

Race Report ~ Simon Boag

Florida Double ANVIL Triathlon ~ 16/19 March 2017

Less than 30 hours, more than \$50,000 and a top 10 finish

Now that it's over, I can safely say it was awesome... and really, that's only a partial lie.

In a regular ironman, you hit bottom once or maybe twice. With this monster, I lost track after about a dozen times. I've never experienced anything quite like it but loved the triumph of perseverance.

First though, I must acknowledge a lot of people:

- Mike Khoury and the team at Cristo Rey for the impact and difference you're making. Thank-you for allowing me to attach this event to your mission of changing lives. Keep making a difference for so many young people, the future of the city, the country and beyond. You are living proof there is a better way. Impressive. Since I've started this campaign, you have produced another class of Seniors with a 100% College Acceptance rate - way to go!
- My silent partner, who wishes to be anonymous, who is making the doubling of donations possible. He has an incredibly generous spirit that infects and inspires all those around him. Thank-you, I am a better person because I know you.
- My Pit Crew consisting of my daughter Natalie and my good friend Rich. Wow. Simply would not have made it without you being there. While I thought it was kinda cute at first, putting in an order every 20 minutes and then having it magically appear on my next lap, at some point during one of the initial dark crevasses associated with this journey, I turned my life and total control over to you two and you nailed it. The right nutrition, the right electrolyte, the right words of encouragement, the occasional kick in the ass, all the exact sustenance to overcome my whiny, weak-willed excuses for why I couldn't keep going or why I was slowing down. Thanks for putting up with my whining and crankiness. For all that bad crap, remember, what happens in Lake Louisa State Park, stays in LLSP.
- My great friend Russ who also did this race. We've been planning this race for over 3 years and the stars finally aligned and we committed last year. The camaraderie kept me going on the long, boring training rides & runs and while I was complaining to myself about cool temps and a little rain in California, Russ was sweating it out on 12-hour training rides on his bike trainer in his basement in the middle of winter in Michigan. Yup, he is in a whole different league when it comes to mental toughness than me. Russ killed this race. Top American, 4th overall, after 281 miles had a sprint to the finish and would have been 3rd if he hadn't listened to my bad advice! More on that below and my apologies for that Russ. Your perseverance on that last lap was amazing!
- To all of you. In addition to your impressive generosity, I loved re-connecting with those of you that I had lost touch with and all of this carried me through many dark spots. Very cool. Special shout-out to Tom & Doreen, Dieter, Mike, Dave, Bill, wow.
- Lastly, but certainly not the least, to Elayne, with whom I am trying to build a relationship. We already have limited time together and then, on top of that, I would take off for a 6-hour ride or a 3-hour run. Your support and selflessness was great, thank-you. Not quite sure anyone has entered a relationship with baggage quite like this. You are awesome.

The Race:

Wow, yea pretty spectacular event.

32 people started, 22 men and 10 women (and 4 teams of 3 each). 24 solo racers finished. An incredible emotional / physical roller coaster, where you are constantly working to prevent sliding into the next pit of woe. Sometimes, with the right short-term goal setting, with just the right amount of sugar and caffeine, you could stave it off for an hour or two, then wham, back with a vengeance, into the abyss. I lost track of how many times this happened, I just know it was a lot.

I underestimated the course, I overestimated my abilities (I know, I know, most of you will claim that shouldn't have been a surprise Einstein) however I am just blown away with human ability to overcome, keep going and just do whatever needs to be done. Churchill said, "If you're going through hell, just keep going." I'm pretty sure he picked that up from doing a Double Ironman race (however, I'm not sure it explains his svelte physique).

It was a non-stop day-and-a-half of things being thrown at you, trying to stop you, but it doesn't. That's life, just like life. It's all about figuring it out.

Quick lay of the land; Home base was set up at one end of the Lake Louisa State Park, near Orlando in Florida. Big beautiful park with gentle rolling hills or at least for the first couple of hours they seemed gentle. At some point, there was a dramatic tectonic shifting of the plates and the elevation increased like you wouldn't believe. Wow.

Home base was a series of canopies in a tent village, one for each racer, which resembled the Pit Lane at Daytona. Every lap of the 37 bike laps and 26 run laps came through the village.



The Swim:

The story of my life – it was cold, 38° at start. I fled Canada because Michigan was warmer. Left Michigan because I got too soft for those winters. However, no one should be swimming outside when it's 38°.

This lake had at least one Gator and his name was Henry. No one asked if he had been named by someone, or in memory of someone...





Now, I'm not sure why, but there were a lot of tannins in this lake. Like a good Cabernet, it made the water incredibly dark. Because it's a 4.8 mile swim, I was not going to jump in early and do warm up laps, there would be plenty of time to warmup. Well, that led to the first rude awakening of many for the day (and night..and next day...and start of the next night...). We started on the beach and ran through the water until it got deep enough to dive in and start swimming. When I did this, my first reaction was, "omg, I've just gone blind". I could not see a thing. I guess all those things my mother told me have just come true... I mean, it was totally black. Then I took a breath and the good news was, I saw a blue sky. I wasn't blind. Ok, head down and boom, light switch thrown and black again. Breath, blue sky. This happened a couple of times and I couldn't figure out why I was closing my eyes every time I put my head down to swim? Couldn't see your hand in front of your face. Freaky!

Good news was we were not going to see if Henry was coming for us or not.

After each lap on the swim, you had to stop briefly and yell out your race number to a person on the shore, about 200 feet away who was responsible to count your laps. After completing the 11th lap, they would call back that you were on your last lap, something I was really looking forward to. After what I thought was my 11th lap, I called out my race number and got a simple "thank-you", not the desired "last lap" reply. I paused before yelling, "how many laps do I have left?". A second or two later I got the "last lap" reply I had been looking for. What a relief. I responded with a heartfelt "I love you!!!" and proceeded to start my 12th and last lap.

About 20 minutes later I was done and after nearly 3 hours in 63° water, I was shivering uncontrollably. Wouldn't be the last time over the next 36 hours but man, did it take a long time to get changed.

This race is a series of escalating endorphin rushes sufficient to satiate any endorphin junky. The secret was to set small, bite size goals which add up to getting to the next meal, the next transition, the next sunset or sunrise. Could not, would not think about the finish line until the last lap. If you did, no doubt you would get seriously demoralized and lose the mental battle that was being waged.



The Bike:

It took an incredibly long time to warm up on the bike, but with 37, 6+ mile laps in front of us, we certainly weren't short on time. And now, it was time to get down to work. After the swim, the bike felt pretty good but everyone was going faster than me. Russ kept lapping me and I got chicked so many times I lost track.

After a couple of laps, Rich gave me my first lecture that I wasn't drinking enough (come to think of it, he does the same thing on Thirsty Thursdays...). The thought crossed my mind about doing the elementary-school-lunch-bag thing and pouring some liquid out before the next lap to avoid any more sermons. Luckily though, I still had the wherewithal at that point to realize that might not be the smartest idea of the day. I did start drinking more even though my stomach never really settled down.



While Rich was orating on the necessities of electrolytes and the impending metaphysical crash if I didn't fix it soon, he paused for a moment and Natalie chimed in "boink!". This was the perfect tag team strategy they employed on me throughout the day. Natalie, with her use of the word "boink" was conjugating the verb "to bonk" just in case it wasn't clear enough what was going to happen if I didn't smarten up. It worked.

We had a gorgeous sunset on the first day which could not be enjoyed due to the deep-seated fear knowing the real race was about to start and the toughness scale was going to be ratcheted up a couple of notches. This impending doom combined with a stray comment from someone in the pit lane, "just think, this time tomorrow, you'll be getting close to finishing". Are you f'n kidding me!?! Boom. Like the first step of a bungee jump, down you go into the emotional crevasse.

As it got dark, it got lonely. At least during the day, I could tell every time I got chicked or each time Russ passed me. Now, unless I recognized a taillight, I didn't know who was passing me. I learned which was Russ's taillight (I saw it a lot as it kept disappearing over the horizon again and again).

There was very little conversation at this point in the race which added another element of toughness. An occasional grunt or "good job" as someone blew past. You know they were feeling sorry for you because you were going to be out there a lot longer than they were. Nice. See you on the run buddy, see you on the run.

My next scare came sometime around midnight. As soon as I drank, my body decided to flush it out immediately. I was stopping every 15 - 20 mins to pee and knew that this was not going to lead to a happy ending. My biggest fear was telling Rich as I knew I'd get another lecture. I held off with the news hoping it would fix itself. It didn't. So the next lap, I pulled in, hung my head and addressed Rich, "forgive me father for I have sinned". Of course, Rich already knew. He was timing each lap and could tell before I could that something was wrong. To his credit, he listened, told me to say 10 Hail Mary's and said we needed to get some salt down. While I thought the offense was only worth 5HM's, I didn't argue, paid my penance and as with everything Rich recommended, it worked.

And then we rode. And rode. And rode some more. And then it got cold. The jacket came out, an extra shirt or two, gloves, hat and more. But you were just cold. Again. I've tried cold and I'm tired of cold. No mas por favor.

It was worse for the crew and Natalie powered down at one point.



At some point, they brought out the junk food which is always strange. 34 of the fittest people you've ever seen and they start handing out burgers, fries, hot dogs, chips, pretzels, you name it. And we inhaled them - omg soooooo good! Natalie kept bringing me tray after tray of food that I'm sure were worthy of a couple of Michelin stars. Happy times... for a while.

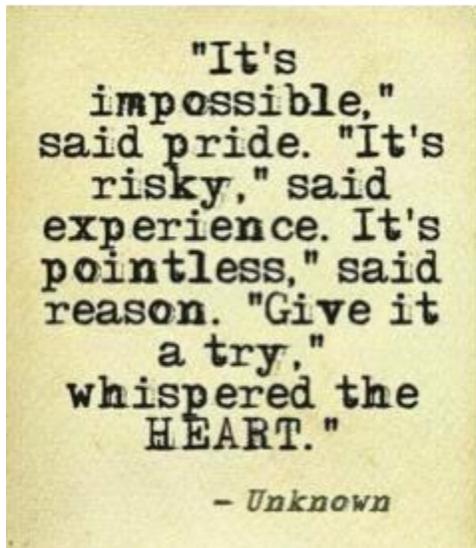
I'm not sure exactly when it was but at some point during the long, cold, dark night (did I say cold?), (did I say long?), I fell in love with 2 pieces of 2" thick packing foam. During my race preparation, I wasn't quite sure how I would use these foam pieces (you can't imagine the packing process for a race like this, \$350 in extra bag fees to fly here) but I just had this feeling extra foam would be useful. When that time came, I placed one under my big sore butt and the other across my handle bars. Ohhhhh sweet baby Jesus, heaven has bestowed love on me, wow. Like sinking into a big comfy, oversized armchair, ahhhhhh, so good.

Even more demoralizing was riding, riding, riding, people blowing past you all the time and no one was starting to run - while I knew it would be tough to see people running and I still had a lot of riding to do, I WANTED to see people starting to run! Finally, someone started to run. I had a long way to ride. Then Russ started to run. I still had a long way to ride.

The last few laps, with not many bikes left on the road, were incredibly lonely. It was now 3am, very dark outside and getting very dark inside. Yup, this is the mental toughness that they were talking about (at least at that point, I had thought this was bad. It got worse).

The race volunteers were great and because they saw you so many times, a very cool rapport was established with them. They knew your name, could tell how you were doing and always had a joke or word of encouragement. I believe there is even a video out there somewhere of the run volunteer and I skipping & singing to "Skip to my Lou". Not sure, all that is somewhat foggy. Regardless, thank-you volunteers, you made such a difference and I didn't thank-you enough during the race.





My favorite motivational sign on the course was the following;

The Run:

In the history of mankind riding bicycles, there has NEVER been so much joy generated as there was getting off that bike. I'm pretty sure the process to separate the bike seat from my ass involved the use of a blow torch but again, details weren't exactly clear and at that point, it didn't matter. I was actually looking forward to running the next 52.4 miles because I knew I didn't have to get back on the bike.

I started the run with my feet totally frozen. Big blocks of heavy, frozen flesh that you kept slapping onto the pavement. I'm sure there was going to be a price to be paid for this but the short-term vision of warming up was palpable and so inviting. Amazing that as my feet and legs warmed up, not only did it feel better, it actually felt good. After 229 miles, with a lot more to do, I felt like I was out for a 5k stroll through the park. Wow. Unfortunately, that euphoria didn't last...

The 2nd lowest point of the race came at about 4:30am. It was dark and oh yea, it was cold. Too dark to tell who was who behind each lonely headlamp and sunrise was still too far away to have that as your next short term goal. I was really getting tired at this point and weird things were starting to happen. At one point I was absolutely certain I saw prancing unicorns in the middle of the road ahead of me. Everyone had circled around them and were clapping and cheering. *It looked like so much fun.* You cannot imagine the disappointment when they disappeared and it dawned on me it might not be real (although I'm still pretty sure I saw what I saw).

At this point, I just wanted to sleep. So much so, I convinced myself that I could run with one eye closed. It worked pretty well. Then, I alternated and ran with the other eye closed. All good. The next logical progression of course was to close both eyes, ahhhh that felt good... At least that brief experiment didn't end in any spilled blood.

The sky finally started to get a little brighter and what an incredible difference that made. With each minute closer to sunrise (and potential warmth), my mood improved exponentially. I know there is perfect correlation between my mile splits and the degree of light outside. That helped me finish the first marathon in less than 5 hours and the thought of having to do another one didn't even phase me.

After about 30 miles, I had to walk and hit a new low. Rich got me motivated with a walk-run strategy where I ran for 150 strides and walked for 50. Absolutely amazing how long that kept me going. I was pulling off 9-minute miles with this strategy after running for 35 miles, 264 miles total so far and 25

hours of continuous racing. Who is this guy I thought? I didn't care, I was just happy to be along for the ride.

At this point I was starting to get feedback on Russ's race and how amazing he was doing. He was in 4th place overall and just kept going and going. He was about 8 miles ahead of me and the guy in 3rd place was only about 20 minutes in front of him. Rich was getting everyone fired up and motivated. I was on a high, took up the mission and found Russ. I fell into step beside him and we mapped out a strategy to shave off the 20 minute lead. Russ had pushed so hard, his legs were fried and he wasn't that chatty.

The guy in 3rd had started to walk and Russ wouldn't stop. I entertained him with bad jokes and talked about the Zen of running just long enough to distract him as he powered through the last few miles. He kept gaining on 3rd. The course had a series of gentle S bends leading into the finish and we spotted 3rd a few hundred yards in front of us before he saw us. Russ put his head down and ran. We cut the gap in half before he looked over his shoulder and saw us coming. He took off and the sprint was on.

This was surreal. 281 miles into a race and there was a foot race sprint to the finish. Wow, I will never forget that!

We were still gaining on him with the finish in sight when he suddenly took a left turn. What was that? I told Russ, let's follow him, there must be something different going on for the finish. There wasn't. By the time we realized he had made a mistake, he had corrected, ran across the finish line and we were still behind him. Damn! If I had told Russ to keep going, he would have been 3rd. Sorry Russ, you worked so hard, you earned that spot.

I stopped for a few minutes to watch Russ's finishing ceremony and then hit the absolute lowest point of the race, knowing I had just cost Russ the podium and I still had another 8 miles to go. I was spent.

Lowest of the low. Again Rich and Natalie saved the day. Rich kept pushing me to try and run a little. I argued, I had a lot of weak excuses about tired feet, legs, etc, etc, the list was long. I had decided, screw this, I was just going to walk the last 8 miles, I didn't care. For about the 1,000 time, Rich's advice started to work his magic and I tried to run. Nope wasn't happening. Then I tried again, telling myself to quit whining. Nope. Ok whuss, just shuffle then. Hey, that worked for a bit. Now shuffle a little more.

Good. Now run. No! Run. Piss-off! Run! Then it dawned on me, just think, Russ is drinking your beer right now. I ran. And I ran. And it started to feel better. And the laps melted away. And I got to my last lap, whoa, what a rush.

If you want an endorphin high, this is the ticket. Pleasure is the absence of pain and this was pleasure like you've never seen! Wow. 29 hours 36 minutes and an 8th place finish. Very happy with that and very happy to be done!



(Yes, the visor is on upside down to collect ice and slowly melt to keep you cool!)

2 beers and a half a pizza later, I was out cold for the next 12 hours.

My apologies to anyone I work with. I've always expected people around me to not work any more or any less than me but to work as hard. I've just learned we are all capable of taking it to the next level and that next level is a lot higher than you think. Fasten your seat belts, it's a shame there's only 24 hours in a day.

Conclusion:

Three questions that need to be answered;

1. Would I do another one? Wow, the wound is still festering so I don't know. Time must mend all wounds or else we'd all be from single child families.
2. Would I recommend this race to a friend or an enemy? Definitely both. It would convert enemies into friends however I'm just not sure if the friends would remain friends.
3. Was it worth all the effort? Yea, it really was. What an experience.

Thank-you.

S.