

2005 Triple IRON Triathlon

Hi

The Triple IRON Triathlon I did this weekend is over - I finished in 56hrs and 20 min - thought doing it once would be enough but I may have to go back because I certainly feel like it got the best of me. (Even with a PhD in sport psych and lots of prep things aren't always perfect and there is always something more ☺)

We got there on Thursday. My mom and dad were nice enough to fly in from WI and together with my brother we set up a canopy, tent and all of my gear (2 bikes, wheels, lots of gear tubs, etc). Dad and my brother left to spend the weekend together in sane, dry places. Mom and I settled in to playing with the dogs (they came too) and organizing gear. We had a really nice intro dinner where we got to meet everyone and I was humbled by the experience of the group. The rains (courtesy of Tropical Storm Tammy) started about 10pm. Mom and the big dog slept in the van. The little dog and I were in the tent which sprung a leak around 4am. I managed to fix it and then got up to get ready for the 7am start because I couldn't sleep any more. 11 people started our race. Only 2 of us had never done this before and I was the only one who had never done any sort of Ironman. I was also the only one who decided to paddle not swim. By the time it was all over on Sunday, 5 people DNF'd due to injury or weather issues and one person downgraded and did the Double. And despite the 40ish hours of rain to start the race off, we still were incredibly lucky - the temps were always descent 60-75 I think, maybe mid 50's at night - so really can't complain.

Race start Friday 7am - The Paddle- I rented an awesome little kayak and when the swimmers started I was off on my 24 mile paddle. I had to go down the lake, across open water to a set spot and come back 6x. For the first few laps there was some rain and some wind but nothing awful. I saw tons of blue heron (or the same one in many places?) and lots of fish jumping for raindrops. I had taken water and food with me so I didn't need to stop. For my final lap out the rain came down so hard that I couldn't see more than 20 yards and the cross wind was a huge fight. I was so glad the Coast Guard boat was only 20 yards or so behind me. After some of the scary water incidents in other races this year, I was definitely white knuckling this one. By the time I headed back the rain had stopped but the wind was a direct headwind and getting back was slow. Finally got off the water by around 1ish and went up to the kitchen facility to change.

Friday around 1pm - The Bike - Despite the now steady downpour that started as I left the water (and that pretty much continued with only a few 10-15min breaks until Saturday late afternoon) I decided to go ahead and use my road bike. I brought a rigid mtn with semi slicks in case conditions got horrid but the road bike was the better option. As I approached the bike start to check in I found out that the horrible winds I had

experienced on the water had also blown over our tent and canopy and had destroyed one of the race director's large tents! So the transition area was a bustle of activity as they tried to relocate all tents to the other side of the road and to clean mud and rain off of everything. (Some nice volunteers helped my mom set the canopy back up but when it blew down again about an hour later she abandoned it and the tent for a spot up the road where she could park the van and the dogs and still provide support for me on the course. I felt very guilty about not being able to help her and for dragging her out in the rain.) I headed off on the 5 mile course for 67laps feeling very nervous. I don't like road biking on wet pavement and I especially don't like wet leaves on wet pavement and the thought of wet pavement, wet roads and dark left me anxious and nervous all afternoon as I anticipated night. And when the rain didn't stop and it got dark it really sapped a lot of energy as I fought to stay calm and on pace because I knew that tensing up is what leads to crashes.

The course was mild and rolling, at first, but it is funny how terrain changes over time. I found out later that of the 4 or so triple tri's in the world - this is considered the most challenging course because it is not flat. I managed to keep about a 15 mph average riding all by myself for the entire 336 miles except for about 10 laps when I road side by side and talked to other racers here and there. I am really proud of that because a few of the athletes had pacers to keep them moving (I didn't know that was allowed and I think it makes a huge difference). I stopped every 50 or so miles to get fresh bottle and more pocket food. Around midnight I stopped for a 1:20 break to stretch, to change into dry clothes (even though they just got wet again as soon as I got out of the van, it helped reduce road grit), to eat some hot food and to sleep for about 20-30 minutes. Riding in the pouring rain (not drizzle) in the dark with only a few other riders passing the other way is an incredible thing. It wasn't a closed course so occasionally cars would pass. I know I hit at least one frog and I came pretty darn close to a nasty encounter with a possum.

Somehow I managed to avoid him, although I was only about 3 or 4 inches from his head (he hissed at me something fierce) and how I kept the bike up on the wet leaves I do not know.

In the wee hours of the a.m. I had to stop because of a sharp driving neck pain that meant I couldn't turn my head or even raise it all the way up. I was afraid to take too much Vit I (Advil) because it can tear up your stomach so I was doing some creative riding and head tilting. After a few sketchy moments on the bike I finally asked the massage therapist on site if she could help. She was amazing! I was very worried about having mid race massage but I didn't really have a choice. Apparently the death grip on the paddle in the winds left my upper back and neck pretty funky up. After she finished a little 15 min session, I didn't have another problem with it all race! Seriously, Zanna was one of the best in the business that I have encountered. By this point it was about dawn and once I got back on I pretty much stayed on the bike and just kept going out and back until I finished this leg. It was mind numbing boring at times compared to the other types of events I have done (but now that it is over, I can say I have found a different kind of neat challenge in the

event that I didn't appreciate right away). As we were finishing our final 50 miles, the folks from the Double IRON Triathlon were just starting their bike. I spent a few delightful laps with two of these fellows (side by side - no drafting allowed) and regaled them with tails of a soggy night on the road and gave them tips on the course for dark riding.

The Run - Saturday 3 or 4pm (not sure and haven't even checked stats yet). The last few laps on the bike were rain free and we really didn't see any more rain for the rest of the race. I changed into dry running stuff and set my bike (who now needs a complete overhaul ☹) aside. The run was to be 78.6 miles on a 2 ish mile loop. It went back out the bike course then took a turn down a side road and back. So for the first and last part of each lap you got to see the Double IRON Triathlon bikers and any remaining Triple riders as they did their bike work. For my first lap out and back I took Bodhi, our yellow lab, and for the second I took Nimh - I was feeling pretty guilty - not only that mom was stuck in a van with 2 wet dogs but the intent was for them to spend the weekend outside not stuck in a car. They both seemed to enjoy their turns on the course. Bodhi is old and he liked the trotting pace. Nimh is my normal running partner and she was pretty annoyed with the slow pace.

As I finished my 2nd lap, my dad, brother and his wife arrived to say hi and watch the silliness for awhile. I took Dad on an easy lap with me while I was still working on getting rid of my bike legs. They left shortly after that and I just kept going out and back on the course. My husband, Chris, showed up around dark after his cyclocross race was done. He gave my mom a much needed break and helped clean up the soggy mess that was the downed tent and canopy. The first 2 marathons were pretty uneventful - a mix of power/speed walking and running depending on the part of the course.

I took one short 30 min break for a brief nap and to change into new clothes. Despite all the people, up until the run, I had felt very much alone out there after the solo paddle, isolation of the rain, and virtually solo ride. The nature of the run was much more social and fun than the bike. I spent an hour or so jogging with a doctor from Switzerland (who won the race) and I met many very inspirational people (both racers and crew). It was also much easier for me to zone and run - not sure if that is the longer running history or the lower fear of crashing but I really enjoyed the miles.

Then just as I was finishing the 2nd marathon I became aware of some trouble with my feet. I didn't think much of it at first but finally I stopped by the medic tent. Discovered I had several quarter sized blisters between toes and along the edge of my foot. He fixed them up with duct tape and super glue after lancing them. Unfortunately this was in the wee hours of the morning and after sitting there for about 20 minutes while he worked and despite being wrapped in a blanket, I was freezing. I tried to do another lap on my new feet but I was shivering pretty badly. So I curled up for a 20 minute nap in a warm

sleeping bag and then started out again. Had a great time for awhile doing laps with Vincenzo Catalano, an Italian who holds the world's record for number of Iron Triathlon races in 1 year (31!) - he had to DNF the night before on the bike but he did some of the running as training! So at first all was fine and I was looking at a pretty good finish for a first attempt but by morning my feet were in terrible shape. The blisters were altering my running style and this was causing massive cramping. Running was out of the question and even jogging for more than few steps at a time was horrid. Parts of my feet were numb now too (and the numbness lasted for over a week after the race) and I wished they would all numb out. It is very frustrating to know you can physically go faster/harder but you can't. I knew the blisters were back and bigger but was afraid to take off my shoes and I knew that at this point nothing was going to 'fix them' so I kept going. I hadn't had blisters like this since my first adventure race years before and I am still not sure what the difference was that I had trouble this race.

Occasionally I would be in synch with and be able to walk a lap with another competitor in the same boat, Chris kept me company for a few laps and I hobbled with an awesome member of another team's support crew too. There was some confusion for awhile regarding the number of laps I had left but it was finally straightened out and I managed to run the final mile to a finish line full of awesome people who had volunteered throughout the event and to my waiting support crew. I finished in 56 hrs and 20 mins. - several hours slower than I had planned due to my hobbled feet but also well within the 60 hour cut off time. Maybe next time (and maybe next time I'll swim so I am not handicapped by the winds in the paddle!!)