

**Amy Engel**  
**Virginia Double Anvil**  
**October 11 &12, 2013**  
**Lake Anna State Park**

**RESULT:**

Swim - 2:19:06. 1<sup>st</sup> place overall

T1 – 13:59

Bike – 15:07:43. 3<sup>rd</sup> place overall

T2 – 13:22

Run – 10:08:32. 1<sup>st</sup> place overall

**TOTAL – 28:02:42 (1<sup>st</sup> place female – new course record holder, 2<sup>nd</sup> place overall)**

I had an early flight from San Diego to Washington-Dulles on Wednesday. Arrived in DC Wednesday evening and picked up the rental car. I was traveling alone and had a ton of gear and my bike. This was tough. It was dark and raining. The drive to Lake Anna State Park took forever due to the weather and traffic (3.5 hours). I stopped at a grocery store for a few items. I finally arrived in the park and at the cabin around 9:30 PM. Exhausted. Unpacked and started to put the bike together. I brought the Kuota K-Factor bike. I realized that I forgot to pack the top round piece that holds on the handlebars. This is a standard bike and a standard piece (not like with my Trek). Tammy and Fred arrived to the cabin around 10:30PM. They unpacked and we decided we would go to the local bike shop (30 minutes away) in the morning.

It was still raining Thursday morning. I took some time first thing in the morning to organize my gear. I had all of my gear, clothing, and nutrition in large, clear, Zip-lock bags. Each bag was also labeled (bars, gel/blocks, bike warm clothing, run hot clothing, medical/personal care, etc.). We had 3 large clear plastic bins. One bin contained all of the clothing and gear bags. The second bin contained all of the nutrition bags and other food (bagels, PB, Gatorade bottles). The third bin contained extra bike parts (tubes, tires, small hand pump, etc.), and blanket and towels. I had morning clothes, swim suit, wetsuit, goggles and cap in a tote bag that I would take to the start in the morning. Tammy and Fred took time looking at each of the bags when we put them in a bin.

Tammy and I drove the 30 minutes to the bike shop for the bike part (no problems with this). We also picked up lunch. It was around 1:00 when we arrived back to the cabin. We ate lunch, finished putting the bike together, and did a double check of the gear. I had created a fairly detailed race plan. The three of us took some time discussing the plan to ensure we were all thinking the same. I then attempted to rest and take a nap.

Tammy, Fred, and I went to the check in area around 5:00PM on Thursday. We took the bins with the gear to the transition/crew area. Each racer had a space in a tent with a table and chairs. It was still raining – good thing my gear was in plastic bags and plastic bins. The tent also was helpful. At check-in,

I passed the drug testing and was given my race number. ☺ My friend, Sarah, was also racing. She arrived and met us at check in. Sarah and I had told the race director ahead of time that we were friends and wanted to be together in a tent. This worked out perfectly. Our tent spaces were together and we shared crew. We each had two people, but our crews worked together which gave us 4 people helping take care of us. At check in, a timing chip was placed on our bikes. Bikes were left at the T1 area which was the restroom and snack bar by the lake. We were served pasta for the pre-race dinner/meeting. Sarah, Tammy, Fred, and I went back to the cabin for the night. Sarah and I didn't sleep much. Nervous!!!

We had the alarm set for 5:00AM Friday morning, but were awake prior to it going off. We left the cabin for the lake around 6:00AM. I had a bagel with PB and a banana for breakfast. Sarah's crew of Josh and Jamie were going to arrive while we were in the water. Sarah and I changed into our wetsuits in the bathroom by the lake. This was T1.

There were pre-race pictures and then the race started at 7:00AM by the race director striking a large anvil twice. It was overcast and the rain was on the way. There were 21 of us racing the Double Anvil (3 females and 18 males). I started in the back, but quickly passed all but two swimmers (both male). I was able to get a great draft on the third lap, but lost them starting lap four or five. The swim was 12 laps. We were given different color swim caps to wear and a race staff was counting our laps. We were all instructed at the pre-race meeting to stop after each lap and yell our name to ensure our lap was counted. I had fun doing this. I guess I was very clear yelling my name. ☺ My race plan had me stopping after 6 laps (half way through the swim) for nutrition. Tammy waded into the water up to her waist and brought me Gatorade and Clif shot blocks. This was a perfect plan. I didn't need any additional nutrition stops. I felt great. Water temperature was around 72 degrees, which was much warmer than the air. I was a little warm in my wetsuit, but was glad I wore it since it was a long swim and the poor weather conditions. I was very relaxed and was really enjoying the swim. Half way finished with lap 11, one of the guys on a kayak started paddling next to me. I didn't understand why. I was swimming and not breaking any rules. He was right next to me. I tried to ignore it and just swim. I stopped and yelled my name after finishing lap 11 and was going to start the final lap. The guy on the kayak then yelled, "Lead swimmer starting last lap." Oh, I am in the lead! That is why I lost the 2 guys I was drafting off of early on. I had passed them! The kayak was the escort for the lead swimmer. What fun! I had a nice last lap and was still enjoying the swim. I finished and yelled my name again, just for fun. I waved to Fred and jogged to the restroom to meet up with Tammy for T1. Swim time 2:19:06. 1<sup>st</sup> place overall.

T1. I took off the wetsuit and swim suit. Changed to tri shorts (I don't like bike shorts), bike jersey, and a wind vest. I took my time. Dried off the best I could. Tammy was very helpful. The rain was moving in. It was going to be a long ride. My bike was parked outside the bathroom. It was time to ride. T1 time 13:59.

The bike course is a 4.8 mile stretch of road that we ride out and back 45 times. Our crew is at the end near the lake/restroom. The main timing station is also located here. A second timing station is located

at the far end at the turn around. Each end requires a 180 degree turn. I unclipped one foot EVERY turn. I was not going to take a chance of falling with a tight turn and wet roads. The second person (male) out of the water passed me and took the lead around lap 4. He is strong! The rain started at lap 6. It was cold and wet. I didn't want to stop and change clothes. Everything was going to be wet. I just kept riding. More and more people joined the course. It was interesting that not many people talked. I think it was due to the weather conditions. Rain and slippery roads. Everyone was focusing on staying safe and dealing with the miserable conditions. I enjoyed seeing my crew so frequently. They reminded me to eat and drink. I forced myself to focus on this. Since the weather was not warm, I really made sure I was drinking enough. No drafting was permitted. Not that anyone would try in these weather conditions. I would pass Sarah and we would ride together and chat for a bit. The only other person that seemed to want to chat was a guy named Bret. Very nice guy. Overall, this was a solo ride with frequent turns and crew sighting. The timing system was acting a little off at times due to the rain, so we were asked to tell our number when passing the two timing areas. I tried to have fun with this. The rain became a downpour. I decided to stick to my race plan. I stopped around mile 80 for real food of bagel and PB. I also refilled my bento box of nutrition and used the port-a-potty. Tammy encouraged me to change to dry clothing, but I didn't see what the point would be. I continued on. My next scheduled stop would be close to 6:00PM. At this stop, I did a full change. The four crew members helped me change everything and put on warm clothes. Tri shorts, leg warmers, tri top, warm cycling jacket, and gloves. We also put on the helmet and bike lights at this time. It was not quite dark yet, but I wanted to get as much done at this stop as possible. I also had some warm veggie soup the race had provided. The race had put straw on the ground, but there was still mud everywhere!!! It was dry under the tent, but muddy. It was really tough to get back on the bike and start riding in the rain again. I did it and kept peddling. It was very dark – no moon, in the woods in the middle of nowhere. I was glad for good lights. It was still tough to see and I slowed down a bit to be careful. The last 1.5 hour of the ride was rough. I was in a very dark place mentally and physically. So cold. Although I had plenty of dry clothes, I didn't want to stop and change. I mean, really, what was the point?!?! I had to stop around this time to switch lights (batteries only last so long). I remember Tammy trying to hurry to switch the lights and had trouble getting one clipped. She was so worried that she was slowing me down. I laughed and gave her a hug. I really was not in a hurry to get back out in the rain. It was great having a crew that was concerned about my time more than I was. I had to dig deep mentally and keep biking in the dark. It was so quiet. It was nice having the timing station at the far end to have a little company at the other end of the course. Finally, I was told by my crew and the main timer that I was starting my last lap. The timer at the far end of the course said, "Finish up the bike 500 (my number) and start that run." Limiting factor on the bike – wet roads and the 180 degree turn at both ends of the course. Unclipping one leg every turn really slowed my pace. Bike time 15:07:43.

It felt amazing to stop biking!!! My crew took the bike and helped me do a full change to warm clothes for running. Long pants, tank top, long sleeve bike jersey, hat, headlamp, and reflective vest. A few laps prior to making a clothing change I would let Tammy and Fred know exactly what I needed (even which bra/undies/socks). They had no trouble finding the items since the bags were clear and labeled. I had some additional warm real food (pizza and chicken/rice). Time to run in the dark and the rain. T2 time 13:22.

The run was 26 out and backs. The crew and main timers were at the front end and the second timer was on the back end at the turn around. We were still giving our number at each timing station due to the timing issues with the rain. I had no idea how I would feel starting this run. I started off at a nice shuffle run pace. This felt okay. Actually, it didn't feel bad at all. It was very dark and tough to see. Keep moving forward. I planned to walk the hill every lap, but I had no problem staying at my pace and shuffling up it. The first part of the run course is shared with the bike course. We had to be careful with both bikers and runners on the road in the dark. The run course then made a right hand turn for the second part of the course. I got off course on the third lap. It was so dark and I have trouble with directions. I turned right on the road just before the main road with the bike/run course. I ended up going several extra miles. I had no idea where I was. I was confused, cold, wet, scared. I was lost. I kept running around and finally found my way back on course. Horrible. I made myself focus. Keep moving forward. I felt that I was holding a steady pace. My crew was encouraging me and would give me nutrition every, or every other, lap. I was holding up okay. Just keep moving forward.

As I mentioned, there were 3 females racing. Sarah and I are friends and we both had personal goals for the race, but were really doing this for the experience. We were not there to compete with anyone other than ourselves. There was a third female that we did not know. Her husband had raced the Double and Triple and she had crewed for him. She had passed me at some point fairly early in the bike. During the run, I noticed she was walking. Most people were walking. I was still fine holding my steady shuffle run. Tammy knew that I didn't want to know where I was in placing. I just needed to focus on my race and stay in my happy place. However, I finally asked Josh where was I in place. He said he thought I was only about 1 lap behind her. Okay. I am going to keep moving. The alarm on my watch went off at 4:00AM. This is my backup alarm to wake up every morning. LOL. For some reason this made me smile. It is morning! I frequently start my morning workout by 4:30 AM, so I tried to think of starting a new day. I did not wear my Garmin at any point during this race. My most difficult time during the run was between 5:00 – 6:30. Still raining and still dark. When was it going to be daylight? My crew did a great job motivating me. I mentally dug deep to keep going. Some people were walking/shuffling together, but not anyone going my pace. I also didn't really want to talk. I was okay alone and in my happy place. No pacers were allowed on the course. Only racers were permitted to be on the course. Finally, it was daylight. I made a brief stop to remove the headlamp and reflective vest. Tammy reminded me that my race plan has me changing into dry and cooler running clothes at daylight. I was wet and cold, and just not in the mood to change. My shoes were soaked. I had another pair of shoes and lots of other running clothes, but I was back in a good place and didn't want to lose my groove. I decided to stay in the same clothes and change later if I became too uncomfortable. The first place overall (male) finished. He had a great race! I again asked my crew how far behind I was. They smiled and told me I was two laps ahead!! Okay – that gave me some more pep in my step. I was down to single digit laps. I can do this! Other racers were now encouraging me to keep going. Sarah and Bret were cheering for me. I had three laps left and I went the wrong direction, again!! I ran an extra 2 plus miles by running down the road to the camp ground and back to the course. My crew was worried that something happened because I was gone so long. I noticed if I slowed to walk, I was so tired that I would almost fall asleep and my brain would become fuzzy. I had to keep my shuffling run pace. Finally

there were two laps left. Then, the final lap! I was so excited. When I almost reached the finish I was handed the American flag and the national anthem was played. I was crying!!! I did it!!!! Complete with a few extra miles. Run time 10:08:32.

The finish line was amazing! Almost all of the crews were cheering. The race director, staff, and volunteers were there. Lots of pictures were taken and lots of hugs were given. I was given a small sledge hammer and hit the anvil twice to symbolize my finish. So cool!!!! I was then told that I was the 1<sup>st</sup> place female finisher and 2<sup>nd</sup> place overall finisher. Yes, I beat all the males except one. I was also informed that I set the female course record by beating the old record by 19 minutes. 21 racers started the double (18 male and 3 female). Only 12 finished (9 male and 3 female).

I was put in a golf cart and taken to the lake bathroom area. I had a massage, but this only lasted a few minutes. I hurt too bad to be touched. I changed to dry clothes and Tammy drove me back to the cabin. Hot shower and to bed. I tried to sleep, but could only nap for about 2 hours. I hurt too bad to sleep. Tammy and Fred collected all the gear and then went to get me pizza. Sarah's crew was keeping her status updated on Facebook, so I knew when she finished. I wanted to go down to see her cross the line, but hurt too bad. She had told me on the run course to finish and go to bed and not come back, so I knew she was okay with it. We all went to bed early and slept in on Sunday.

Sunday was the awards lunch at the winery. It was very nice to see everyone again.

This was an amazing experience. I was nervous going into the race since I was self-coached and was not sure how my training and taper would work. Well, it worked just fine! The conditions were miserable, but it made the race result that much more satisfying.

I have to thank Sarah for being a great friend and staying tough out there on the course. Her crew of Josh and Jamie were great and helped me a ton. Most of all, I need to thank my wonderful friend, Tammy, and her husband, Fred. They were amazing!!! Tammy and I are both very organized and our style really clicked on the course. They were there for me with whatever I needed. I cannot thank them enough. A good crew makes a difference in a race like this.

What is next?!?! Well, I am going to take some time to recover and rest. Next season will be a "typical" season with an ironman race. I am considering going long again in the future. Ultra triathlon is as much mental as it is physical and I enjoyed this challenge. This was an amazing experience.