

BURNING UP AT THE 2X

Kale "TentMan/Northern White Boy" Poland 03/10/2014



I continue to learn at my relatively young age in a sport that caters to the older, more experienced athlete. To me, there is nothing better than going through the shitstorm that is multi day racing.

There were about 30 of us shivering in a pool that was much warmer than the 50-something degree air on a chilly Tampa morning.

As we filed back into our lanes after the group photo, I had some mixed feelings about the 4.8 mile swim we were about to embark on. The last time I entered the Double Iron/Anvil distance, I was a beginner to this

whole game, having entered but not finished a Triple.

Here I was with a whole lot more racing (two Triples, a Double, a Quintuple, and a Deca) under my belt, but with almost no swim training. Our local pool had been closed for the last 6 weeks, and when you don't own a car, that makes for slim options. I was nervous, and when Steve had asked for my expected swim time, I told him to put me in the slowest lane.

It turns out you can just nordic ski all winter and ignore swimming and not be completely horrendous. Expecting a 4 hour swim where every lap seemed worse than the next, I was pleasantly surprised to exit the water comfortably after 3 hours. Not fast or impressive, but not too shabby only having swum 5 or 6 times over the winter.

I hopped on the bike after a couple minutes of getting my junk together(my crew hadn't yet arrived), and immediately decided I would go with the race plan I made back in January before I got sick for the entire month. I had missed a large chunk of vital overnight/big volume training and knew I probably wouldn't be able to go fast the entire way, but I really just wanted to see how mentally tough I was after finishing a Deca. I didn't much care about the fitness level - I wanted to see what my mind could take by going off the deep end early.

The roads from the pool to the actual bike course were more like a mountain bike/orienteering ride, as it was all under construction. Picture a group of time trial bikes and dudes in aero helmets jumping curbs, and navigating soft sand sections.

I got on the course and loaded up, knowing Sterlynn wouldn't be there for a good 2 hours. I was going to be solo for awhile, so I filled up with food and water and set about going off the deep end. The course was pan-flat and I rode angrily. There would be no coasting and no sitting upright for the entire 224 miles. Just ass to the saddle.

The first half of the ride went by in a blink...somewhere around 5 hours. As the sun began to set my true colors began to show in more ways than one. Our harsh New Hampshire winter was going to play its card here in Tampa.

My skin, despite wearing sunscreen, was charred. Also, my lack of long bike rides over this crazy winter started to show, as I began to really fade around mile 140. I pulled off the course and told Sterlynn that I "needed to get my shit together, because right now, it is not." Lap times were 4-6 minutes slower than earlier in the day. I ate everything in sight, but they never got better. Temperatures started dropping, from 80 degrees during the day to almost 40 by 10pm.

I was shivering on the bike but wanted to grind it out because I only had 4 laps or so left. I was only able to go one more lap and had to stop, because I couldn't feel my hands and was shivering uncontrollably. Sitting down, Sterlynn put a sleeping bag over me and I wore a bunch of her clothes. Picture a New Englander getting hypothermia in Florida. Yeah, I couldn't either.

Things were no better after 15 minutes, so I went in the tent with more clothes and just focused on getting myself back in the frame of mind for just 1 more hour of riding. In my head, 1 hour more of riding might as well have been 10 hours, but I got on anyway after 35-40 minutes of being a wuss and struggled through until about midnight, bundled up like the Michelin Man in ladies clothing.

Getting off the bike, I tried to get a sense of urgency into my head because even though my bike was a couple hours slower than I hoped, if I put together a good run, I wouldn't be super far off from the slow end of my pre-sickness goal of 24-26 hours.

I walked the first couple laps just to get my legs under me. At the time I was perplexed because there were only a couple of us on course. Where was everyone? Apparently the cold was wreaking havoc on everybody. No one goes to Florida and expects 40 degrees.

Although I wanted a nice fast run, I decided to be smart and pace pretty evenly for each lap. I was twice-shy from the last double and even triple when I did a lot of running at the beginning and paid dearly for it in the last quarter of the run. We always expect to hurt badly, but to suffer and stagger through the last 15 or 20 miles in the heat is a different thing entirely.

The night kind of flew by, and owls were hooting everywhere. Eerie but cool. Most laps, Sterlynn

was out at the table, ready to hand me whatever I wanted, and sometimes forcing me to eat shit I didn't want to. Some laps I jealously looked into her car where she was reclined, sleeping.

I was prepared for the pre-sunrise fuckery that seems to be hardwired into every endurance athlete. This means 4:00-6am, eyes barely open, staggering, tripping over your own feet, and falling asleep while standing. Sterlynn handed me a Red Bull somewhere around 5:30 or 6 and it actually did give me wings.

The sun was coming through the trees. The morning was dead still, and the light from the sun just had that look to it. You knew it was going to be a hot one. I ran pretty much for the next 2 and half hours, just trying to get as much mileage as possible before the oven got turned on. At this time I knew how bad my burn was, and my history in the heat is not good at all. More than anything, I didn't fancy re-roasting my skin on the rotisserie that is loop-course racing.

Around 9am things went south. The sun was up, it was hotter than hell, and I was ready to have this thing over with. I was pooched. This is where missing the night training caught up with me. It became "run to that tree, walk to the next, run to that post, walk to the next tree", and pretty much stayed that way. Every half mile, Steve had put out bins of ice and sponges, and every half mile, I doused myself to stay alert and cool.

Eventually, I passed the sensor and the noise of "final lap" came from the speaker. I'd like to say at this point I ran like the wind to the finish, but it was more of the same. I wanted to go faster, shit, I wanted to run, but that didn't happen. I ran/walked to the turnaround, where I thanked the volunteers for cheering/jeering through the night, and then slapped high 5s, urging on the remaining competitors who would slug it out for hours to come.

The last lap, you always go from hurting deeply and focusing only on that, to reflecting on the whole experience from training to the finish. It is generally an emotional lap. I hoped the Deca would not toughen up and jade me from this experience, and it did not. I wore my sunglasses because I didn't need anyone thinking I had feelings or anything.

Sterlynn met me about 100 yards out from the finish, and we ran together through the line as the National Anthem played. A few photos, and the whole thing was over. 24 official finishes in the book. There is no question I would have DNF'd if Sterlynn wasn't there. I brought no warm clothes, and if she hadn't had a bunch of extra hoodies and pants, I would've quit on the bike. I know it.

Massive public thanks to her and Donna/William Pruett for support before, during, and after the race. Additional



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Props to Steve for a fantastic race once again, an extra thanks to him for slapping my sunburn at the awards ceremony, after I had just showed everyone how bad it was. It was great to see some old friends and make some new ones as well!

Thanks for reading, and may 2014 be your year!

KP

