

Double IRON Triathlon (7th-8th September 2002) Race report!

I guess it all really started 4 years ago; there I was, writing up my PhD. I had recently visited the USA to go to some job interviews and a couple of conferences when Chris Faigle emailed me to tell me that he had found a really neat event.....a Double IRON tri (4.8 mile swim, 224 mile cycle and 52.4 mile run.....or in metric 8km swim, 360km cycle and 84 km run), and that he really wanted to run 52.4 miles, and I could do one of the other two events and we could find someone to do the third. Well to cut a long story short, a year later I was living in the USA and we did indeed do the Double as a team (but that is a completely separate report). I recall saying after watching the pained expression on all the athletes faces "that is something I have no inclination to do," little did I know, that after being involved in the race again (as a support crew/volunteer), on a cold winters night in February 2001 I would be riding home from work and think to myself, I can do this riding in the dark thing.....I think I should do the Double!!!! A couple of weeks later I would be out on a club ride and meet a young man named Aaron..... obviously a triathlete, we got talking and one thing led to another (get your minds out of the gutter....not those sort of things) and we started training together on the bike and hanging out together. Fairly early on in the friendship I mentioned that I was thinking of doing the Double in 2002 (my race calendar was full for that year). Well it became obvious that Aaron would make a good support crew. So I worked on convincing him that he wanted the job.

In the 12 months before the race, I don't think that we had an encounter that didn't involve the phrase "so when I/you do the Double....." (Aaron what are we going to talk about now? We planned and replanned the race (my aim was to be able to "race" as much of it as possible rather than just suffer the whole way through); we planned and went on crazy training sessions that involved doing lots of training/racing in a weekend with little or no sleep, cycling all night etc. As the time approached, THE PLAN was put to paper.....7 pages for Aaron to memorize! A little spanner was thrown into THE PLAN a couple of weeks before; I had to drive myself to Canada the week before the race to get a work visa, arriving back at my house the afternoon before the race. Well it had to be done, so it was, 1200 miles in the 4 days before the race, COOL!

Arriving back at Hotel Couldrey on Friday morning I rang Aaron and he came to load up his trigeek mobile (for those that don't know, that's his license plate) and we were off to the beautiful location of Lake Anna State park. It was cool to see the folks from Odyssey, but what was all this about having to ride up that steep hill from the lake on each of the 30 bike loops? That was a change from last year and a bit of a shock to the system. We did a warm up loop of the bike course, and then I was dragged off to register in Fredericksburg. In the weeks before the race, I had been thinking "I must email Kirby and ask him if I can be #6 because that is the number we were when we did it as a team", well I turn up and Kirby says "I was thinking of giving you number 6" . I took that as a good omen! Aaron had said that I was to be in a hotel room by 6pm (I hadn't slept much in days).

Well we made that cut off.....but only just! It was really quite nice, I sat in bed and Aaron did the last bit of pre race testing of the bike. Then a good night's sleep. I was surprisingly calm, scared yes, but looking forward to giving it my best shot.4AM The alarm goes and we head back to the park, talk, sit, get ready, and before I know it, it's time to start swimming. Oh yeah, I

saw 2 shooting stars that morning,, no prizes for guessing what I wished for on both of those! The lake is the most beautiful setting, especially on a wonderful morning like this. I can't imagine a more ideal setting for swimming 4.8 miles. 33.6 laps of the lane rope (p.s. Aaron, that lane rope became like the yellow line on the W and OD trail in the middle of the night). The swim was so much fun, we stuck to THE PLAN exactly, and it was exactly the right plan! About half the way through the swim I tried to wiggle my fingers, and realized that I couldn't, they were all swollen, not good, but I figured that my lymphatic system was just not working properly because I was keeping my fingers so still. So I invented a new swimming drill, as the arm comes out of the water, to make a fist and then release before entering the water.

Let me say, that it is rather difficult to perform this drill while swimming in a straight line and keeping the stroke nice. Never mind, it seemed to do the job! It was good to see Aaron with water, hammer gel and Cytomax every 4th lap, my support was doing a good job so far.

Out of the swim, well that was the easy part, but I bit down and I was happy about that. Time to put on my favorite cycling outfit (the New Zealand one) and we were on the trusty Cervello and up that hill for the first of 30 times!!! My transition time was about 5 min, this is faster than some people I know in much shorter triathlons (take note Jono, I'm talking about you). I was concerned about that hill getting very difficult later in the day and during the night. Out on the course and the course was filled with competitors of the Half IRON tri, it was neat to be able to cycle with all those people and to say hello to and encourage those that I knew. The first 7 laps (each lap being 7.5miles) flew by....all those miles on my bike had paid off after all! The hill really wasn't so bad, had worked out where to change gears, and had broken up the lap into different pieces. I had worked out how to coordinate the....shift down into the lowest gear just before where the support crews were, toss my empty bottle in the direction of Aaron and Jen (the other half of my most excellent support crew), shout to them what I wanted on the way back up, head down the hill, do a U-turn and pedal back up and pick up my order!

THE PLAN for the bike was being stuck to, and I was just a little ahead of schedule. I had decided to have 5 5-10 min breaks, between which I was not allowed to get off. These were partly to break the ride up mentally as much as anything and give me something to look forward to and prevent me from stopping too much. 2 lots of 7 laps then 4 lots of 4 laps. This worked well! The start of the second set of 7 went well, I was having a blast, I kept thinking to myself, "I am doing the Double, how cool is that". It was so nice to have so many folks there that knew me and were cheering me on at the bottom of that hill every time I got there (for those that don't know, you couldn't get a good speed up going down because the turnaround was at the bottom, so you had to climb from a stand still). However, in lap 11 things started to get a bit difficult, I didn't realize just how hot it was, and I now think that a lot of the problems that were starting then were due to the heat. My stomach couldn't absorb enough water, so it felt really bloated and I didn't want to eat and I was thirsty, my feet were really sore (although I was remarkably pleased that this was in fact the only thing that was sore). I made it through to the end of lap 14 but suffered a bit in that last lap. I spent much of the time deciding what I wanted to eat when I stopped....for some reason instant pudding seemed like a good idea. I stopped, ate my pudding, which tasted sooooo good, peeed, which stung like nothing else and I screamed. Had Aaron tell me that I wasn't eating enough, so had another serving of pudding (he was right I started eating more and felt less nauseous) Stretched and then back on the bike. I don't know what was in that

pudding, but what ever it was, IT WORKED! I was back to being super happy and had a most excellent lap. Aaron asked if he could ride the last lap of the next set with me. I was glad of the company, and when I came past to pick him up he was on his cell phone talking to the peeps at the BBQ (BBB and Woody were most interested in how things were going). So then Aaron had to endure me telling him about the lap in minute detail...where I ate, where I shook out my feet etc. Then time for the lights. When it got dark, people seemed to start having problems, fortunately I commute to and from work in the dark all winter, so I rode on as though nothing was different, I was just so glad that the sun had gone down and it was no longer hot! The 10 laps that I did in the dark all kind of merge together, Aaron rode 4 of those laps with me, the first one of which I had to ask him to because I thought I had to do a #2 and it was dark and no light in the portajohn and could he please bring his torch (flashlight for you Americans!).

Well turns out but I just had a lot of gas, but once I knew that no #2 was on its way I could let this gas out without worry. Okay, so that was too much information, think I have been hanging out with Dan and Mike too much! The last few laps were less pleasant, my neck was a bit stiff, actually my back and shoulders hurt too, and my legs were tight, I couldn't get down onto my aero bars and pedal at the same time for the last 4, but what do you expect in the last 30 miles of a 224 mile ride.....as Aaron and I always say "the last few laps are always going to suck!" I ate and drank lots and kind of looked forward to getting off my bike, although I wasn't sure that I liked what was coming next! My feet had stopped being really sore, and my major complaint was the major burning that I experienced when I tried to pee! I'm sure there was more suffering during the ride, but it's already disappearing 2 days after the end. Throughout the bike ride I got to talk to many of the competitors, it was a great feeling out there, everyone doing it together, there was a lot of support and mutual feelings shared.

How different to every other race this was. I don't know why I was surprised at how different this race was, I had seen it 3 times before, but somehow it did surprise me. I was also surprised how much fun I was having, and how happy I was, I hadn't really thought of this before the race. So there I was, THE PLAN said that I was aiming to be off the bike at 02:00 (between 02:00 and 03:00 was okay) and at 01:55 there I was descending the hill for the last time (by the way, that hill really didn't cause me any more pain of hassle the 30th time than the 1st time, which I think was a good thing).

Waiting at the bottom of the hill was a small group of friends, my support crew, a chair and some clean clothes! Oh yeah, a ham sandwich and hot chocolate too :-). A quick change and I was off (T2 about 10 min). This was the first time that I had sat down on anything other than a bike saddle (oh yeah and the toilet seat).

THE RUN!!! Time for the first deviation of the plan, I had watched some of the Triple IRON competitors start their run, they seemed to walk the first lap. I had thought to myself, they have a long way to walk if they are going to walk the whole thing, but then it turned out that it was just the first one that they were walking, then they started running. Towards the end of the bike I began to realize why this was, and I figured they had done lots of these races! I figured I could get some good food and liquid into my system and stretch out those legs! And that is exactly what I did...I felt all bowlegged walking on that first lap. Then came the second change to THE PLAN. I had not accounted for the ups and downs, so on that first lap I devised a new plan that involved in running 70ish % of each lap (reducing the amount of each lap run as the

laps went on down to a minimum of 50%). Well turns out I stuck to that plan well! To be honest, the first 4 laps were awesome, Aaron walked the first one with me, roller bladed the next 3 with me. There was such a clear sky and the stars were so beautiful, I think we commented it on each lap as we made that right hand turn. Then Aaron needed to organize a few things, go to the bathroom (where he took a nap while sitting on the toilet.....I was so envious) so I headed out on a lap by myself. All of a sudden (a lap after telling Jon Clarke that I really wasn't very sleepy) tiredness came over me. As I was walking up the first up hill I actually started falling asleep while walking (well that was a new experience). And I had my first hallucination. As I was walking along all of a sudden I see a whole set of garden furniture on the road in front of me,man, now I have to walk around this....no wait, I could sit down and have a sleep.....errrr, it hasn't been here the last 33 times I came past....I must be hallucinating! Aaron, the trouper that he is, was out there with me from the next lap on, right until the end. He walked with me, he ran with me, when we got to the end of each of the laps he ran ahead to get me whatever we had decided I needed to eat (many Jelly sandwich rolls were made and eaten) and he would meet me after the turnaround. The remainder of the first marathon was rather non descript. The bond with the other athletes and their support crews was amazing, and seeing those people at the turnaround (both ends) cheering me on, willing me on, made me happy every time.

At one point Don came on part of a lap with me and asked me how I felt, I never expected to have people ask me how I felt, or to tell me how proud they were of me (Dawn, Chris R. and Dan I remember in particular, but thanks to any others that said that) Having so many people that knew me there and wanting me to be successful was more wonderful than I can describe. 13 laps down, the first marathon complete, it was time for dry sox and shoes (my second sit down on something other than a bike seat or toilet seat). It was a nice point, to have done the first marathon, my body hurt, but hey, nothing that I wouldn't expect after more than 24 hours of exercise. It was light, everyone was up again, but I knew that the remainder of the race was going to be the bit that tested me and whether I could push my limits of tolerating mental and physical pain a step further. I was not wrong!

Firstly getting out of that chair was tough. Each lap got harder and harder, I had developed some significant issues in the back of one leg so that I couldn't straighten out that leg properly, but this only hurt when I walked, but other things hurt when I ran...so I was in a constant battle with myself to run more or not....actually it had no bearing on what happened, I ran the bits I decided to run and walked the bits that I had decided to walk. Mentally I suffered when it was so painful to walk but I knew that I didn't have an option but to keep going forward. It all blurs together, abet, but it was mentally and physically tougher than anything I have experienced before in a sporting event. I hit a low at around lap 16 or 17. I started to become irrational about my feet (if I remember rightly it only lasted for one lap). I so desperately wanted to take my shoes off, kind of like when you are so incredibly thirsty and all you can think about is taking a mouthful of water. I kept trying to convince Aaron that I should take my shoes off and do the rest of the run (or at least a few laps) without shoes. When he told me that I wasn't allowed to do that (in THE PLAN it had said that Aaron was right even if Chris didn't think he was...and fortunately I remembered this), I tried to convince him that I should try my Teva sandals for a lap, that wasn't allowed either, so we tried untying my shoe laces for a bit of the walking....nope that didn't help either. Aaron decided that my feet were probably a bit swollen and that my trail shoes, although they wouldn't solve the problem, might give just the tiniest bit of relief. Well

that was indeed the case, or maybe it was a placebo effect. But I got to sit down for the third time (thanks for letting me sit in your chair Dan). But by this time it was really really hot again. Chris F. joined us from around this time (thanks Chris), and as the laps went on, my group of supporters grew, Jen came along for the run, and then Chris' girlfriend and Jon Clarke even joined me for a bit! That reminds me, why was everyone trying to get ME to pick up all the trash????

So many of you seemed to have the same idea! These laps were interspersed by some fun dancing by Lori and Cindy, which made me laugh. Actually I laughed so much during the run as a whole, Beat has such a dry sense of humor that was so fitting as we death marched out there, Aaron and I laughed a lot on so many of the cycling and running laps, and those people that did the vibrator impersonation, I really can't complain that I was in bad spirits for all except about 10 laps of the run, and even some of them had moments of laughter. However, during this time, I think I got a very small taste of what the Baton death march was like, I do not claim to know what it was like, but I really felt like I was being tortured (fortunately this only lasted really badly for a couple of laps), I was mentally suffering at that time as well as physically suffering.

Well after wanting to be finished for so many hours, some how I made it to the second to last lap, and then I realized that it was really going to happen, spirits lifted a great deal! The last lap I enjoyed with the people running with me, and then it was time for the 0.4 mile. Before the race I thought that this would be tough to go out and do another 0.4, but in fact, it was like doing a victory lap. Don rode his bike up to the 0.2 mile mark and said how proud he was of me, and then I turned around and ran down for the last time, the smile on Don's face said it all to me, everyone was so happy for me, and I was so happy for myself, I cried all of the last 0.2 for all the happiness, pain, and emotions I had felt, but mostly because I had set a crazy goal and achieved it better than I ever thought I could. I was not only pleased with finishing, but that I gave it 110% all of the 33 hours and 24 minutes! This race report has been really long, and I give you full credit if you have read this far, it doesn't even make a small dent on most of the feelings and thoughts that I had out there. The bonds I felt that I made with many of the other competitors and how I finally understood the looks on the faces of people as they did the Double that I saw in the last few years.

It also doesn't do enough justice to Aaron, who looked after me, kept an eye on what I was eating and drinking, being out there with me for some bike laps and all except 2 of the run laps, we ran and walked, sometimes in silence, sometimes talking and laughing. He got me what ever I wanted, carried what ever I needed, and made great jelly sandwiches (during all this Jen did a great job in holding down home base, taking photographs and making hot chocolate), the only thing he wouldn't do...is put Vaseline on my butt when I had my first ever case of "baboon ass", but I didn't really expect him to!!! He has promised to write his own supporter's report which will be interesting to read (he writes well). Also I can't imagine having done this with my US family of Odyssey people, being able to share something this big was a very precious gift. Well I guess that's the end of the story. I wonder what will be my next challenge, actually to be honest I have a fair idea, but you'll all have to wait until there is a firm PLAN!

For more information on the Double IRON or Triple IRON Triathlon – please visit www.USAUltraTri.com, email Steve Kirby at steve@USAUltraTri.com or call (757) 430-8021.