

Florida Double Anvil Race Report

Lisa Vega ~ 2014 Florida Double ANVIL ~ 22 March 2014

I spent the past two and a half years planning races and mentally prepping for this race as my ultimate endurance goal. 4.8 miles of swimming, 224 miles on the bike, and 52.4 miles running. All continuous-with a 36 hour time limit. I was not sure what in the world I was getting myself into with this length of a race. I followed a training plan that averaged a little more than twenty hours a week of training. It was taken from the book *Beyond the Iron* by Wayne Kurtz. (I later found out this was not the typical plan and included more volume than most of the other plans/ and just simply more volume than most of the other participants did). I had a crew of three-Michele, Tracy, and Robert. All with the instructions to keep me moving, not matter what happened. Death before DNF had been the running joke between us.

When race day arrived, I woke up slightly nervous, but not nearly as apprehensive as I had from the regular Ironman races. I was deeply dreading the swim portion. I had swam 4.2 miles in training. The race would be 76 laps in an outdoor 50 meter pool in a wetsuit. I knew once I was done with the swim, I would be in a much better place both mentally and physically with the race. I had spent the past few months working on strategies to improve my swim-which is the weakest link of my swim, bike, and run.

Arriving at the race site—the pool-I got out my swim supplies and began to get ready. I walked to the water and put my hand in to feel the water temperature. It felt a little warmer than I wanted it to feel. The heater was supposed to be turned off to cool it down overnight. I put on my wetsuit and got ready to get in the water. I was in the slowest swim lane. I was expecting it to take me about three and a half hours to complete the swim. There were four of us that would be swimming in this lane, with all of us having similar expected times to come out of the water. We took some group photos and then the Anvil was struck and it was go time.

The first ten laps were mostly a blur. I worked on controlling my breathing and getting into a rhythm. I was also trying to remain calm, knowing that I had 76 laps to complete. I felt myself begin to get a little dizzy after lap twenty-something. I worked harder on my breathing. Relax, stay calm I told myself over and over in my head. I got to lap 30 and it suddenly felt worse. I was dizzy and nauseated. I was miserable. Tracy had been given the task of counting my swim laps. I stopped and got some of my nutrition from the side of the pool. I looked at Tracy and said “I don’t feel good. I want out of the pool.* She looked at me with surprise and said to keep swimming. I did, but cautiously because I was feeling worse by the minute. I really wanted out by lap 35. I felt like vomiting and ended up throwing up on the side of the pool. I tried to get out. My whole crew was there by this time and they would not let me out. I begged, even tried bribing them with breakfast. No deal. They blocked the exits and I was forced to keep going. At one point I was crying. Michele, the self-proclaimed crew leader, told me the water was already wet, it did not care if I was crying. I finally realized there was no option other than to keep on swimming. It would be easier to be at the bottom of the pool than to deal with my “mean” crew. After what felt like the whole weekend, it happened! I was done with the swim. 4 hrs and 46 minutes. I found out later they wanted to disqualify me but my crew talked them into letting me get on the bike.

I felt human again being on dry land. It was slightly humorous to get hugs from the people I was quite sure were going to inflict some type of real bad bodily harm on me only minutes ago. I attempted to give away all my swim gear to the people still at the pool. I was quite sure I would never get back in any water again. Ever. I took a little extra time changing and got on my bike. I took it slow for the first 30 minutes or so. I got into a natural cadence and the bike felt great. It was a beautiful afternoon in the state park. The weather was in the mid- seventies and there was little humidity. It was a perfect day for biking. There

were other cyclists in the park training and it felt great when they were completely awe struck at what we were doing out there. Luckily the course was closed from motorized vehicles. I relaxed and enjoyed the deer, rabbits, turtles, and raccoons I saw. I was happy not to see the alligators, panthers, or wild pigs that were known to be in the park. I did a little over 100 miles before it began to get dark. This was the darkest dark that could possibly exist. There was not a sliver of light anywhere. The bike lights were all we had. Most of the time, my light only showed a spotlight on the ground similar to a flashlight. I could not see any animals that might run out into the road and it was extremely difficult to see where the road curved. Frustration set in again. And it grew more frustrating as it grew colder outside. A fog moved on so my clothes were wet. My toes were freezing. I did at least three of the seven mile loops with my teeth chattering nonstop. On my final lap, about 4 a.m., I saw two red lights ahead of me. I began to get excited. Oh good, I thought, there's another cyclist up ahead. I then realized they were not bike lights, but eyeballs staring at me from a tree. I just hoped whatever creature of the night it was, it would not pounce on me, because at that point I was sure I was not even a match for a raccoon.

Freezing and relieved to be off of the bike, I changed and prepared for the 52.4 mile run. I figured this would be where it would all begin to fall apart. I had only run 31 miles before this. I had no idea what it would be like to do a double marathon after that swim and the freezing cold night bike ride. I began a slow shuffle. I was slightly nauseated. My crew gave me anti-nausea medicine after the first 1.78 mile loop. It helped dramatically. I felt more energized and as the sun started to come up, I was able to begin picking up my pace a bit. I saw an elderly lady with a giant purse walking beside me and had to check at least four times to make sure she was not real. She was not real at all. Nobody with me but the other participants. As the sun came up, we were all doing some variation of walk/running. This was my chance to get to talk to some of the other athletes out there and it became a bonding experience. Their stories had me blown away with inspiration. There were heroes out there. I felt proud to be a part of such an admiral group of athletes, each with a unique story of their inner as well as outer strength and champion. As the day (and the rising heat) wore on, I began to feel the excitement as my co competitors/new found friends began finishing. I knew it was going to be down to the last few minutes for me, and finishing in the time frame would be difficult if not impossible at this point. I decided to keep going and do the best that I could. I was not sure of what my pace would maintain, but I was sure I could keep going. At about mile 43, my crew member Tracy looked at me very sweetly and innocently asked "Do you think you could just pick up your pace a little bit?" She doesn't do triathlons. I broke into a smile and told her I would love to more than anything in the world but I was not sure my feet would agree to that plan at the moment. We all laughed. The time frame ended up going out the window, especially after the temperature got up to close to 80 degrees in the afternoon. I decided I would "unofficially finish" after my crew suggested I keep going and do the distance anyways. I would have been just minutes over the time limit, but at mile 46 I began to feel like cinder blocks were attached to my feet. Taking each step was a slow process. I crossed the finish at 37 hrs 4 minutes. One hour and four minutes after the race cutoff time. I was happy that I completed the distance but had mixed feelings about the time.

I have never felt so privileged to be a part of something so moving and life changing. It's two days of finding out everything that's inside of you during this race. The other athletes and their crews became like extended families that day. Cheering each other on, encouraging, sometimes only smiling or even just nodding, but all the while with the same goal of just moving forward. Watching the seventeen athletes finish made me feel a sense of pride for them. The Race Director made sure the finish line was very special for each athlete. Seeing and feeling that there is nothing too big or too difficult to conquer out there is something that will stay with me for the rest of my life-and is something I hope to pass on to those around me. The only question left is whether or not I feel the need to go back next year and make the finish "official" within the 36 hour time limit. I cannot honestly answer that question at this moment.