatever reason and be completely out of hand in a matter of a few minutes, literally.

To dispel any rumors as to who does or does not make "the call" on when a race will be a go or no-go, it is the promoter. But it is not quite that simple. I will say that the MSXC does strongly encourage the promoters to work to ensure their event can run in bad weather, on the front end. The MSXC has no way to force anyone to run an event even if we wanted to, and we do not. We do insist that if an event is in jeaporady, that we notify and cancel in a timely manner (before Saturday). Part of being included as an MSXC event is having a property that can hold up reasonably well in bad weather. We are a winter series and bad weather should be expected by all. We try hard to not schedule locations where weather is a potential cancelling factor. We have locations with creeks that rise, and grounds that turn to quicksand during some months, and when possible we don't schedule those where we know the chances are high for a weather conflict. In the end, it is the promoter's responsibility to know their property and know when a cancellation is imminent or required. A cancellation normally means a move to the "snow date" typically in the late winter or spring. So this is a tough call for any promoter who is faced with it. It is expensive with revenues put off until months away, and some fixed costs are a 100% loss. It is not a decision made lightly by any promoter, and the expectation is that promoters will run, on schedule, with courses adjusted and prepared as necessary for a tough event. A tough event is OK. An impassable event is not. Obviously the race management team for Iuka did not expect this to be impassable or they would have cancelled to the snow date earlier in the week.

That said, this event had 6 other MSXC event promoters who were either attending with their son/rider, and/or riding in the event. This promoter peer group as well as several other very experienced, objective individuals whom I trust had a lot of input to me on what went wrong. Their collective opinions were that the problem was due to a miss on what a particular section would do when wet, and a lack of "lines" to deal with this obstacle. Additionally, all of our bad-weather-experienced promoters will tell you that any time a course has very wet sections that the course width will grow as riders find their way around and through it. You may go from 20' wide to 200'. This may be fine at some properties, but in the case of any tight property where trails are close, the consensus was that this became a secondary contributor to the race problems. Because the nearby trails were close, as the bad sections widened trails got "closer"

and “closer” and became in sight of riders on both trails. The course lanes eventually closed in on each other and riders ended up in the wrong place at the wrong time, at minimal fault of their own. This is an obvious problem. There were other things that went wrong, some were possibly preventable, some were due to lack of experienced course workers or understanding, some by helpful spectators, and some were just bad luck.

What may have been a major contributor were “helpful” spectators and riders who “assisted” by removing course markings they deemed unsuitable. Mark uses ropes as a last line of marking to prevent missed turns, and I understand those were removed. I personally do not like them and ask for alternatives, but that is Mark’s call. Let me say that going forward if an official ever finds a rider/crew/family/etc. either moving, removing, changing or adjusting course marking, they or their rider may be disqualified (This goes for anyone walking the course and “tagging” better lines too). If you have a problem with the course, you are not allowed to alter it in ANY way. If there is a safety concern, tell an official. You can tell the promoter or tell me and I will. NEVER take it on yourself to make any changes. There were spectators on course “helping” with pointing out lines. Spectators are technically not allowed on-course at any time, ever. You are subjecting your rider to a penalty for being on course. DO NOT be there unless enlisted to be there by course officials. “Help” at this race WAS a contributing factor for the failure.

This is a good time to point out that no rider’s pit crew may be on the course to assist a rider as well. This is an unfair advantage and would subject the rider to a DQ. Don’t be there. If Joe has to pull his bike out of the mud, then Bill does, too. It is not fair if Joe’s dad jumps in to help. This is an individual sport, not a family/crew competition.

As the MC event was in trouble early and shortly after lap one; the course personnel properly executed a reroute to miss the section that failed. I mention this because I wanted to be sure everyone understands what the consequences and normal results of such a mid-race reroute are. In an ideal perfect world with everyone spaced 2 seconds apart, a promoter would make a reroute on the end of a lap just before the Pro class came back around. All would end up making the same “new” course/lap. But XC racing is anything but perfect or evenly spaced and it is rare to hit a lead lap in such a fashion. Second best option is to hit the Pro riders so all pros make the same course. Unfortunately, because of the total impass on the course, the Iuka reroute had to take place in a less than preferred manner. As is often the case, a reroute will result in the rerouted riders getting an advantage (due to a shorter or relatively easier section). In a rerouted race, this often means the riders who got lucky and got the reroute may have passed, and subsequently beat, riders who did not get the easier path. In these situations, the rider had no control over what a course official is telling them to do. They go where they are told, as directed by official personnel only. This is the “luck of the draw” and the results at the end of the event stand, as scored. Like it or not. This is just part of XC racing, simple as that. Fortunately, this is a rare occurrence. Rare enough it is not (yet) covered in the rulebook. But when it happens, this is how it is handled. It is impossible to second guess and place people where they “think” they should be, or where they think they “deserve” to be, or where they might have been had they made or missed a section. Score wise, they are where they are scored, period.

At Iuka, to add insult to injury, the reroute problems were compounded by other factors. Mainly that since the course was so tight, as riders earnestly worked to get around an obstacle; they ended up on other sections of course. It was not practical to go back the way they came (impass), and they could not go upstream on the wrong trail to get around the obstacle because it is dangerous, as well as inappropriate to go against traffic. So off they went on the wrong section. To finish it off, all reports to me were that the

guys at the checkpoint were rerouting some riders and not others. This is a huge no-no as once a reroute takes place; all riders should be directed that way.

Unfortunately, even after a heroic effort by Akers and crew, the ATV race was another almost equal mess. But this time I place much of the blame for that on the riders. With no reroutes involved, the ATV riders seemed unable to follow the arrows and stay on course. By then at least, the course was reported as marginally marked, but it remains the responsibility of the rider to follow the arrows and course. If some can go the right way, all should be able to. I personally witnessed blatant misses viewed from the start area that were just unbelievable. We were provided lists of numbers by unofficial spectators, but when looking at the laptimes the Promoter and myself agreed there was too much inconsistency between what was reported and what the results showed to enable us to DQ anyone. The results did not bear out the unofficial witness claims as one rider would look off a little, the other reported rider looked perfect. As with the MC race, it was not possible to arbitrarily dock people based on laptimes because they were not wrong enough to be definitively penalized. This time. Had I not had my hands full with the motorcycle problems, I'd have personally gone and stopped every rider I saw off-course and DQ'ed them. There was no reasonable excuse for the misses I saw.

The fact is that the race is behind us, it cannot be rerun, the prompter made some unpopular rulings for properly filed protests on race day. I say unpopular but I must point out that the choices were absolutely unpopular no matter what choice was made. These were impossible decisions to be based on marginal data for and against riders with equal cases. I can assure you it is enough to give any good man a nervous breakdown.

So, those with a good score are happy, and many with a bad score cry foul for different reasons. Some riders missed course sections intentionally, some by accident, some at the direction of the officials, some at the fault of the officials. It has been many years since we have had an event that has failed in this manner. I still have all the documentation from those races back in 1998 and 2001. At this Iuka event, several riders demonstrated their poor sportsmanship, utter disregard for rules, and cheating. If the shoe fits, whatever you tell yourself and your friends, there's no excuse for it. For those that need to cheat for a \$15 piece of wood, win by finding unfair advantage at any cost, or think they get "real" bragging rights from a stolen class championship, I have a recommended series for you and it is not this one. For those who made it around this ironman course, without taking advantage, **my sincere congratulations**, this was a real test of skill and endurance. It is unfortunate it worked out badly for some.

Like it or not, the bottom line is there is no "fix" for the problems of this event. About EVERY course of action is egregious for someone. All we can do is to make it as fair as possible for all attending from an overall standpoint, and do what is right for the MSXC as a whole. I believe I have a good ability to be the "Devil's advocate" or "wear the other guy's hat" so to speak. In a leadership position with an organization this size, with such a diverse base, it is important to understand the many viewpoints and perceptions. If you are unhappy about the actions of the officials related to this race, I have to ask each of you, no matter your situation, to try to do the same, and pick the guy on the other end of your issue and see how any alternatives you think are "fair" would affect you in their shoes. I have received a great many complaints and a lot of "input" and suggestions for this event. I appreciate that and have read every one carefully with my full regard. I have not received one person's input that I do not understand and sympathize with their perspective. However I do have several inputs that do not give any thought to what if "the table was turned" and they were in the other's situation. With input from other MSXC promoters, I am providing our best effort at a "reasonable" handling of the event as far as points go.

1. We will not “throw the race out entirely”. This is not fair to the riders who came, supported the MSXC, suffered, and smashed their pipe on the concrete pipe obstacle. Then managed to dig out of an impassable mudhole, properly complete 1 to 3 laps on the ever changing course, and survive. Simply “throwing it away” incorrectly rewards those who stayed at home that day, or the guy who another rider out-lasted. Unfortunately, not throwing it out rewards a rider who ended up in a position they did not deserve. We must take the high road and assume that is the minority.

2. We cannot throw out the last lap (or more). I looked hard at this as a possibility at the race. We are unable to determine exactly when the reroute and major problems started. But that becomes moot because it is evident the problems occurred before the extensive C classes made their first lap and they are having trouble on their first lap. I believe there were enough other problems that even if I had a cut mark, I still could not score the race any better. Similarly, this does not sit well with the person who is confident they properly made the last lap(s) (as directed by officials) to earn their place in front of one who may have dropped out.

3. I cannot throw out all short laps. This won't work because we have no way to know who did a short lap on purpose, accidentally, or under the direction or fault of the officials. In my experienced and objective opinion, there were all 4. Only 2 of them would be “tossable”. As the one checkpoint was selectively rerouting, some in one class may have been rerouted while others may not have been. While I am sure they thought they were doing the right thing, I am confident the check workers cannot tell me a breakdown of classes by helmet number so there is no way they could have done that well. But reports from riders had riders from the same class being routed different ways so I do not know the details or logic of what happened. But we do know it happened to some.

My point is that I have explored all solutions and considered all suggestions.

After careful consideration of the pros and cons of all the alternatives, in the interest of being as fair as possible to those who supported the series by (fairly) surviving through this event, the following actions will be taken for the Iuka, MS race:

1. Time data is fundamentally flawed for this event. For a variety of reasons. The starting of the MC race included a primary “problem” that I won't rehash here, that resulted in a failure to start the race a) with each class on time, and b) with consistent time transitions between classes. The start was not a quality start. As I was enlisted as the starter I get credit as I failed to properly record who started relative to whom and so each classes time's relative to each other are flawed. Overalls are based on this relationship. Efforts to work on the times after the event may have further compromised time data, no place data is affected. Similar problems on the ATV course resulted in time problems. You may not realize it but our events are scored the old fashioned way, in an “order of finish” methodology. Time data is provided as a fringe benefit to our members. The time data at this event is flawed. As per the 2009-2010 rulebook events with inaccurate or questionable time data due to any time related issues will not include time in the results.

The Iuka's time information would provide no person with good data or data that any course official is prepared or able to defend, uphold, or change, and no cases for change would be accepted based on the time data. We apologize for the inconvenience.

Therefore, **no time data will be posted for this event.** Old fashioned, XC place data only will be posted.

2. Overall places are dependent on good, valid time data. “Overall” results are a fringe benefit of computer scoring of a reasonably well performing, consistent event. This event did not meet that criteria. The MSXC series is one of national respect, identified as the second largest in the eastern USA. We are large and respected because of our excellent events, and great rider population. Neither the end result quality of this event, nor the quality of the time data for this event is sufficient to make any determination of overall scores for the 420 attending riders. **Therefore no standard “overall” points shall be awarded for the Iuka Event in any class.** In order to reward those who participated and survived this event, **all** finishing riders for this event will receive the same overall points; 100<sup>th</sup> place overall points (MC) and 50<sup>th</sup> place overall points (ATV) toward their series ranking, across the board, AA to Junior MC, ATV Pro to ATV 30+C..
3. There were 2 official **protests based on time data at the Iuka race. Both protests are hereby invalidated** and the scores will stand as originally posted because 1) we have identified the time data these original protests were based on as potentially invalid, 2) because neither protest followed full protest procedures citing which rule was violated, the name of the protestor, and accompaniment by the protest fee 3) because an error by the administrative crew allowed a class to be awarded while it was apparently under protest and the protested rider had no opportunity for rebuttal 4) Because there were significantly worse infractions in the questionable time data on riders who were not protested and it is impossible to know if any of these riders had shorter lap times because of inaccurate data, intentional misses, accidentally misses, official reroutes, or official error. No awards will be reissued or changed regardless of how they compare to the original results.
4. The **protest in the AA class stands.** In this protest the protestors insisted on “rule of law” even under the circumstances. I understand all of the participants perspectives here. With all the available data in hand (not covered here) Mark Akers ruled in favor of the protestor and as such, **this ruling will stand.** Unfortunately my expectation is absolute “rule of law” will now apply mercilessly to this class going forward, so everyone on your toes, boys and recommend you know the rulebook front to back.
5. We have limited budgets with our factory contingency programs. All pay less than the 11 (12 possible) locked in events on the the calendar as of today. **This event did not go well enough to sufficiently represent fair enough competition, it included too much of a luck factor. Therefore, this event will not be a contingency paying event. Instead, contingency programs will move to a different previously uncovered date in lieu of this one.** The results of this event are not consistent enough to make it fair to ask our generous factory support programs to spend contingency money when we should have events with more solid and representative results later in our calendar.
6. Finally, the MSXC points system is designed to allow a rider some breathing room when it comes to attendance. This is commonly referred to as “drops”. Our “drops” can be used for life events like weddings, and births, recover from a temporary illness, or deal with some other conflict. They are there to make up for a racing mechanical failure, an off-day racing, or an iron-man survival mud run. Riders who attend all events get the advantage because they get more “chances” to do well. This is by design. The reason for points in the first palce is to encourage all riders to come to all events.

ased on locked-in events we have at this time, we are currently at 2 “drops”. As the Iuka race was unusual, **we will increase the drops to 3** for the season, **max**. This will apply to MC results, ATV results, but not youth. Youth went OK and no adjustments will be made in youth.

7. On a lighter, more sportsmanlike side, the ATV pros were arguing about who would take second (instead of first). In stark contrast to the MC’s, neither felt they deserved 1<sup>st</sup> and both tried to bow out, the **ATV Pro class** scores will remain, as posted, as scored.

This may be more, or less information that you wanted. We may of may not have addresses a particular complaint. We do know what they all were. We sympathize with those who may be unhappy. We are pleasantly surprised by the majority who are understanding, happy, and say “suck it up and move on”. This is a reasonable attempt to “do the right things” based on our experience, and detailed understanding of went wrong, and the options at hand.

Thanks you all for your support and loyalty. **And thank Mark Akers and crew for sticking out a miserable day and doing their best to save it.** And thanks to all the mails we got that were completely happy with everything and had no problems at all, tickled to death they were stuck up to their butts in mud with their comrades. We’ll try hard to keep those experiences to a minimum.

MSXC, Inc.