

# **Thursday, December 12, 2013**

## **Race Report by Sarah Speicher**

### **USA Ultra Triathlon Virginia Double Anvil: Party in the Rain!**

The race was LONG...so the report is long...but trust me it could be longer. I wanted to document the experience to remember it myself and to share with others who might be contemplating participation in an ultra-triathlon, crewing for someone, or those who are just curious.

#### **The Idea**

I decided to sign up to attend the Double Anvil party after the Louisville Ironman in August (check out Louisville post for more details if you're bored...and want to read a fun race "remix" write up). Why would I do something like this you ask? (Okay, really I ask.) The simple answer is because we are all miracles. Whether it be making the world a better place, performing cutting edge brain surgery, painting a masterpiece from a blank canvas, fighting fires, saving the environment, raising children, or doing an ultra-endurance race...we have so much potential inside of us which makes me ask why wouldn't I attempt something like this? Whatever I do in life whether it be personally, professionally, athletically, spiritually, I want to do my best and give all I have to give, I want to go the extra miles, and I want to think outside of the limits that have evolved over time to become "norms" within our society. It's not about competing with others to be the best, but it is about doing my best and finding my potential... wherever it may be at any given moment. So that's why I decided to go for it. That and the encouragement from my coaches at Veritas Endurance Coaching. After Louisville Ironman, I asked Coach Bob "So what do you think about me doing a double Ironman next month?" He replied "I think it's a great idea!" Once I know my coaches think I can do something...I know that I can do it too. Not only do coaches make us stronger and faster, but they also give us courage and confidence.

#### **Party Planning**

After recovering about two weeks from Ironman I trained hard for a month and tapered 11 days. Training included the 44 miler ultra at Evergreen Lakes in Illinois, one ten hour bike, a few long runs followed by long swims, reading race reports, resting, not resting, eating, and accumulating the necessary supplies and equipment to help me conquer this feat with limited experience and knowledge. For anyone out there looking to do one of these....reading race reports were very helpful. Be prepared for anything...sunlight, darkness, cold, heat, rain, fatigue, boredom, cognitive decline, wild imagination activation, illness, soreness, injuries, smelliness, bad breath, frustration, hunger, peanut butter cravings, thirst, tightness, gear mishaps, etc. Not all of this will happen...but it's a nice feeling to be prepared! The less feelings of worry, uncertainty, and anxiety we have...the better we will perform.



Party Supplies

I also packed a tent and sleeping bag in case I needed a nap or place to change; however did not end up using either of these items. I packed a medium bin full of nutrition. Within this bin I had utensils, plates, paper towels and baby wipes, Coke, Mountain Dew, almond butter, honey, cinnamon, olive oil, avocados, rice cakes, potato chips, bananas, salt, chia seeds, energy bars and chews. I packed a cooler full of cooked sweet potatoes, gold potatoes, oranges, black miscellaneous items such as supplements,

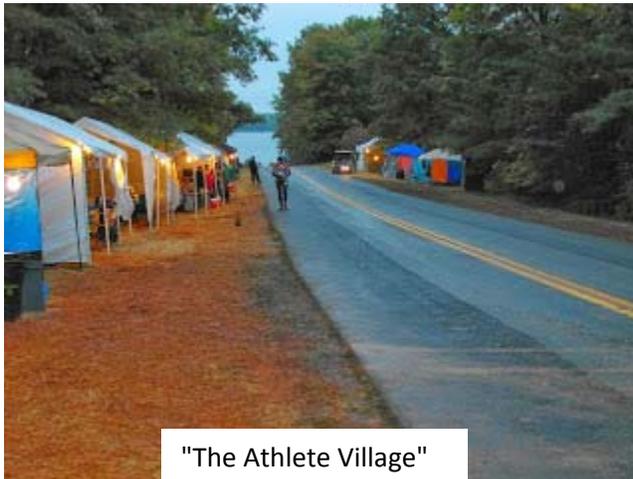
ointments, hygiene products (can't go to a party without my lip gloss and body splash), hot hand/feet warmers, plastic baggies, gum, mints, ginger candies, and motivational thoughts from friends back at home. You might think some of these items are not of importance; however I actually have a strategy behind them. Being an occupational therapist, I can't help but to consider the use of sensory strategies to help modulate my energy level. Chewy candies are organizing and calming (plus ginger is anti-inflammatory anyways). Citrus and mint are both alerting scents and tastes which would help me feel awake when the going would get tough. Nothing like a dab of strawberry lip gloss and splash of VS Mango Temptation to feel fresh and focused while cycling or running in the middle of the night. Okay, the Mt Dew and ZipFizz helped too...but I wanted to take in as little caffeine as possible. If you haven't tried ZipFizz, I would recommend trying. It's more natural and healthier than the typical energy drinks. <http://www.zipfizz.com/>

Upon reading the race reports and talking to the race director I learned it would be wise to organize a support crew for this race. My first thought was who in the world would want to take off work for a few days to come help me through this craziness that I voluntarily put myself through. I would expect no one to do this, especially with short notice. And then my stubborn, determined and naive mind thought "I don't need crew, I can do this by myself". I had no crew. In fact some people close to me felt this was going too extreme and would choose not to enable me to participate in it at all. Of course I was determined to do the race...crew...or no crew. So I told the race director Steve "sign me up". Little did I know I would be blessed with having a crew of several amazing people whom would help me get through the race. People from afar, people at the race site, childhood friends, and people I've never met before. Four days before the race, Jamie, one of my best friends from high school, decided she would go with me to Virginia. She knew nothing about triathlons, but didn't want me going alone. She never fails to be there for me in times of need even when I don't know I need her! A couple weeks before the race, one of the national triathlon coordinators for Team RWB sent out an e-mail to members living around the DC/Virginia area to help me find people to help. Two days before the race I received an e-mail from Josh, a Washington DC chapter Team Red White and Blue member expressing he could help out because he was on furlough due to the government shutdown. There's not many...ok pretty much zero benefits

of a government shutdown. But having this Team RWB member as part of my crew team was actually one very positive outcome of the furlough I must say. Not only was he an experienced ultra-athlete, but also a mac daddy of numbers...which comes in handy when calculating caloric intake during ultra-triathlons. He was also a Veteran of the United States Army which explained his selfless service to help another person go a little further, endure a little longer, and look a little closer to see how he could add to the effort throughout the entire mission.

## Party Time!

We arrived at Lake Anna State Park Thursday around 16:30. Just in time for race/bike check in and the athletes welcoming dinner. It was raining as expected. The Triple and Quadruple athletes were already on the course relentlessly truckin' away loop after loop in the rain. Before dinner I met up with my friend Amy and her crew Tammy and Fred. There were only three females signed up for the Double Anvil and Amy was one of them. She's from Cincinnati and we've camped and raced together a few years ago at Triple T, but she lives in San Diego now. We were both super excited to see each other at the welcome dinner and to be going through this race together. After dinner, Jamie and I went to unload



"The Athlete Village"

my food and gear boxes to our shelter within the "the village". I gave Jamie a little orientation as to what and where items were located within the bins. Jamie was planning on going to her Aunt/Uncle's in DC for the night and coming back in the AM. Unfortunately, she had a close encounter with a deer on the way back to DC so she would be a little late coming back to Lake Anna the following day. Josh was planning on being there by the time I got out of the swim in the morning. Since I was staying the night alone and plans

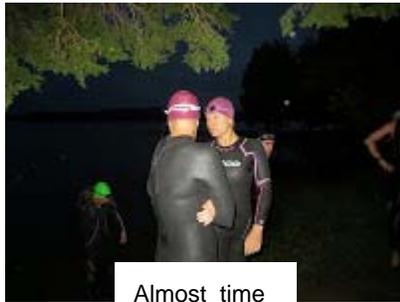
were a little last minute, the race director Steve hooked me up to stay in a bunk shelter with Ironman Billy and his wife/crew. Instead, I ended up staying in a heated cabin with Amy, Fred, and Tammy though since they had a last minute opening. I was really thankful to have heat, electricity, and a bathroom that night! Amy and I shared a room with twin beds and I don't think either of us got much sleep. We woke up around 05:00, showered, ate breakfast, and drove down to

## The Plunge: 4.8 miles (12 laps) (2:42:30) (6/20)



The beach house is right there near the swim entrance. Our bikes were casually stationed within the beach house area and this would be like our T1 area. While waiting around before the swim I stayed in the women's restroom to keep warm. I set up my bike gear in there, did some foam rolling

and stretching on the floor before putting the wetsuit on. Amy and I were so excited and nervous, we couldn't stop smiling and laughing.



Almost time

I was full of excitement to enter the unknown amongst 19 other athletes from all walks of life and all parts of the world. I was filled with curiosity about how I would feel both physically and mentally in the hours to come.

As the time neared 07:00, we ventured outside towards the swim start. Tammy, one of Amy's friends and crew, volunteered to wade out into the water after our sixth lap and give us some nutrition. I gave Tammy a plastic bag with an Ensure, mini Bonk Breaker, and PowerAde. All of the Double athletes gathered around near the swim start and we took a group photo. Steve gave a short pre-race speech and hit the Anvil two times to signify the



Chillin' in the Ladie's Room start. Off we all went into Lake Anna.



Double Anvil Take Off

The water actually felt great and there was no fog...which I was worried about from reading previous race reports. I could see the buoys and sure was happy about that! I've never swam 4.8 miles before, so I was a little worried, but the swim was by far the easiest and most comfortable leg of the race for me. I exited the water in 6<sup>th</sup> place out of 20 athletes that started. As I ran up on land and flipped my cap/goggles off, I heard a guy say "Let's go Sarah!" and I

replied "Are you Josh!?!". So I met Josh in T1 and he would be there for me, along with Jamie, Tammy, and Fred, through the thick and thin of the next 31+ hours. As Josh and I ran from the water to the beach house, I told him my plan to shower off and change. Then I would hand him my bag to carry up to our shelter in the village and I would get on my bike to start the loopy loos. My total T1 time was around 22 minutes. First time I've washed my hair in T1...and yeah maybe it wasn't necessary.

## The Never Ending Ride: 224 miles (45 laps) (17:49:42) (15/17)



Photo Credit: Nathalie Behn

My bike was ready to go with fluid and nutrition to last about an hour. While showering and changing, I had another Bonk Breaker and finished some PowerAde. The attire for my first half of the bike would consist of the De Soto 400 Mile tri shorts (which I got about a week before the race and really liked..thanks Team RWB Boom for the recommendation), running tights over the shorts, base layer shirt, another shirt over that, and a breathable wind/rain jacket. I also wore gloves and a hat under my old school helmet. The cold and rain make me melt. My fingers seriously turn

white and go numb pretty easily. I went to the doctor about it a few years ago and she said it's Raynaud's condition and nothing to be worried about...just stay warm. Not only do I turn colors when cold...but my joints get stiff and my muscles tighten up telling me to just curl up in a ball under shelter somewhere. That wasn't a choice here.

My goal for the bike was to pace around 15mph and finish around 15 hours...that did not happen. Per past performance in racing and training we would think that's a pretty easy safe pace...but through in the wet, cold, dark, extended hours...things changed. But next time will be better. For the first half of the bike I was close to goal pace; however as the dark set in and rain continued into the night my pace significantly dropped. I took a few 10, 15, 20 minute breaks throughout the bike, most occurring during the second 112. I tried to stay on the bike except to get off for bathroom breaks during the first half. Since I wasn't sweating, but was continuously hydrating I had to pee like a million times (at least it seemed like it)...which was frustrating as well. There was no way I'd be peeing on my bike during this race. I never slept, but I completely changed into dry clothing at least once, and changed my socks a few



times because they kept getting wet. Eventually I asked Josh to tape shut the holes in the bottom of my cycling shoes, then I put on a fresh pair of socks, then hot foot warmers, then another pair of socks, then a plastic bag wrapped around each foot, then my cycling shoes, and finally the neoprene shoe covers. Never leave home without masking tape and plastic bags. As Josh was taping up my shoes, Jamie was drying and vasalining my cold wet pruney feet and I was eating my dinner. Black rice, avocado, and olive oil oh my. At that moment I truly felt like a

princess...a princess of darkness that is...



Back out into the night went the princess of darkness. As I slowly rolled through the Anvil Kingdom shinning my creepy light I did feel little bursts of fright. The party was quiet. The external stimulation was low. For the next several hours I would see blackness with little specs (rain drops) flying at me. Riding through the rain in the dark almost felt a little bit like night diving. Evoked some feelings of confusion, anxiety, and caution. I would look forward to seeing the timers at the loop turn around every 5 miles. I would look forward to seeing the life of the Anvil Village every 5 miles. It looked so pretty sitting there at first sight as I turned the corner and rode towards the light. I tried to use my imagination to pretend various scenarios and I made myself LOL on several occasions. Occasionally some true darkness would set in. At one point, I remember sitting in my crew tent. Just sitting there not wanting to go back out in the rain. Of course Josh and Jamie

would patiently look at their watches and say “you really need to go back out there now”. Perfect moment for some mango body splash. The more frustrated and uncomfortable I got, the more I tried to reach inside to pull out my blessings and to remember that I can do this. I thought about the veterans I’ve worked with, the sacrifices they’ve made and their demonstration of determination. One inspirational veteran from Team RWB, was actually on the course completing the Triple Anvil. Jim and I exchanged some Facebook messages a few times prior to the race, but I was looking forward to meeting him on the run. I thought about the veterans I have grown to know through Team RWB this past summer. I knew they were pulling for me back home and I knew I had to keep going and do this for them. I thought about people who are fighting or who have fought cancer. Anytime I needed a reminder, I looked down at my wrist to see my Team RWB and LLS bracelets.

As I rode my last loop I felt joy and appreciation. I was looking forward to slower winds and more dry clothes. I finished my 45<sup>th</sup> loop somewhere around 04:30 with a time of 17:49:42. At this point I was in 15<sup>th</sup> place out of the 17 athletes that would end up finishing the bike. Three out of the 20 athletes who started would resign from the race (which did cross my mind once or twice) during the bike leg.

## The Happy Run: 52.4 miles (26 laps) (12:50:59) (7/12)



I had been up for 24 hours, swam 4.8 miles and biked 224 miles...and now I was about to run 52.4 miles. During T2 we couldn't find the pants I wanted to change in to and maybe I got a little mean. You know how some things really aren't a big deal...but they seem like it at the time...this was one of those times. So, I'm sorry Jamie and Josh for being mean at that moment. Once I had my running gear on I thought "Oh shiiizzt this is great!" The excitement and adrenaline took over which made for a truly enjoyable run. Okay, maybe it was more like a jog or shuffle. The first two miles and the last two could be considered running. Sometimes I walked the hill, sometimes I shuffled the hill. I was just happy to be off that bike and feel my extremities once again. We started off with headlamps and some kind of light on our backs so the other cyclists and cars could see us. The run loop was 2 miles with a portapotty and aide station at the turn around. So we had some kind of aide every mile. The volunteers at the turn around livened things up with their funny comments. I looked forward to seeing them every two miles. The run was nice because we could actually talk to each other a little bit. Amy was kicking butt and taking names (and smiling) the whole way through the race. She went on to break the women's record for this race course. I was able to finally meet and chat with Team RWB Jim here and there. Don't get me wrong...there were several times when I was alone coming up with some crazy internal thoughts. I worked on a little jingle about doing the ultra shuffle, danced and sang it when no one was around...then laughed at myself. Yep. I also gave up on the portapotty once or twice when no one was around and peed in the woods on the side of the road. Yep. As daylight set in, Jamie's uncle from DC showed up with some coffee which hit the spot for sure. He joined in the crew for the rest of the race as well. About half way through the run, some friends from Cincinnati showed up which was a fantastic surprise that really lifted my spirits. Glenn and Katy moved from Cincinnati to Virginia a few months ago. Glenn was my hero when I did my first marathon with Team in Training in 2008. Little did I know then that I would go on to do the Double Anvil, let alone an Ironman. Coincidentally Glenn and I were both in this year's Man and Woman of the Year Campaign to raise money for The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. When I agreed to take on that challenge is actually when I first started searching for ultra endurance events and found the Anvil. So Glenn inspired me to get through my first marathon experience and was here to inspire me again to get through the Double Anvil. Throughout the race, I knew that the more I smiled the better off the experience would be. My legs kept slowing down as the miles kept increasing. I would tell my legs to shut up and move but they resisted slightly. Towards the last few loops, Jamie, Josh, Tom, Glenn, Katy and their two kids were all waiting for me and ran me in, around the cone, and back out to the end of the village. No stopping now...they had fluid and nutrition readily waiting to take on the go. Their cheering continued to grow and their energy transferred over to

me. As I went off for my last loop, they told me to put it all out there...to speed up and push. I told them my legs just wouldn't move fast enough and I couldn't. But I did. As I left the village for one last time something came over me that still tears me up to this day as I think about it. I looked up into the sky and took all the emotions in. I thought about the people who inspire me. I praised God with thanks for the miracles of life. And the legs let loose. I know I was holding back some throughout the race...because that's what I had to do to make sure I finished. But now it was time to give it all I had and finish with nothing left. I somehow changed my shuffle to a run once again...and it felt like a miracle. I finished the run in 7th place out of 12 with a time of 12:50:59. Twelve out of the 20 athletes that started would go on to finish within the 36 hour cut-off. My total race time was 34:06:25, finishing in 10<sup>th</sup> place out of the 12 athletes that would end up completing the entire race. All 20 finished the swim, 17 people finished the bike, 12 people finished the run. It was a heck of a party which definitely reinforced my reasoning for doing it in the first place. We are all miracles.

## **ANVILIZATION**

Twisting and turning all through the night  
Heart beat pounding through the invasive fright  
Rising to eat hours before daylight  
Foam rolling and stretching to avoid the dreaded tight

Walking to the water preparing for the anvil flight  
Hysterically laughing before taking the plunge  
Pessimistic thoughts we must try to shun  
Knowing in our minds that ANYTHING can be done

The anvil strikes  
The anvil strikes

Venturing out into the unknown  
But realizing that we're never alone  
Reaching and twisting, pulling and kicking  
Breathing in, breathing out  
Gliding and sighting  
Like speckled trout

Spin through the day  
Spin through the night  
Spin through the cold  
Spin through the rain  
Spinning machines are not tame  
Although the squirrel cage does get lame

Run, jog, shuffle, slog, walk free  
Pee  
Look at the trees  
Giving thanks is key  
Think about anything you could be

Feet on the ground  
Peace has been found  
It's a wonderful sound  
Finish line bound

The anvil strikes  
The anvil strikes

## The Party Guests

There were so many friends at this party in person and spirit. From crew, volunteers, and other athletes at the race site to people back home...everyone played a special part which I will forever be grateful for. All the friends before the race and during that gave me words of encouragement either through Facebook, phone calls, or text messages, really meant the world. Knowing that people from all over were tracking and cheering made me feel supported, loved and gave me energy to fight through the hard times and finish for them. I just wanted to name at least a few guest of honors.

**Veritas Endurance Coaching.** Coach Bob, Cody, and Julie prepared me and believed in me. I started off the season with a pretty low base, but they obviously were able to build it up within a few months not only to help me get through an Ironman comfortably, but to go on and do an ultra+ trail run and a Double Anvil. If you follow their plans, they can make anything happen. Their knowledge and honesty always helps increase my awareness of my abilities, my performance (weather good or bad), and my potential. I thank them for helping me realize I can do more than I think I can. I'll continue to look to them for guidance on where to go next and coaching for wherever I go.

**Dinn Chiropractic.** I came to Dr. Dinn in the spring feeling physically and mentally fatigued. He worked with me to modify my nutrition and introduce additional supplements to get my energy levels back to normal again.

**Josh and Maria.** They are one of the most caring supportive couples I know. Always checking in with me either through a random text, phone call, or facebook. In Louisville they carried around the giant head, made over my bike, and had dinner with me and my family. They called the night before the race to give me a pep talk and made me feel supported as they always do. They are full of love and good at sharing it with others.

**Doug.** The new boyfriend...who is also a triathlete...yay! Well at the time of the race he was new to my life...maybe not even my "boyfriend" yet. Maria introduced me to him the night before Louisville Ironman. A few days before the Anvil, Doug sent me a five page document titled "Sarah's OT (Occupy Time) List", which consisted of thoughts and questions to ponder throughout the long race since he couldn't be there in person to support. I read it the night before. It made me laugh, smile, and maybe tear up just a bit. It made Doug score big points with his demonstration of creativity and thoughtfulness there. Both some of the several good characteristics which make me "heart" him.

This list might actually be a large part of the reason he's still in my life today. So good move Doug. I just hope he supports me with other ultra endeavors such as Triple Anvil's, 100 miles runs, or Ultramans;))

**The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society Team in Training.** TNT has been there from the moment I started running. I've met a ton of friends through them and several were supporting me through messages and some in person. When I saw Glenn, Katy and their kids I was super excited. Katy mentioned through a message that they would try to come, but I didn't know if they'd be there especially with the terrible weather. They are continuously giving people. Always inspiring and helping others. The kids had some awesome sparkly pom poms that were pretty festive too.

**Team RWB friends.** You guys motivate the heck out of me. I feel honored to be part of such an amazing group of people. In the weeks and days before the race, Cincy members would message and ask if I needed anything and share words of encouragement. Some of them really wanted to come help crew, but couldn't because of other obligations. Just knowing that they wanted to was important and made me feel like they were there from afar. Besides the local Team RWB support, I was totally impressed with the national support. As soon as I posted on the Team RWB triathlon page, the triathlon coordinator responded and sent out e-mails to members in the Virginia area. This is how Josh ended up hearing about the race and need for assistance crewing. Talk about teamwork...

**Jamie.** As long as I've known her she's always willing to give and help others whenever needed. She's one of my best friends because she's caring, open, forgiving, smart, and fun. Jamie had no idea what she was getting into when she offered to come with me a few days before the race, but because she cares about me, she made some pretty significant sacrifices and supported me. Jamie did a great job supporting me emotionally during the race and creating culinary delights! She also took pictures and updated my FB status throughout the race. My favorites were the sweet potato, honey, almond butter, cinnamon, chia seed sandwiches. Yum. On top of all this, she drove my car home the entire way back from DC to Cincinnati and she arranged for us to stay at her aunt and uncles house pre and post race days. Speaking of...they deserve an extra mention of thanks as well. They gave me a comfortable warm bed to sleep in and hooked me up with a post race Epsom salt bath and a nutritious delicious veggie and seafood dinner.

**Josh.** Another awesome person I met through Team RWB! He didn't even know me, but he took me in like family! Josh is definitely the type of person that puts forth full effort in everything he does. Not only did Josh do the basic crewing such as give me fluids and nutrition, but he took charge and developed a system. Josh secretly had an Excel spreadsheet (that I knew nothing about) keeping track of my pace, calories and fluid consumed. He sent it to me a couple weeks after the race and the sheet was top quality professional. Josh also took photographs and helped other racers. He did not rest and he deserves a medal for being there road side every single loop through the entire race.

**Amy.** When Amy found out I signed up for the Double, she called right away. We were both excited each other would be there and talking to her helped ease some of my worries. She also offered to share her crew, since I had none till a few days before the race, and requested to Steve that our shelters be right

next to each other in the village. The night before the race, she offered a space in her cabin since one of her crew members was unable to come last minute. One kind act after another! She's one of the nicest people I know. Her crew members Tammy and Fred also deserve a big thanks for helping me from wading out in the cold water to holding up towels while I changed in the shelter to drying my wet clothes in their motor home.

**Jim.** Team RWB Jim is actually on a poster I hang in my office at work to hopefully inspire other Veterans to join Team RWB and engage in socialization through healthy physical activities and volunteering. Jim inspired me before and during the race. Jim is a US Army Veteran who was injured while serving our country in Iraq. His mission is to inspire others both Veterans and civilians to support each other and overcome challenges. My friend Tom actually told me about Jim and said he would inspire me before I ever met him. The note he left me wrapped in an American flag was a reminder to remember those who cannot be here and to wear the eagle and make them proud. Jim did the Triple Anvil this year and is going on to do the Deca Monterrey Ultra Triathlon in 2014.

**Steve.** Talk about an awesome race director. Besides that, Steve is also a US Navy Veteran. He actually answers the phone anytime and will talk to you and answer as many questions as you need. Steve and all of the volunteers put a lot of time and energy into this race and their effort is noticeable. I can tell he is passionate about the sport and about helping others be the best they can be.

