

Double Ironman, Tampa, February 24, 2012.

by [Rebecca Daniels Hansen](#) on Sunday, March 4, 2012 at 7:05pm ·

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4:30 am. I'd been biking for a few hours trying to get my mileage in before work and school took over my day. I'd just blown my second tire and I had to be back at 6:10am to get Hayley up for school. My bike light was out. It was foggy and pouring rain. I sat in the ditch crying. I changed the tire, rode back as fast as I could and got my sleepy girl up and out the door. My race was a month away.

My Race. A Double IRON Distance: 4.8 mile swim. 224 bike. 52.4 run. I wanted to see if I could finish it. But mostly I wanted to train to become a more confident, better swimmer. I learned to swim a few years ago when Maddie and I did our first triathlon. At the time I wanted to better understand the sport that she and her sisters share. I think it's the toughest sport there is and it continues to be the most difficult of the three triathlon disciplines for me.

I fractured both my arms and developed frozen shoulder during my Death Race in June. I guess a smart person would have taken a break from swimming. I was pondering my options when my friend, Coach Amy Schwoerer, told me how she'd coached paraplegic Olympic athletes. They swam rolling from side to side, touching the wall with their heads. My pity party abruptly ended. If they could do it, so could I. Amy patiently helped adjusting my stroke and I did my Clermont Iron Man swim with one arm. Gradually my injuries healed and I could use both arms, Amy spent many hours on the pool deck coaching me.

February 23. Pre-Race

I'd flown from Buffalo, NY to Tampa after watching Maddie swim at her A-10 College Conference meet. Going from snow to 80 degree temperatures was shocking. I became so overheated rushing through the parking lot garage that I stopped, unzipped my suitcase, stripped down and changed my clothes to the amusement or horror of several cars passing by. I then battled Tampa traffic for several hours to get to the pre-race meeting. Once there I met up with my crew gal extraordinaire, Jill Cerami. I also saw my buddy John Wall (from our Death Race days), Crazy man Race Director, Steve Kirby and his non-crazy, but lovely wife, Cindy and the effervescent tireless volunteer, Karen Schuyler.

The pre-race meeting had athletes from around the globe. I think the final count was 40 men and seven women. In addition to all the accomplished Double and Triple IRON Men and Women there were also Epic Man racers, RAMM, Triple, Quadruple, Deca, and even Double Deca. Double Decca, yes, that's twenty Ironman back-to-back! I was in awe.

February 24, Race Day

The Swim

7:00 am start. 4.8 mile swim, 76 laps in a 50 yard pool. I shared my lane with 5 other athletes among them the amazing, Deca Ironman Wayne Kurtz. Wayne had become a great mentor so it was great to meet him and his lovely wife Jan. I'd asked for the "slow" lane. Most of the guys in our lane projected their times between 2 ¼ to 3 hours. Gulp. I'd hoped for 3 hours and 15 minutes. I just wanted to emerge from the pool with enough energy to bike for 14 or so hours.

Early on in the swim I knew I was going to have to suck it up and dig deep. Everyone was swimming over and around me. They were being courteous, but frankly I was in their way. I'd get a leg or a kick or a mouth full of water as they consistently passed me. I'd swallow water and try not to panic but it was useless. I also pushed off the wall too hard, too many times and I got cramps that wouldn't subside. Mid-way through the race Jill leaned over yelling at me to eat. Hindsight I should've done that more often and earlier as I became dehydrated. It was tough to catch up. Later on, much to my dismay, Jill informed me that I looked like a splayed-out-starfish instead of the swimmer gliding through the water that I had envisioned. 3:48, third from last out of the pool. The first guy out was an hour and a half or so. Time to venture out on the bike.

The Bike 224 Miles

Did I mention that at the pre-race meeting we were given option A) ride in cars to the bike transition and have an unofficial time OR B) ride across I-75 and a few lanes of traffic zigzagging back and forth but have an official time? I opted for playing in the traffic and the official time. That little adventure was excellent for elevating my heart rate early on.

The bike loop was 6.86 mile loops 31 times. John and the rest of the volunteers cheered us on at every passing loop. It was a gorgeous day in the 80's except we had cross winds that were constantly shifting. I would be cruising along at 20 miles per hour and then push as hard as I could and barely be moving at 12 mph or slanted against the wind, still I felt pretty good on the bike although I would go for hours not seeing anyone. Jill met me every few loops with fresh bottles of Infinit and every few hours with a pb&j bagel. As the day wore on, my sunscreen dripped into my eyes and they became bloodshot and swollen. I look high in the pictures. My calves were beginning to throb. I thought about my buddy, Frank Fumich, who's legs had spasmed for hours during his recent Triple IRON Tri. I hoped that wouldn't happen to me. Thankfully it didn't. Nightfall brought out snakes, turtles, and some white headed animal I managed to dodge. I also had some guy on my tail because he "liked my light". Go figure. My blisters also became painful. At around 10 hours I layered on another pair of bike shorts ~ desperate for some relief. I also stopped to talk with my fellow racer Bogie who was pretty sick, hoping to cajole him back into the race. I kept stopping to look for him but he was too sick and dropped. My projected bike time was 14 hours, not including changing clothes, eating, etc.; so when I came in at 14:10 I was pretty happy with my time. I was also delighted to say goodbye to the bike.

The Run 52.4 miles.

On to the run. 30 loops at 1.75 miles each. Jan Kurtz, John and all the other volunteer cheered us on at every loop. Jan called me an "Angel" each time. Guess she doesn't know the real me does she?!

I thought my run would be my biggest strength. Boy was I wrong. I felt so good for the first 20ish miles, way ahead of pace and then I. Hit. The. Wall. I didn't just hit it, it came crashing down. I couldn't hold anything down. In a desperate attempt I tried Gu, Gatorade, sugar tabs but it just made it worse. I'd gotten cocky. Gone out too fast. Ate the wrong foods. And I was paying for it. Last year I'd paced Leslie Holton on her run. She was so worn down that I ran backwards in front of her encouraging her to go a few steps at a time. I pretended that Leslie was with me. My oh-so-amazing crew girl Jill kept cheering me on walking/running every other lap with me but I had to tell myself to lift my feet, fake the smile. I stopped to brush my teeth hoping to feel a bit better. My teeth felt better but that was about it. The last few hours I had slowed to a crawl. Move forward. Baby steps.

My last lap I looked at the scenery taking it all in until I rounded the corner to run a bit to grab the American flag and run over the finish line to the national anthem. I've got to say it's a pretty amazing feeling listening to our nation's great song, holding the flag, crossing the finish line in 33 hours and 10 minutes.

March 4, 2012

It's a week later. I came back to mid-terms, playing catch up at work and general chaos but I've recovered pretty well.

This week I swam in the ocean, ran bridge repeats with some of the T2 gang yesterday and ran 30 miles on trails this morning.

I'm so grateful for all the love and support that I had prior to and during the race. I never cease to be amazed at all the love from my ultra buddies, people that I've met at a race who become friends for life.

Poor Jill stuck it out with me when my family couldn't make it due to Maddie's swim meet and some of the other crew fell through. She was, and is amazing.

I now know how to train and race differently for my next Double IRON Triathlon. It was a great experience.

My next big race is 150 miles in Vermont May 12th but I'm thinking that I'm pretty out of running shape and not ready for mountains or snow but I might have to give it a go anyway. My far more important race will be with Maddie as she runs her first half Marathon in St. Louis in April. Yes, she's slowly slipping to the dark side of running. Hayley and Grace won't be far behind!



Wayne Kurtz and Rebecca, Double Iron Man



Lane Members for Double IRON Swim



Stopping to refuel



My "Tent" space



Pre Race with John



Taking a break from the bike



About Mile 100



Sunscreen in my eyes and adding more padding!



Thinking brushing my teeth might make me feel better. My teeth looked better. I did not.



Almost to the Finish Line ~ National Anthem Playing!!



Awards from Steve. Amazing Guy! Amazing RD!



John and RH after race. We both wondered which was worse, that or the Death Race. Fumich whaddaya think!



Finish!