

Lisa Vega Crew Report

2014 Virginia Triple Anvil Triathlon

Here is my race report from a crew perspective from the Virginia Anvil Race:

After racing the Double Anvil in Florida this past year, I was incredibly excited about being a crew member for Brad Kelley for the Triple Anvil in Virginia. This sounded like an awesome way to be a part of the race without having the pressure of training/racing. I was excited to see the people who had encouraged me and made it possible for me to keep moving on that run course in Florida. I was thrilled to spend a few days with a group of people who understand this type of lifestyle instead of being considered “weird” for training for hours at a time instead of resting or slowing down. This group understands training through concussions, stitches, crazy fatigue, hectic schedules and the rewards that come from the internal satisfaction of knowing what the body and mind can overcome. Most of the world has no clue what this is about. I couldn't wait to see my new found ultra-triathlon family.

I arrived at Lake Anna State Park around 11pm. It was quiet. I decided to volunteer for the Quintuple, thinking I would nap as the Triple started the next day.

Brad had decided to share crew members with Vasilis. He had two crew members-John LaBombard and Todd Houghton. We figured it would be easier for the three of us to crew for the two athletes-and I will say I could not have made it through without them! No way!

After a two hour nap in the car- it was time to get ready for the swim. I found the guys and Brad showed me where his gear was. We got him in his wetsuit and ready to go. He needed Glide and it was not in his bag for the swim start. I ran to the tent-not there. I ran to the car. Not there. There were several miscellaneous bags in the tent area and the car, but none that appeared to have Glide. I failed my first crew duty! Not a good sign.

Brad described the bag in between swim laps. It was nowhere to be found. It was not in the dozen or so bags in the tent area, and it did not appear to be in any of the bags/suitcase in his car. The guys hung on strong in the swim. The last two laps Vasilis had become somewhat fatigued and as he swam outward of the buoys, his crew decided he was trying to swim back to the Japanese restaurant he had visited the day before. It was amazing to see these guys completed 7.2 miles of swimming! (I would probably still be out there instead of home writing this).

They had a fairly smooth transition onto the bike portion. They were smiling and riding, looking strong. The crew took turns taking short naps and alternated getting the nutrition. Billy Collier, who was doing the Double tomorrow, came around and gave us much needed support and assistance. Vasilis' nutrition of Snickers and Doritos made my inner child-like sense of nutrition quite happy, as he brought plenty to share.

The second part of the bike, as it turned into night and the next day was less smooth. It began to rain. Vasilis had turned completely pale. We tried to figure out his nutritional needs. He was nauseated. The other crew members were incredible with offering assistance/supplies. I was able to find some ginger chews. Nothing we tried seemed to completely work. A crew member next to us checked Vasilis' sugar levels and decided he might be hypoglycemic. We increased his calories and sugar. In a couple of laps, he looked better. It was chilly and wet.

The guys napped a little bit at a time, and kept moving forward. They got it done. There was a 1st time Triple competitor, Mosi Smith, who did not stop smiling the entire race. He made it look fun. I never ever saw him without a great big grin on his face. Wow!

Watching all of the guys starting and racing in the Double was amazing as well. They were strong and fast. Most of their race was done in the rain. There were several first time athletes to the Double who were well prepared and extremely strong. Billy Collier had completed the Double in Florida and was in the tent next to us. His wife kept us company and helped give us energy to continue figuring out what these guys needed. Billy stated he was extremely tired going into the run. He seemed slightly discouraged. And then, about mid run - something extraordinary happened. He was able to pick up his pace and run strong. His determination on the run is something I will never forget. Watching the excitement and seeing how proud his wife was will also stay in my mind as he ran strong and finished beautifully. Way to go!!!!

The run was daunting from the start. 78.6 miles was ahead for these guys. I knew they were running short on time. I was doing the math and knew that Brad was nearing a point where it would be extremely difficult to finish in the allotted time. I was taking some pictures and posting them on Facebook. I happened to notice Brad would re-post some of the pics I was taking. This was going to have to stop! Amongst the crew, we made jokes about the guys posting selfies on the run. WE threatened to confiscate their phones. The next thing I knew, there would be a selfie posted on Facebook. What could you do other than laugh a little. AS our celebrity Double competitor was running in to finish (Paul Bedard of Gatorboys) I decided to take a picture. All eyes and his camera crew were on him coming down the hill. Brad was running up the hill to do another lap. As they were in the exact same place on the course, Brad began to make swooping motions of his crotch. He continued to motion and circle this area with his hands. I was trying to decide whether or not to see what he wanted or take a pic of Paul. In a slightly animated voice, John stated "what's he doing"- before I could even try to say anything, John changed it to "why is he doing that?????" I ran up to where Brad was to see what these obscene-looking gestures were all about— as he stated he needed bag balm (lubricant for the undercarriage area). We promptly decided that Brad's gesture was the universal symbol for bag balm request. I laughed until I cried when I realized that the camera crew was right there and would probably also have a good laugh upon editing this.

AS the official time was closing in for the Triple to complete, both Brad and Vasilis stated they wanted to finish, even if it was unofficial on time. I was proud to hear this from both of them and both John and I agreed to stay and crew as long as they needed it. Steve Kirby, who is by far one of the best race directors and positive supporters of his athletes agreed to let the guys continue on the course and gave us the clock to count their laps. Brad had a few less laps remaining than Vasilis, so he decided to take a nap. I decided to stay on the course and keep Vasilis company on the course, as it was dark and he had been going for over 60 hours at this point. Vasilis had

twenty laps to go (40 miles). I had to leave at 7am to get to my flight on time. I committed to staying out there until I had to go to the airport.

John would get the nutrition ready and Vasilis and I would complete the loops. I was amazed beyond words at what happened in those hours that followed. This is the stuff real heroes are made from. I am actually in tears now as I write this. Watching someone have the mental strength to push through this for no glory, only the four of us out there in those woods at this time is beyond words. We laughed and joked.

There was no complaining, only trying to fix any physical ailments as much as possible. We laughed about how “not normal” it was to continue on and just to be out there in the first place. I was more deliriously tired than I have ever been in my life, but I knew it was nothing compared to what Vasilis was feeling. That kept me moving as well.

As the night wore on and we knew that there were still a handful of miles left, I did not want to leave at 7am. I wanted to see this through until it was finished. Brad got back up and was running fast and strong. I told Vasilis I didn't want to go until he was done. We decided to change my flight until later in the afternoon. Vasilis asked me why I was out there that long. I don't remember exactly what I said, but the integrity, determination, and the will to go on made an impact on me. My discomfort was so minor compared to this. It was the smallest tribute I could do to be a part of something like this.

On one of our last laps with Brad, as the sun was fully up, I spent a lap without saying a word. I was choked up and crying watching these guys move, knowing there are barely more than a handful of people in the world who would keep going after the official race time was over.

Moving strictly for the integrity of NEVER GIVING UP and finishing the distance no matter what. The blisters on their feet were enough to stop most. I cannot even comprehend the pain level these guys were pushing through. I was on a lap with Vasilis and did not see Brad finish. But he was strong and I was incredibly proud of this. He went to shower and go to award ceremony, so it was down to the three of us. John, Vasilis, and I.

John had probably slept less than I had. I took 3 naps of about two hours each over the course of five days. I would not have been anywhere else. It is amazing how the body continues to move, even under these crazy conditions. The race laps were counting down for Vasilis. Several other racers came by and offered support. Paul B. brought a portable stove when Vasilis requested hot water. Donna Pruett was there to help and offer support in those last few laps.

I took a break for two laps and the amazing Kamil Suran walked with Vasilis for these laps. He gave him advice and encouragement that knocked a significant amount of time off of those last laps. No other sport ever does one of the most elite athletes give back to the others like this. It was with bittersweet feelings, huge hugs, and well wishes that I had to say goodbye with two laps to go for Vasilis. I was going straight to the airport (probably in close resemblance to a homeless person at this point) but I would not have given up a second of something so inspirational and beautiful until I absolutely had to catch my flight.

I have had more appreciation and been thanked far more than necessary. It is me who gives thanks for this. I will hold this experience close in my heart. It reminds me to never take short

cuts in life, always give more than I think I have, reach for anything possible, and never, ever give up. I have so many heroes, so much appreciation for what happened those few days.

John ~ oh my goodness, you were the best crew team mate ever when the hours rolled on and it got tough. Todd, you helped set it up so we could do this later in the game. Donna ~ you helped us laugh, encouraged everyone, and the Ramen noodles were a life saver! Frank Fumich ~ seeing what you did out there is unbelievable! Your finish is forever etched on my brain for when I think I cannot do something. Andy Weinberg ~ thank you for taking the time to answer my technical questions to help those guys. Wendy and Angie ~ having you guys out there to help the motivation and helping keep the guys going and helping me keep sane throughout. Loved seeing you guys there. Kay and William ~ watching you guys race your hearts out and seeing the training you have both put in was inspirational as well. You guys were rocking the course. Mosi ~ seeing your smile made me want to smile. Steve Kirby ~ thank you for making all of this possible. I have fallen in love with your races!

Brad and Vasilis ~ I cannot express fully the impact of being there; and especially in the 34 miles I walked with you, Vasilis, out there. Your determination and strength are like nothing I have ever experienced before. You guys have truly helped me see the world through a different, beautiful lens. I cannot thank you enough. I am more than proud to have been a small part of a life changing experience.

Congratulations and thank you to all!