

## **Race Report: USA Ultra Triathlon Double IRON – Tampa, Florida, March 1 & 2, 2013**

*7.6 km Swim — 360 km Bike — 84 km Run*

### **Pre-race**

Yasmin and I arrived in Tampa on Monday evening. With the race on Friday morning we would have a few days to rent a car, poke around and get to know the area, and just get used to being away from our snowy and cold winter home back in Ottawa.

On Thursday we picked up my bike from Oliver's Cycle Sports after they put it together and made some adjustments. We met our friend Dave Gunn who was also entered in the race. Dave and I decided to take our bikes and do a loop of the bike course so we would have a bit of familiarity with it.

We then headed over to the bike check in and registration, paid for our race day licenses, and had our blood test. We received our race kits and goody bag and had the timing chips applied to our bikes.

Later that evening Yasmin and I went to the pre-race dinner. The race director Steve Kirby gave us a little pre-race talk, introduced all of the athletes, described the course, what to expect and some basic rules.

We then headed back to the hotel to do any last minute preparations. Then it was time to shut the lights out and sleep.

### **Race Morning**

The alarm went off at 4:15 AM. I did not sleep well, or long. I tossed about unable to fall asleep at first and then in and out of sleep until close to 2:00 AM. Only then was I able to finally relax and get a bit of deep sleep. Time to get out of bed and move. After washing and applying some sunscreen, I ate a bowl of cereal with fruit and sipped a cup of ginger tea. I was a bit worried about my lack of sleep but I had slept well the previous couple of nights after arriving in Florida so I hoped that would help carry me through.

Yasmin and I met up with our friends Dave and Jocelyn Gunn and Dave's father, also David. We packed up the car and headed for the pool at 5:45 AM with a goal of a 7:00 AM start time for the swim. The swim was at the New Tampa Y and would take place in their really nice outdoor 50-metre pool. We choose positions and park our bikes along the fence of the pool deck.

It was dark. It was cold. I was hesitant to start to dress for the swim. Finally, I had to do it. Yasmin helped me get into my wet suit and applied a generous amount of Bodyglide around my neck and then she zipped the suit up. I was finally ready. Yasmin took a couple of photos of Dave and I together then continued about her duties organizing my nutrition for the swim placing it at the far end of my lane for easy access. I am a slow swimmer and I planned to swim easy for the 7.6 km distance. I am in the end lane — the slowest lane — and predicted my finishing time would be around 3:15. It was going to be a long day so there was no point in rushing.

### **The Swim**

The athletes all gathered for a group photo in the pool moments before we were to start. After the photos we moved to our appropriate lanes and ... it is show time! I had only been in a 50-metre pool one time before this race. I kept a steady pace — although rather quick for me — through the first half of the swim. Nothing eventful happens. It was just swim steady and stop for the occasional bit of liquids. During the second half of the swim I started to get a bit of cramping in my right calf. I stopped for some hydration. Yasmin helped out with some encouraging words and some electrolytes. I started to swim again but I eased up a touch on

the pace until the calf cramp passed. I decided to continue at this easier pace and before long the swim was done. I got out of the pool and showered off at the edge of the pool deck. Yasmin helped me out of my wetsuit and dried me off before handing me my bike bag for transition in the Y's locker room.

### **Transition One**

In the locker room, I dried off, put on my bike gear, and exited the change room. Yasmin took my swim stuff and she and Jocelyn escorted me to my bike. I inquired as to how Dave was doing. He had finished the swim about 50 minutes ahead of me! I sipped a bit of eLoad and took a few swigs of water. I clipped in, notified the appropriate person that I was finished transition and I started to ride out towards the bike path that would eventually get me to the park and onto the looping bike course.

### **The Bike**

The first part of the bike had me a bit unnerved. This is primarily because there is construction going on that prevented us from going directly on the path from the Y to Flatwoods Park where the bike and run are. There was a detour that caused us to cross the interstate highway, ride a short distance along the roadway, then cross back and return to the bike path. The description and as it appeared on paper it made it seem far more complicated than it actually was — thank goodness! There were volunteers to show us where to cross and where to enter the park. I couldn't get lost.

Once into the park, I continued along the paved wide path until I came across a volunteer that instructed me to turn around and loop back towards the entrance of the park. At the entrance I called out my number to the volunteers and then head back into the park. The extra looping was to make up mileage that would be blended with the bike loops within the park to give us our official distance of 360 km for the bike. Once again I passed the volunteer but instead of turning as with the previous time I motored on ahead looking for the entrance to the park's 6.86-mile bike loop.

I rode onto what I thought was the loop. It was windy — lots of headwind. I kept moving along for what seemed like far too long without seeing anybody. I began to wonder if I had missed a turn and was off course somewhere within the park ... maybe not on the actual bike loop! I continued on then suddenly Kamil Suran passed me. Then, a cyclist from one of the group teams past me. I was definitely on course. Within a few minutes I saw the crew tents through the trees ahead.

I stopped at my tent and Yasmin had a bottle of Heed ready for me. We discussed briefly about what I'd need for the next few laps. She would mix up some Perpetuem for me and prep some fruit for me to take away. I had planned to use Hammer Gels, Heed, and Perpetuem as primary sources of nutrition along with real, solid food — fresh and dried fruit, Pringles, pretzels, peanut butter sandwiches in addition to food that was being prepared and made available on course by the race people and sandwich truck. I also had Cliff Bars but found out very early on in the bike that I would not be able to eat food that was that sweet.

Off I went. The bike is a loop course. It is six miles long. I became very familiar with the various landmarks that I used to pinpoint my location throughout the day and — more importantly — through the night. The course is within a wild life preserve — Flatwoods Park. It is dark at night. It is very dark. There is no ambient light source other than moonlight if that is available.

The ride during the day for the first iron distance length was great. It was windy but I was able to stay in aero position pretty much exclusively. My plan was to do as much riding in aero as possible breaking it up a bit more within the last few laps to stretch out my back and get ready for the run.

I have never been on a bike longer than 10 hours and I was concerned about whether my saddle would be tolerable for the entire ride. I changed up my saddle to an Adamo Racing II model a couple of months prior to the race and found it was far superior on the trainer to my previous seat. I never had a single issue with the new seat for the entire double iron ride. It was comfortable until the end!

The loops passed by and as the sun went down so did the temperature. I put my lights on my bike — two LED lights on the front, a blinking rear light, and a headlamp on my helmet. It was tricky get the headlamp to fit on the helmet in place. After a quick munch of a roasted veggie sandwich, ordered up by my lovely crew girl, I was back on the track. After half a lap the light on my helmet came out of place and dropped down smacking me on the forehead. I put it in my pocket and continued on. It was getting really dark at this point and hard to see with just the narrow beams from the remaining front lights. I needed the headlamp! Back at the crew tent we repositioned the light on the helmet and duct-taped it in place. Returning to the course once again, I continued on.

### **Wildlife**

There was talk about wildlife straying on to the track during the night. There might be armadillos, rabbits, wild pigs, snakes and other beasts. I did get to see my fair share. At dusk about five minutes out from the crew tents a doe ran across just in front of me. Nervous, I looked right and here was a buck coming as well. He passed across the road just behind me. This was not my only encounter with deer. After dark, in the same section of the loop, a doe began running along side of the bike path just to my left. She continued to run beside me for what seemed like minutes but was probably just seconds. I was afraid she was going to veer into my path. I was relieved when she finally jumped to the left and into the brush. I also saw an armadillo at the side of the road and two snakes. I was riding by myself for the most part during this race and at night it can be a touch creepy as was constantly hearing stuff moving about in the brush just off-road. It is very cool indeed.

### **The Long Cold Night**

As the night grew later it got colder and colder. Is this Florida? I was not prepared for this — not that I hadn't just run outside all winter in Ottawa — but I did not have proper clothing for these frigid temperatures. I stopped and Yasmin brought me some long underwear to put over my cycling shorts and a long sleeve shirt to go over my jersey. Out onto the course again, only to have to stop the next lap to add another training jacket. Back out again. I was so cold. My hands were numb. I could no longer ride in aero position as I couldn't see well enough without straining to hold my head up and my hands were just too cold. So, I sat up for about 80 percent of the second iron bike. This was not very efficient riding and slowed my pace tremendously.

At around lap 23 or 24 I had to take a break. I was having a hard time focusing. I stopped at the crew tent and told Yasmin I was hitting a low and needed to rest a bit. It was at this point that she informed me that my friend Dave Gunn had withdrawn from the race due to an injury to his knee. It was just too painful for him to press on any further. Yasmin said that Dave, Jocelyn, and his father David would return in the morning to help her crew me to the finish. Time to rest. We decided 20 minutes rest would be good, as it had worked for me in my last 24-hour race. Yasmin took my shoes off and helped me into a tent so I could lie down for 20 minutes and recalibrate my brain. Then, time to get back on the bike. I felt so much better and was able to finish the bike.

### **Transition Two**

Once again, Yasmin helped me to the tent of another generous crew to change and rest for another 20 minutes before commencing the double marathon. I could not get my clothes off. My hands were frozen stiff. Yasmin helped me change and then put me in a cot to rest. Then, it was time to run.

## **The Run**

It was nearing 5:00 a.m. when I was ready to go. Yasmin was concerned that I might not have enough time to finish as I had taken so long to complete the bike. I had 14 hours left until cut-off. We decided that if I kept moving I should be able to make it within the time limit.

I started to walk a bit and then jog a bit. I continued this for the first two of 30 laps. I made sure to grab some food and drink every lap. Wayne Kurtz had told me to keep eating no matter what. I did. The sun was now coming up. I felt rejuvenated. After the first two laps my legs were feeling pretty good. So, I started to set up a run plan. I would walk after eating my food for a bit until I reached a specific landmark and then I would run down to the left turn. Then, I would walk to the first driveway and I would then run to the turn around where I would walk two minutes heading back. Then, I would run back to the turn, walk 30 seconds and run up to the timing station start/finish. I did this relentlessly for the next 25 laps. If anything, I would let myself walk less but not more.

The other runners, support crews, and volunteers were great for keeping the spirits high. Paul Grimm was a real inspiration encouraging me on every lap. This kept me running.

At around lap 21 I found myself starting to obsess about the amount of time I had left. I kept asking Dave to check the board in order to see how many laps remained and if I had enough time to finish. He kept telling me to just relax and focus on keeping moving.

In other races and constantly during training for this race I have had problems with my feet blistering primarily between my toes — even when using Injinji toe socks. Prior to this event I decided to try something a bit different. I went out and bought two pairs of my favourite Brookes Dyad 6 shoes. The only difference from the norm was that I went with a 4EE width instead of a typical standard D width. I also bought a pair of these 4EE shoes up one-half size larger to accommodate any possible foot swelling.

The first pair of shoes lasted me until about lap 26 when I changed to the larger-sized pair as my feet felt like they were swelling a bit. These shoes took me to the finish. I had no blisters and my feet felt great after the race — just like the bike saddle change, another success!

## **The Finish**

I finally found myself on the last lap. I made sure to really pay attention to the entire course and soak it all in and really enjoy the last time around. I thanked the volunteers at the turnaround checkpoint and headed back towards the finish. I followed the same run/walk plan I had used for the entire race even though I just wanted to walk up the last incline. As I ran the last bit towards the finish I was handed the Canadian flag and then "O Canada" began to play. It was an amazing feeling to cross that finish line carrying our flag and hearing our national anthem!

Just after the finish, pictures were taken with our race director, Steve Kirby. Then, more photos were taken with my support team, Yasmin, Dave, Jocelyn, and David.

This was a great race put on by a wonderful team in a fabulous venue. It would have been even better if the weather had been more cooperative but — as I believe — you have to take what the day gives you and go with it the best you can. We learned a lot and that knowledge will not be wasted. I am definitely looking forward to my next double iron and all of the fun and training leading up to it.