

If you obey all the rules, you miss all the fun!

Saturday, March 3, 2012

Dani's Fantasy Land.....



The pool was SO pretty!

Dani's Fantasy Land: Finish ride across Florida. Recover for two weeks. Start swimming way more. Go from around 8 miles of running a week and turn into a gazelle overnight. Toe the start line of the Double IRON in the most amazing shape of your life.

Reality: Finish ride across Florida. Develop an overuse injury in your ARM of all places. Pinch a hoffa pad

in your knee from bad tracking on the bike. Hurts to ride. Hurts to swim. Guess that means you will run. A lot. Go to Hawaii for 12 days and slack off. Get back in town and freak out. Use the insane fitness that you have to run WAY more than you should. 10% rule turns into 110% rule. Develop tendinitis in both Achilles 5 weeks out from the Double IRON. Develop a bacterial sinus infection a week before the race. Toe the start line in not-the-most amazing shape.

Life has a way of throwing curve balls at you every now and then. I had 12 weeks from my ride across Florida to the Florida Double IRON. I had great intentions of lowering my biking way down, ramping up my swim and my run training, and everything being just fine. Of course, I never imagined that I would be injured going into this race, but I also never really thought about doing something this long either.

5 weeks out my Achilles decided to stage a massive revolt on me. I was very nice to them and stopped running completely (honestly, I had no choice). I had to curtail the biking quite a bit too.

2 weeks out from the Double, I went to my Orthopedist in a last ditch effort to find a miracle cure. I also wanted to make sure that I wasn't going to rupture my Achilles by participating in the race. The doctor gave me topical anti-

inflammatories, pills, inserts for my shoes, told me to ice my Achilles everyday, find a hyperbaric chamber, and be prepared to be in some really intense pain.



My coach didn't freak out at all about my injury. His exact response was something like "you're tough, you'll be fine." I did a 45 minute run the week before the race. After Jason saw me limping around he said "babe, I just want you to know. This is going to be rough. You are going to be HURTING."

I made one last trip to the doctor the week before the race. I had a bacterial sinus infection that left me insanely dizzy. Plus I had to make sure that my innards weren't going to come spilling out of my hernia. I got the green light from my regular doc to do the race. Bases covered. I was about 99.9% sure that I wasn't going to die.

We are still really happy, which must mean the race hasn't started yet!

leading up to the race, the week of it, I was totally and completely fine. Not nervous at all. I did a social media purge, which I found to be quite pleasant. I unplugged and told myself every single day that I was healed.

We rolled into town Wednesday, our height-challenged crew came Thursday, and the race started Friday morning.

The swim was in a pool and we were seeded by our expected swim time finish. I had ZERO expectations for this race. Goal #1: Don't die. Goal #2: Don't come in last. I only "had" a swim time estimate because I had no choice. Other than that, I had no time goals at all.

I ended up in lane 2 with four other guys. Jason was in lane 1 with the fast peeps. Kacie was in lane 3. I LOVED the fact that I could see them swimming next to me. It didn't feel like a race at all since we were in a pool. I really felt

Interestingly, despite FREAKING out



Please don't show Maria this horrible form!

like we were just in masters swim practice. The swim started off rather fast, and despite the guys telling me that I could lead the lane, they all got past me within the first 200 meters. I swam my "I can hold this pace forever" pace and felt fine.

I counted the laps and stopped every 20 for nutrition. I felt great until the last 600, which was the first time that my arms got fatigued. The longest I ever swam in training was 6000 meters without stopping, so I was surprised I didn't feel worse earlier! My lap counter said that my 100's were all almost the exact same split! Even pacing for you! I exited the water in **2:23 for 4.8 miles**. Pleased with my swim time because I am not really a swimmer. Very shocked that I had the 6th fastest swim of the day! And now...onto the bike!



I stopped at the 2k, 4k and 6k mark to eat!

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Wednesday, March 7, 2012

I likey my bikey!



I LOVE my bike!

So I spent a LONG time in T1. I found out that Jason had an amazing swim and that made me happy. I dried off, ate a banana, chatted with Jill, and made sure that I applied my bag balm.

The bike was the one and only portion of the Double IRON that I was thinking might not kill me and

would probably be really fun. Last year, racers left the YMCA pool and got 30 minutes to get to Flatwoods Park by car due to construction. This year, racers had to ride over. Which meant we had to follow directions. And cross under Interstate 75. All while maintaining a heart rate in high zone 1, low zone 2. I will admit, that I am NOT the best at listening to directions/instructions. In between looking for cool bugs with Kacie, and listening to racers argue over whether or not it was safe to ride over to the park in heavy traffic I heard something about "there will be a volunteer at every turn." So, I rode out of the YMCA parking lot and kept riding, and then the road came to an end into construction. Doh! I turned around, and found my way out to the main road.

So the main road was really busy. As I crossed under 75 and had to merge with traffic I saw a huge white Tahoe speeding towards me. It didn't look like it was going to slow down. I peaked at my HR. It was NOT in low zone 1. I made the executive decision to dart across the traffic to make it to safety (which was the volunteer that I saw wildly waving her arms at me) I got to her and she said "turn left at the Home Depot". This happened to be the exact time when a fellow racer, Ben, caught me. He made fun of the fact that despite beating him out of the water by 8 minutes he got on the bike before me (I am a woman, hello?! It takes us some time!) We didn't see the Home Depot, second guessed the turn, then missed it, then found it!

I was SO relieved to find Flatwoods Park. I was very stressed out, honestly the ride over added some years to my life. Once we got to the park, we had to do a small section of a loop, then 31 6.861 mile loops. This gave me the chance to see my height-challenged crew 30 times!



Jill and Emily hard at work!

I noticed that it was REALLY windy. It had rained the day before, making it quite humid as well. My asthma was acting up on me and I was trying to do the ONE THING I swore I would do: keep my HR REALLY low. Because the ride was a complete loop the wind took turns, cross, head, even a little tail.

You can never really get enough tail ya know? But I tried to enjoy it while I could.

The lead guy blew past me at mile 30. Jason wasn't too far behind. He said that he was cramping some. I **STRONGLY** encouraged him to slow down. The single most important thing I learned from riding across Florida is that you cannot fight the wind. It always wins. People were riding strong, and I was getting passed, but I honestly didn't care. I was sticking to my plan. I caught Jason around mile 75 and he had full blown cramps. I knew that he had an upset stomach too and wasn't being honest with me. I offered some words of encouragement, and he promised that he was going to slow down and take a couple of breaks. I rode away hoping that the cramp God would have mercy on him!

At mile 120 I noticed people were getting pretty tired. No one seemed as peppy as they did earlier in the day. I felt great. Even better than I did when I started. I offered words of encouragement every time I saw someone. The ride got really spread out and I got a little lonely. I saw a couple of snakes and several small rabbits and that made me happy. There were quite a few cyclists out there training and they all said the exact same thing to me: "you're crazy!"



I was trying to not stop unless it was a nature break, so I did the very professional looking water bottle toss with a request for what I wanted on my next lap. The crew was **AWESOME** at the handoffs!

At mile 160 I realized that I had forgotten to put sunscreen on. What a horrible mistake. I was fried! I also realized how **HORRIBLE** my saddle is that I have owned for about 6 weeks. I will be taking suggestions for new saddles please! I wrote an open letter to my girly parts and read it out loud.

"Next time I want a sandwich with **MORE MEAT!**"

When I stopped to put lights on I inquired about Jason. Since I hadn't caught him, and he hadn't caught me, we were likely riding the same speed. This wasn't exactly in his race plans so I knew something was up. "Where's Jason? He's puking isn't he? He's puking and y'all aren't telling me!" Emily and Keith said no, Jill kinda looked uncomfortable and said "he had a little to get out, but he's better now." Uh huh. I wasn't happy that Jason wasn't passing me like he should have been.



"Um, you might wanna get back on the bike. Dani is catching you!"

I was excited for the sun to go down. I really like riding in the dark. Flatwoods Park was a great place to be, it was totally unlit, with lots of wild life. You could hear animals, but couldn't see a thing. At one point a pack of wild boars came walking across the path. 4 of them. That was quite possibly the highlight of the ride!!

I caught up with Kacie, the other chick from Atlanta around mile 200. I was so excited that she was having a great ride! I knew it was her first night time ride, and that she likes animals too, and I kept thinking "I hope Kacie is seeing these animals!"

220 miles into the ride my lights started flickering. Although I enjoy night riding, riding in complete darkness is not something I am fond of. I started to freak out a little bit. I saw a light blinking up ahead. Another rider! My light was dying and I went into panic mode. I caught the rider up ahead and pleaded with him to let me ride side by side until I made it back. It was Ben! My buddy from the missed turn at Home Depot. Turns out Ben is a student at Clemson, 20 years old, and hasn't been on a bike for more than 30 miles since October. He gave me one of his lights and instantly earned my respect. Not very many 20 year old kids would attempt something as daunting as a Double IRON. Especially if you are taking a million classes and don't have time to train. Ben clearly is my long lost cousin!

I finally made it to the end of the last lap. Jill and Emily had all my stuff ready for me, and because it was totally dark I just changed behind the car. They told me that I wasn't far behind Jason, and that he seemed to be doing better. I got changed into my run gear and couldn't believe that I was 2/3 of the way done with this thing! The fact that I had tendinitis in my Achilles and had not run in 5 weeks actually didn't cross my mind one time. 52.4 miles to go!!!

Bike Time: 12:33:44 for 224 miles, 17.83 mph avg, female course record!

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Tuesday, March 13, 2012

You get what you paid for....

I spent \$390 in the two weeks leading up to the Florida Double in various expenses related to my Achilles injury to try and find some type of cure. Unfortunately, not all the money in the world could buy me what I really needed: time, and specifically, more time on my feet. I knew that having only completed a 17 and 20 mile long run was dismal and not going to be sufficient to prepare me for a 52.4 mile run. But you know what else money can't buy? Friends that are so incredible that they give up their whole weekend to support you, stay up all night and move at a snail's pace with you, a support network back home of virtual cheerleaders, sharing the course with some really incredible people, and having the love of your life cheer for you even when they are suffering. When it came right down to it, there are certain things that money and training can't provide, and getting myself to that finish line was about one thing: sucking it up and moving.

I COULD write this entire post about how much I was hurting, and how horrible the run was, and how I would never recommend anyone attempt a Double IRON. But that really wasn't the case. Instead I will tell you how 30 1.746 mile laps went by in virtually no time.

I got off the bike and felt pretty decent. I wasn't in much pain, and I took off at

a reasonable (but certainly not fast!) pace. I saw Jason and he told me how awesome I was doing. I was sad because I could tell he was hurting. It really breaks my heart when he doesn't have good races. But I appreciated the support.

I didn't actually get on the run course until pretty late, around 10:30 pm and it was quite dark. I used a handheld bike light. Another runner told me two laps in that it was blinding him so I ditched it with my crew. For some reason, it seemed like a good idea to run in the complete and total darkness. A couple laps later I ran off the asphalt path, tripped, and fell. My left knee hit the ground pretty hard, but it was my right foot that really took the brunt of the fall. I felt immediate, sharp pain. I saw blood. I stood up and said "you're hurt" then right as I started to get upset the following words came out of my mouth: "GET YOURSELF TOGETHER DANI. YOU'RE FINE. KEEP MOVING. QUIT BEING A PANSY." The only other runner on the course that saw the incident laughed when I yelled at myself, and I trudged forward trying to bury the pain the best way that I knew how.



I think my crew saw my bleeding leg and decided I needed company. I cannot remember who ran with me, and in what order, but I do know that what I wanted was some really good stories. Emily and Jill chatted with me about everything from refusing to wear clothing as children, to kids asking anatomy questions, to Disney movies. Every time that we approached Jason he would call out "Is that Dani?" and as soon as he knew it was me he told me how awesome I was doing and that he loved me. It was really sweet!

I got a pretty sweet scar to remind me of my clumsiness!

Kacie's crew provided me with quite a bit of entertainment as well. They were wearing lights, playing vanilla ice, and being VERY encouraging and supportive. Kacie was running strong, and she must have had the chattiest friends in the entire world with her! Every time I saw her they seemed more like they were having girls night than "let's run all night". Attitude is everything in these things, and so is having people that can take your mind off the pain!



Signs your hubby is awesome: he wears a pink shirt, temp tattoos, and dances for you!

chugging up the line and seeing a picture of a gift with the words "Dani" and an arrow pointed up ahead. Kacie's crew had drawn that for me, and it meant a lot. It's the little things people!

I was in some serious pain during loop 17 (around mile 28). I crossed the timing mat and sat down in a chair. Jason was also resting for a bit trying to let his stomach settle. I knew that I had a really nasty blister. I pulled off my sock and shoe and found that the source of the pain was a blister that was underneath my toenail and the surrounding area. It really hurt! The doctor said that he didn't have a way to pop it while still keeping it sanitary. Frustrated I grabbed it and popped it on my own. I threw on a blister band aid and wanted to get moving again. That was the one and only time that I sat down the entire race, and it was also my slowest lap!



In good spirits like always!

Because there were still bikers out on the course, they had us step off the road and run around a cone so that we would trigger the timing mat. It was a VERY small step back up but every time I did it, it caused a searing pain in my Achilles. I asked them if they could move the timing mat and they told me that they couldn't do it until everyone was off the bike course. It seemed like it took forever, but I will never forget

Turns out when I crossed the timing mat I had lapped Jason and was actually ahead of him. To think that this whole time, in several races we have tried salt sticks, pepto pills, saltine crackers, ginger ale, and a million other concoctions to cure Jason's cramps and stomach problems, when the real cure was TO HAVE DANI AHEAD OF HIM. Before I knew it, I saw him charging

forward like he was racing a 10k. It wasn't long before he had re-passed me, and all was right in the world.



I didn't get tired or delirious on the run, and I didn't really think that I would. I did however, start to find humor in some strange things. Like running up on Ben, and realizing that his Clemson Tri Team uniform had a small tail on the back of it (they are the tigers). This really humored me!

This is the determined look of a guy who doesn't want to get chicked!

Once the sun came up the following day you were able to see the absolute carnage that is the last 10-

30 miles of a Double IRON. I saw people passed out in lawn chairs, people in the grass, people walking with such an incredible look of pain on their face, and some people that flat out quit. One thing that remained the same during the entire time that I was on the course was that the WOMEN were moving! And they were smiling!



I wasn't in the best of shape around mile 42. Keith was running with me. I was begging him for stories. He told me he had none. I asked him questions in hopes that it would lead to some long and interesting story about something, ANYTHING other than the race. Instead Keith spoke to me in a way that only he can. He said some special and inspiring words that motivated me. The

"OK, I admit it. This is starting to hurt"
strangest feeling in the world came over me. All the pain went away. I started to pick up my pace. Laps 25 and 26 out of 30 were actually my fastest other than lap #1!



People often ask me what goes through your head during periods of long training and racing. I think a lot about how fortunate I am, in so many ways, to be able to do what I am doing. Scott Rigsby, a local double amputee Atlanta triathlete was on the course with Kacie. What an incredible source of inspiration he was! I also thought about another Scott, Scott Whitney, who was involved in a very serious bike accident a couple weeks before the race. He underwent major brain surgery. I thought about how precious life is, one minute you are training at Columns, and the next minute you are having to re-learn how to walk.

THIS is what inspired me!

My pre-race tradition is to eat Chick-Fil-A 2 days prior to racing. I got a kids meal, and there was a book on Helen Keller. The book was titled "Determination" and I didn't think that it could have been any more appropriate to read before this race! The end quote was:

"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved."



Headed out for that lap!

When I crossed the timing mat for the last time to head out on lap #30 I started crying. Jill took over for Keith. I am not quite sure what the tears represented: the pain that I was in, the disbelief that the race was almost over, the overwhelmed desire I felt to hug Jason and give him a kiss, or a combination of it all. I cried the entire lap, and well into the finishing area.



It felt good to finally fall into Jason's arms!

I ended up finishing 4th overall, and the 2nd place female. I was not the fourth fastest person on that course. I certainly didn't put in the training that many others did. To say that I was in shock and disbelief is a complete and total understatement.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention something about the incredible WOMEN that

represented! There were 33 people that started the Double. 8 didn't finish. That's an almost 25% DNF rate. Out of the 33 starters, 7 were female. 7 females finished and 3 of those 6 were in the top 5 overall of the race. I am proud of everyone for making it to the finish line in tough conditions like that, but the ladies deserve some special recognition because they really represented. I don't think that I have ever been so proud to be a woman in my life!

And now for the part of this post that has me crying all over again!

To my fellow racers: What an honor and a joy it was to share a course with you. I love these small close-knit races because of the people you meet along the way. Thank you for your encouragement! I am sure it's only a matter of time until our paths meet again....

To Coach Shanks: Thank you for your patience with me. You never doubted my ability to finish this thing, and I appreciate that. I am not an easy person, and I am sorry for the many times I caused you to want to pull your hair out.

To my awesome sponsor: All3 Sports, THANK YOU! You take care of me and I love you for that! Best Triathlon store in the WORLD!

To our friends and family: The support and encouragement that you provided before, during, and after the race meant a lot. We are fortunate to have people like you in our lives! You might not understand it, but you still support it!

To our amazing crew: Emily, who became a bike mechanic for almost everyone (except for us because our bikes were already in great shape!), thank you for being so willing to help others. Your laid-back, easy going spirit and sense of humor fit right in, just like I knew you would! Sorry that you didn't get to yell at me more to get moving, I knew you wanted to!

Poon family: Thank you for letting us borrow your mom and wife. To Jill, thank you for being Mama Poon to us! You are so nurturing and caring, and never once complained about moving at my snail pace. You spoiled us rotten "would you like ice in your bottles?" and now crewing for us is never going to be the same!!! We love the Poons!

Keith: Wow. Where do I even start? I ran my first mile with you. Rode my first loop around Stone Mountain. You remember when I couldn't clip in without crashing. Having you share this experience with me means a lot to me. You are such a wonderful person!

And last but not least....my wonderful man Jason: I could take up competitive cross-stitching, or tell you I wanted to ride my bike across the nation, and you would support me every step of the way. You encourage me and you believe in me, and you never once doubted me in this journey. I love you!

Don't live the length of your life friends. Live the width of it as well. The title of this blog is a Katherine Hepburn quote that pretty much sums up how I think everyone needs to be living their life! Disobeying rules and having fun. Believe in yourself. Surround yourself with people who believe in you as well. Take that risk that you have always wanted to take. Life is short. Make it count.



"Beyond the very extreme of fatigue and distress, we may find amounts of ease and power we never dreamed ourselves to own; sources of strength never taxed at all because we never push through the obstruction." -William James