

Crewing and Pacing at the Florida Double Iron Triathlon

Pete Stevenson ~ Mar 10th, 2011

This last weekend I took some time off from my normal trail running to head to Tampa to crew and pace my friend David at the [Florida Double Iron Triathlon](#). That's 4.8 miles of swimming, 224 miles of biking, and a 52.4 mile double marathon run. The race is a very small event with 17 entrants with an impressive range of abilities and experience. The race director, Steve Kirby, did a fantastic job organizing the logistics of the event. And you could tell that he really put in the extra personal effort to get to know all of his participants and make sure that everyone was taken care of.

I knew it was going to be a long day but really expected it to spend most of the time just lounging around waiting. And David hasn't ever seriously focused on running. Before this race he's never run longer than a marathon and his longest training run to prepare for this was only 15 miles. So I expected my role in the double marathon to be a lot of walking, moral support, and encouragement, to make sure David got up and trudged the last leg of the race to the finish. Last October, David attempted the Virginia Double Ironman and ended up dropped at mile 17 on the run after getting extremely sick. This time he was determined to make it to the finish line but I was expecting a real suffer fest.

Instead, I got worked like a rented mule. Or more accurately, a rented smelly ultra running donkey.

The swim was held at an outdoor pool and the bike and run were held at Flatwoods Park. The bike leg was a 6.86 mile loop and the run was on a 1.75 mile out and back. Initially I thought this would be horribly monotonous but it turned out to be a perfect setup to make it easy to support and to keep each lap small enough to just focus on the next manageable step. It also kept all of the competitors in close proximity the entire day but David resisted the temptation to get caught up in the chase and just stuck to his own pacing plan.

Nina and I got up early to get David to the pool and help with the transition to the bike. We stayed busy at the pool counting laps to make sure we knew when to get the car ready to go. Over the course of 76 laps, David didn't vary off of his planned lap splits by more than 5 seconds and was out of the pool in 2:13 just a couple minutes ahead of schedule and right behind the leaders Marcel and Kamil.

David's mom, Amanda, and Ian joined us for the rest of the day on the bike loop and we kept busy making sure that David had a choice of water, Gatorade, gels, and noodles to rip out of our hands every 20 minutes around the loop. He only got off the bike to take 2 breaks to eat some noodles at mile 114 and 169. After dark he slowed his pace down a couple minutes and then took a few slower easy laps at the end to make sure his legs were in decent shape for the run. But other than his planned breaks, he spent the entire day clicking off laps every 20 minutes. I managed to sneak in a short nap in the afternoon while Nina and Amanda kept up with the bottle refills. But we really didn't have much opportunity to slack off.



Friday on the bike loop. Water, Gu, noodles?

David on the bike loop.
Looking good with his
pointy helmet.



After 12 hours and 7 minutes, David finally got off the bike and was ready to start the run just after 10pm. Steve didn't have any restrictions on pacing or muling on the run so I loaded up with a single bottle belt for myself and a handheld bottle to hand back and forth to David. I added a couple extra pouches to my belt to hold enough food for both of us and I brought my cell phone so we could call in requests to Nina and Amanda back at the start/finish. From the start we worked out a pacing strategy to run to each turn around and then walk out about 100 yards. On each walk break David was able to drink and get some sort of gel, shot block, cracker, or e-caps down. David kept this up for the rest of the night and stayed on pace between about 19 and 21 minutes per lap. On the last couple of laps David extended his walking breaks but didn't run a lap any slower than 22 minutes. Other than a very short bathroom break, David never even stopped to stretch. And damn it, I wanted to stop to stretch. My quads were fried 25 miles into the run. I think it may have been a combination of forcing myself to run David's pace and the pancake flat route that I'm not really used to running on. When we started the run, I had originally planned on leaving at least the last lap for Amanda to run David into the finish. But by the 28th lap, I asked Amanda to jump in and run with us because I wasn't sure if I'd make it the rest of the way. Amanda helped to pull both David and I along through lap 29 and then I finally tapped out at just over 50 miles and Amanda paced David in for a very impressive 3rd place finish. For someone who claims not to be much of a runner, David ran a hell of a race. Through the entire night Jennifer Vogel (whose experience includes an 18:30 100 mile PR) was determined to run David down but he fought back every attempt she made to surge forward and make up any ground. It wasn't until after sunrise that Jennifer finally figured out the math on the remaining distance and let off the pressure. And although Marcel and Kamil were both comfortably in the lead, I'm sure David gave them some reason to worry though the night. In a long run like this a 4 to 5 mile lead won't last long once you get sick or your legs severely cramp up.



After 50 miles, I'm done but David is still running strong.

So what I expected to be a light recovery weekend turned out to be an epic experience. I feel very fortunate to have been able to take part in David's accomplishment. He didn't just finish this race. He ran a smart race, he worked his ass off without faltering, and he ran competitively. If he decides to do another double, I'm sure he'll be a contender for the overall win and if he decides to tackle the triple, he definitely has the physical and mental ability to do it. And now that David is officially an ultra runner, we won't pick on him about the unitard and pointy helmet :-)



Nina, me, David, Amanda, and RD Steve at the finish line.