

# Endless Reserves: Florida Double Anvil (Ironman) Race Report

Mar 03, 2014 John Jenkins



Race Director Steve Kirby changed the name of the event from the Double Iron to the Double Anvil after receiving notice from WTC regarding trademark infringement. Those bullies!

Twenty-seven athletes, representing 6 different countries, started the [Florida Double Anvil \(Ironman\) Triathlon](#). Twenty-two of those athletes finished within the 36 hour time limit.

With the support of my crew - Maria, my parents, and sister-in-law Tiffany - I was among those 22 athletes to cross the finish line after a 4.8 mile swim, a 224 mile bike, and a 52.4 mile run.

The Double Anvil is the longest race I've ever attempted, and during race week, I wanted everything to go perfectly. But, it didn't work out that way.

A week before the race, I was diagnosed with bronchitis, and spent the entirety of race week either on the couch or in my bed, coughing, coughing, coughing.

Maria joked, "A double ironman isn't hard enough. Clearly doing it with bronchitis will fix that."

As we boarded the plane for Tampa, I wasn't even sure if I would be able to start the race because of how sick I felt. In fact, on race morning, I wasn't sure I was going to start the race.



The swim begins. My nutrition is set up in the bin.

But, into the pool I went.

The 4.8-mile swim portion is 76 continuous laps in a YMCA 50 meter pool in Tampa, Florida. Each lane has 4-6 swimmers, who are grouped in lanes by estimated swim finish times.

When race director Steve Kirby asked for estimated swim finish times a few weeks before the race, I said 2 hours. I exited the water in 2:03. So close! During the swim, I took 10-15 second stops every 2500 yards or so to eat and drink.

My bronchitis was not really cooperating, as I was coughing a good deal under water throughout the swim. My mantra for the swim was "stay relaxed and don't force

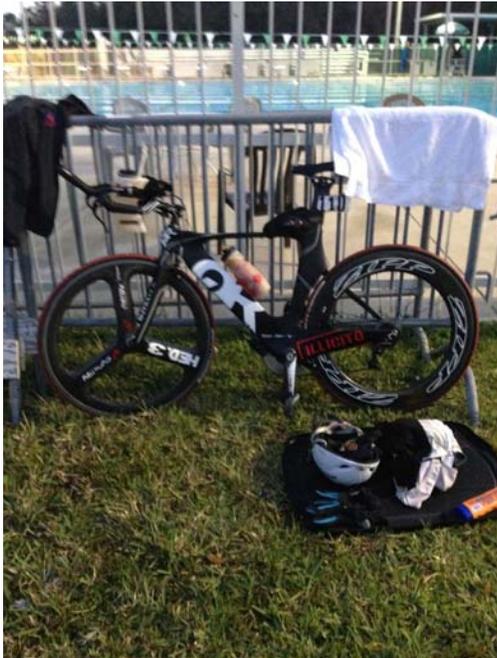
it." "It" referred to my technique. Surprisingly, I exited the pool 1st overall.

I thought, "OH NO. Did I just swim too hard?"

I didn't think that I had, as I felt relaxed throughout the swim. But, I still questioned my effort, as I was in unknown territory. That was the second longest swim I had ever done in my life.

Now, it was time to ride.

The 224-mile bike portion begins with an 8 mile or so trek from the pool to Flatwoods Park, where you ride on a closed 6.86-mile flat loop. You repeat this loop 31 times. Yes. 31 times. Yes. It got boring. Very very boring. Yes. I found it difficult to keep track of the laps.



#### Bike transition

When I completed my 25<sup>th</sup> lap on the bike I told Maria, "Ok, only 5 more laps." She reminded me there were 31 laps, and that I would have 5 left when I completed my 26<sup>th</sup> lap. It was a total mind game, and I battled the last few laps of the bike.

As I crossed the timing mat for the 30<sup>th</sup> time, the sound of a phone ring came from the speakers. That was the sweet sound of 1 more lap left. I was so pumped to hear that phone ring and get off that freaking bike after almost 13 hours.

I completed the bike portion in 13:02, the 5<sup>th</sup> fastest of the day.

I was a little off my goal time for a few reasons. There were some aspects of this race that the only way to learn how to do them was to just do them, and adjust to

circumstances. I had too many stops that were longer than they should have been for fuel and hydration. I also had to stop to put lights on the bike and warmer clothing once the sun had set.

Additionally, I did not know exactly how to pace the bike. I wanted to be able to run the double marathon, so I played it safe, keeping my heart rate in a mostly recovery effort throughout the bike portion. But, I learned from watching the top 4 leaders, who are much more experienced than I. Each of these men had multiple Double, Triple, Quintuple and Deca Ironman's on their race histories—and all of them had done this race before, if not multiple times. I studied them when they passed me, and I noticed that they were turning a heavier gear, at about 80-85 RPM, just sitting in aero and steadily hitting that heavier gear all day long. I, on the other hand, was spinning 95-100 RPM and soft-pedaling. I would train differently for this course, should I find myself on it again.

Surprisingly, I felt somewhat good off the bike with nothing broken or hurting too badly.

Now, it was time to run, and it was about 10:30 p.m. at this point. The temperature dropped into the 40s, and it was cold. So, I changed into running tights and switched up my jacket to stay warm.

The run is completed in 30 laps of a ~1.75-mile out and back course. It is very tough mentally to complete this type of format. Similar to the bike course, the run was a similar mental game, but running is much more in my wheelhouse. Given my ultra-marathon experiences, I knew how to manage some of the sensations and thoughts.



Day time view of Tent City

At the beginning/end of every loop (as with the bike), you end up back at "tent city," where all of the crews are waiting with support, and where you cross the timing mat to log your laps. Getting to tent city helped with the mental funk and fighting off demons, that want to make you quit or walk.

Maria was diligent every loop sitting in her chair waiting for me to cross the mat. She would say, "What do you need? What do you want?"

I was in a stupor most of the time. I would reply, "I don't know?"

So, she eventually took over the decision making for me, and would force me eat and drink what she thought was best.

She also helped me to keep my effort up. As you come into tent city and cross the mat, support crews could run or walk along side you until you got to an orange cone, with a sign that read: "No support beyond this point." Each lap, she came with me to the cone.

I was allowed, as per Drill Sergeant Maria, to walk from timing mat to the cone. As she left me, she would yell after me, "No more walking!" She alternated with other inspirational gems, such as,

- "You're not dying!"
- "Be objective."
- "Of course it hurts; you're doing a double anvil - how did you think you were going to feel?"
- "I don't want to hear about it unless you are injured."
- "Look at the stars! Draw energy from them."

She was a pain in my ass.

I looked forward to these walk breaks every loop, and it helped mix it up on what was otherwise a flat, boring course - especially in the pitch dark.

Maria had set up my Road Noise Vest with the Drop Kick Murphy's station blasting on Pandora. The other racers must have thought, "Who the hell is blasting all this Irish music and bag pipes?" But, I loved it and it kept me moving until the sun started to come up around 6 a.m.

By the early morning hours, I had settled into a rhythm and was knocking down loops steadily in around 18-19 minutes, running to the mat, meeting Maria, getting to the cone, running back to the mat.

My head cleared and my cough was under control for the first time all day. I was running down 4<sup>th</sup> place, who was about 3 run laps ahead of me when I started the run. I had lapped him twice on the run, bringing his lead down to only 1 lap.

The drill sergeant encouraged me to try to run him down. By the time I finished, he was only 3 minutes ahead of me. Even though I didn't catch him, it helped to have a rabbit to chase to make time go by in such a long event.

I also found inspiration from watching Dan Jenson, who was also doing the double as a single leg amputee. Several years ago, I watched him on a documentary about Bad Water Ultra Marathon, which he has done several times. He has always been an inspiration, and doing this race with him was amazing. He confirms that you are only limited by your mind!

After the sunrise, I only had 4 loops or so to finish. I have heard in the past from Ultra friends that the sun rising in an Ultra gives you a tremendous amount of new energy. I found this to be true for me as well. This was my longest continuous race in my life so far, and the finish line was within reach.



Coming into the finish line, with Maria.

After 24 hours, 38 minutes, I cross the finish line in 5<sup>th</sup> place overall. My double marathon was 9 hours, 17 minutes, which was good enough for the 4<sup>th</sup> fastest of the day.

I learned a lot in this race about myself, and what I can do. This is not a sandbag attempt but just the honest truth. Prior to the race I had been basically in bed from Sunday until race day, with the exception of flying to Tampa and checking in for the race. Due to the bronchitis, I was on a Z-pack since Monday, which gave me night sweats and diarrhea. Hardly ideal.



Team U-Crazy camp. My mom and dad setting up shop.

Being so sick had a negative effect on my spirit going into such a long endeavor. I tried to stay as positive as I could, but my mental game was off.

During the swim and more so on the bike section, my coughing was out of control and started making my abs and lower back hurt. It's not really a good sign when your race-day nutrition plan calls for a shot of cough medicine every four hours.

I would come into tent city on the

bike, and while I thought my mind was clear, when I spoke, I slurred my words at times. Maria would check me, by demanding, "Talk to me." She was trying to make sure I was coherent when I wasn't responding well.

There were times when I did not know if my body would cooperate for another mile let alone allow me to finish this thing. Several times, I remember trying to convert laps into the amount of time and miles I had left. This was a very bad idea. I would just get aggravated thinking how much farther I still had to go, wondering how I would do it.



At the finish with Maria & race director Steve Kirby. My friends, and those of you supporting me on Facebook and twitter that helped along the way.

So, I just stayed in the present moment and focused on the positive, and what was in my control. I knew I would have to pass out, crash, get violently sick and/or die in order to drop out. It was never an option to voluntarily quit once I started.

I thoroughly enjoyed this experience and will be back to do another double or triple in the near future. Maria also wants to join in a get the double done. I know she will be a natural and I can't wait to see her do it! Best of luck out racing and exploring. Thanks for reading!

Special thanks to Maria for staying up for 24 hours and pushing me. Love you. Also special thanks to my parents John and Jeanne. With out you two this would have been so much harder. You have always been there for me and I love you for that. Thanks to Quintana Roo Bikes for my sweet Illicito, Cycles By Kyle,

You all Rock! Now on to the next adventure!

Cheers to endless reserves!