

Sleepless in the Saddle: Oregon Race Recap

Michael Ortiz ~ 24 July 2016

What can I say? I feared this race and for good reason. The elevation was challenging and the low nightly temps meant my body had to do more work to thermoregulate. But that part I already expected. What I didn't account for was for fatigue to set in when it did, merely 16 hours into the race. Despite those early challenges, my crew ([Valerie](#), Albert, [Reinaldo](#)) was on point, staying with me through every step of the way. I couldn't ask for more. I did not successfully complete the Oregon Double, but with their guidance I was able to go the distance and achieve an Oregon Anvil Plus in 38 hours, 15 minutes. Here's how it went down.

At 7am Friday, the race started and things were progressing swimmingly. Double Anvil racers had to swim around the buoys 8 times, and for the entirety of the swim, Val waited there in the water to hand me nutrition after every lap, while her brother drove to Wal-Mart to get me a towel and some other things I forgot. I'm not the fastest swimmer, so it took me 3.5 hours to go the 4.8 miles (8,448 yards). After the swim it was off to the bike. I'm happy to report at this time I did not log into work. My team at work survived without me. :) Although I still had the longest transition time at about 40 minutes. Man, I have GOT to get this time down.

Things were going great. I got on the bike a little after 11am, and shortly thereafter ran into some familiar faces ([Joey](#), [Sarah](#), and [Johan 'Taz'](#) - Team Peaches and Beaches!) I felt energized and was knocking down loops slowly but surely, and was sticking to my crew's nutrition plan (they laughed when I brought those energy gels again). Because I wasn't solo this time, I had delicious things to choose from throughout the ride like fruit, chicken soup, apple sauce, etc. There were 21 loops in total, each loop having about 700 feet of elevation gain (net gain was obviously 0). But man, those climbs wore you down loop after loop.

11 hours later around 10pm, I started getting drowsy. Uh oh.. I tried to keep my eyes open, but I kept drifting in and out, until suddenly, BAM, my first crash. I don't remember hitting the guard rail - only the sensation of flying through the air and my bike landing on my right leg. It hurt. Thankfully, Trevin, who wasn't far behind, witnessed the accident and fetched my bike and me out of the ditch. (Thank you, Trevin; I don't know that I properly thanked you). I shook myself off and started to assess the damage. If the flesh wounds were any indication, I apparently broke the fall with my right knee. It seemed to be in good working order, although I now had a few cuts to stain my nice white pants with. Then I checked the bike. Chain popped out, but no biggie. Carbon frame intact, phew. Tires did not pop, oh thank goodness. Hmm... right gears don't work... dang it.

I got on my bike and figured I could go the 4 or so miles to get to the AnVillage, but without the ability to shift into lower gears, those 4 easy miles suddenly became the longest of the bike ride, and that lap clocked in about double my average lap time. I was only 110 miles in at that point. This was going to suck, but I had to make the best of this situation. I certainly wasn't throwing in the towel. About 2 miles from the AnVillage, a car pulled up, and I heard the sound of [Erik's](#) voice "Are you ok?" "I am. I took a bit of a tumble and my gears don't shift, so I have to walk the inclines." "Ok, let us know if you need anything." To not be pulled from the race, you cannot have any type of locomotive support, so I had to march this one alone. But I felt comfort in the fact that Erik was looking out for me on the field.

I eventually made it to the village, where Luke, the onsite bike mechanic, took my bike for inspection. Val and I checked to see if there was anything to do about the wounds and I took a caffeinated beverage to try to help with the sleep issue. When Luke came back, he said my right derailleur was kaput. He kindly offered his bike to me, and said he'd only need to swap out the pedals. That was one of the kindest gestures anyone has ever extended to me in a race. But under the circumstances, I couldn't accept. What if I crashed again and ruined his bike? He understood, and set my back gears into a permanent position, while my front gears could shift into high or low. It meant I could still go fast downhill, but the uphills would be a bit of a struggle. So off I went.

I still couldn't shake sleep off in the next lap, and kept dozing off and swerving on the road. I was getting frustrated... About a third of the way into the lap, I fell asleep, woke up when my bike veered off the side of the road onto the pebbled off-road, hit my back brakes to have my wheels completely stop, fish-tailed a bit on the loose terrain, and then fell forward and to the right. I was clipped in so I once again broke the fall with my knee. Thank goodness for bike gloves, because I could at least break some of the fall with my hands. I laid there for a bit trying not to freak out. This didn't mean my race was over. Maybe I'd be lucky enough to see someone else. Nope. No one.

As much as I would like to keep this PG-13, I might've yelled out some profanities at this point. I took some time to figure out what the best way to unclip from that position without hurting myself. I only had to unclip the left; the right broke free from impact. I eventually unclipped, got up and assessed the damage. Minor wounds, nothing serious. My knee still worked, thankfully. But I had to give myself a talk here. What the heck was going on? Why was I struggling to stay awake? I managed to stay awake for the rest of the lap, although my elbow rests were bent out of shape so I couldn't go into aero position (not that it mattered because I don't think I wanted to at that point anyway).

When I got back to AnVillage, Albert had returned from picking up Rey (third member of the crew) from the airport. It was 11pm Friday. I still had about 100 miles to go. They brought back some BBQ food from Dickey's and it was the most delicious thing in the world. My goodness. Still, I was feeling down at that point. I told them I kept falling asleep. The collective conversation went something like this:

"What do you need to stay awake?"

"I don't know.. This is hard."

"That's not an answer."

"I wish I didn't crash."

"That's behind you. And that's still not an answer."

"I'm tired."

"Here, take this red bull. What else?"

"I'm a little cold."

"Here, put this on. What else?"

"I can't see ?\$&@ with this bike light."

"We'll get your bike fitted with more lights. What else?"

(Thanks again, Luke, for the flood light. That thing lit the entire road!)

"My feet hurt."

"Take your bike shoes off. What else?"

"I need electrolytes."

The back and forth went for some time until I got everything I needed. It was touch and go or a bit, but I managed to stay crash-free from midnight until 5am. Somewhere within that timeframe, I ran into [Jared](#). We kept each company for the better part of a loop to keep each other awake. He rode behind me and said he would yell if he saw me swerve. Thank you, Jared! At that point, I could still finish the bike on time. I had 6 loops left and had to complete each in about an hour if I was to make the 11am Saturday bike cutoff. I'd been averaging 55 minutes a loop through the night, so it was going to be close. My crew saw to it that I had everything I needed to make those laps. It was crunch time, and I was putting in more work to climb the inclines without dismounting, even though it meant having less gas in the tank for the run - but I had to make the bike cutoff or else I wouldn't even see the run.

Just after 6am, I crashed again. What. The. Heck.. It was deja vu. I crashed, landed on my right knee, and the bike fell on my right shin knocking my clipped foot from the pedal. This time something tore into my knee and it was bleeding. I threw my water bottle onto the road out of frustration and broke the top. But frustration quickly turned into panic. What if I don't make this? Is getting this banged up worth it if I don't get a chance to run and do what I do best? And then I thought how upset I would be if I gave up now. After all, I'd dragged three friends across the country to stay awake for two days so we could succeed as a team. There was no way I was throwing in the towel.

I biked the rest of the loop in fierce fashion, told the team what happened, got my wounds properly cleaned and bandaged and gutted out the last 5 laps. I was burning energy I needed for the run, but I had no choice. I crossed the last bike loop at 10:50am, 10 minutes shy of cutoff. I was drained, but there was no time to worry about that. I had to put on shoes and run 52.4 miles in 11 hours.

The run portion was 40 loops of hilly road and technical terrain. After running the first loop, I thought to myself, "Man, 52 miles in 11 hours is challenging even on flat surface and rested legs; how on earth can I pull THIS off?" I didn't have time to think about it. I just had to go. I ran the first 10 loops in under 3 hours. Wow, that was on pace to do the deed. The problem was, I couldn't keep that pace. No way. Loops 11-12, I walked. I walked slowly. And it was when I walked that I became aware of the pain in my leg, so that at least was motivation to keep running. But when your body is tired, there's no fighting it. Val noticed I wasn't quite making sense with my responses at the beginning of lap 12 and that I was falling asleep on my feet, so she agreed to let me take a 7-minute nap after that lap.

I completed lap 12 knowing I wouldn't finish the Double. That made me sad. I'd come so far. So I walked at the pace someone would when they no longer cared about the time - I was dillydallying. To be completely honest, there was a sense of relief that flushed over me when I knew I didn't have to push hard for the next 6 hours. And that scared me. Because that meant I'd already given up. And I didn't come here to do that. There were so many mixed emotions during that nearly 30-minute 1.3-mile loop. I just needed to make it to the tent. Maybe sleep would help sort these feelings out.

True to her word, Val let me take a 7-minute nap, which turned into 10, and then 15, and so. I'd kept asking for more time. Finally, after an hour, my crew opened the tent and I heard, "So, here's the deal. We spoke to race directors, [Teri](#) and [Steve](#). If you don't finish the Double, you can at least qualify for something called the Anvil Plus if you finish a marathon distance before 10pm." That was music to my ears. I was more than halfway there and I had about 4.5 hours to get it done. I could do that. With no sense of urgency at this point, I took this time to finally change out of my bike gear and into running clothes while my crew redressed the bandages. I ate whatever I could stomach at that point and walked/jogged the rest of the way.

A sense of hope can go a long way. I say this because I sprinted the last loop. Where was that energy in all those other loops? It was probably lost in the negativity of not believing I could finish. But that is a topic of a different discussion. The last loop we run backwards to signal to the other runners on the course that we are about to finish the race. My "last" loop, of course, was not for Double, but for the Anvil Plus. During that loop, I ran into Brad Kelly, who was also doing an Anvil Plus and on his last one as well. I'd come to learn he had problems in the swim by getting Vaseline in his eye, an immediate impediment for the remainder of the swim (and the race). Because of this, he biked the 224 mile bike course with an eye patch and still ran a marathon. Wow!



I made it to the finish and got a chance to run in the Puerto Rican flag (pictured here). I would not have gotten the opportunity to do this without my crew, and I leave Oregon - yes - with a sense of defeat, but also with an appetite to come back and complete the course in the future, now with a little more experience and of course with a whole lot more sleep the days leading up to the race.

Have a great day, everyone! ☐