

An Ironman's Tale

Chapter 1 – Pre Race

The day will be remembered for tacks, wind and heat.

The day started as any IM race, wake up call for 4:00 am to get some breakfast in before heading down for body marking for 5:00 am. I had intended to awake at 2 am to ingest some bran and clean the pipes before my 4:00 am breakfast. Sleep wasn't altogether that great; I awoke every hour from midnight so I skipped the 2:00 am feeding.

There were 12 troops including myself in our army attempting this Ironman. 5 were newbies, 2 were looking for a podium spot and a qualifying spot for IM Hawaii, and the rest (including moi) were looking for a decent finish. One person was a DNF from last year missing having the bike cutoff by some 6 minutes. With my daughter Angela back in Vancouver, my wife Julia decided to accompany me and the other troops down to body marking...it was very nice to have her there.

After body marking, I joined my buddies Ian and Sandy to make our way into the bike lot to share the single pump to inflate our tires, then dress into our wetsuits and prepare for the opening of the day, with Julia capturing all the memories with pictures.

This year's format for the start was changed to offer the pros a 15 minutes head start – why I don't know. Therefore the pros were to start at 6:45.

By now I have run into some of the other troops during my go-around the bike lot. As the time approaches 6:45, the announcer asks all competitors to make our way to the beach. The pros are released exactly at 6:45am and then us age groupers are granted permission to enter the lake.

Chapter 2 – The Swim

The 15 minutes passes very quickly and the cannon is blasted starting the race. Once the swim starts, I wait behind the crowd a little further back. I am comfortable with the numbers of competitors around me. The place I've chosen is neither providing me any feeling of claustrophobia or abandonment. After some 8-10 minutes into the swim, I definitely sense a lack of swimmers around me so I am cutting water on my own. There really isn't anybody close enough to me that I could get in behind their feet and draft. Now I really wanted to ensure that I was staying straight and not weaving off course.

With the first leg done, we round the houseboat to begin the second leg. The sun is very low in the skylight making it very difficult to sight. It's very difficult to see the buoys markers so I use the froth of waves from the swimmers ahead to sight myself. It was during this leg I was coming onto more swimmers which I had to pass because they were slightly slower. Suddenly out of nowhere I swam up onto another competitor's back. Wow. This is strange. I should have been able to see their legs; we separate and continue on...

Rounding the last turn I am homeward bound. My legs get hit a couple of times shortly thereafter when I feel the Velcro strap holding my timing chip loosen. I needed to do something quick because the rules state: “no chip – no finish.”

I immediately stop and tread water trying to refasten it. I get spun around, when I see what looks like thousands of swimmers approaching, so my next decision is to tear off the strap and shove it into the neck of my wetsuit.

Getting resettled I head towards shore to end this adventure. I remain swimming into knee deep water and when I stand up everything feeling good – no wobbliness or tightness – yippee. I can’t see the swim clock. Judging by the amount of people around me I figure it may be a similar time to '03 - wrong...

Official time: 1:39:45 / place: 2114 of 2245

Chapter 3 – The Bike

Ah, wetsuit stripping. Volunteers are hollering at you to approach and collapse to the ground assuming the position (butt down, legs in the arm). The whole operation takes 2.4 seconds. Paff, off comes my suit and I’m asked to move on!

Move towards the T1 rack where I am handed my bike clothes bag and it's off to the change tentoh yeah... can't forget - say hello to my wife Julia. I ask her about the time but she's not sure either of my finish time.

Changing is largely uneventful until I discover my sunglasses are missing. Huh? I was sure that I packed them. Have a second look, no nothing. Ok – dump the contents of the bag onto the ground...still nothing. Ah, figure I may have packed them in my bike to run bag. Finish changing and exit the tent to pickup my bike and head over to the bike to run rack. Getting there with the bike in tow, I empty the contents of my bike to run bag onto the ground. I can now confirm - no glasses – awe shucks - 180 kms is a long way again to ride.

Quick picture with my wife I head towards the exit when I suddenly realize that I’ve missed the sunscreen station – how did that happen? Quick word with a volunteer who points me in the direction of the station some 50-60 yards away...placing the bike against the rack I sprint off towards the sunscreen station. At this point I’m wondering just how bad is this?

Official T1 time 9:21

I head out of transition to start the 180 km trek. With the sparse amount of bike traffic on the road right now it's very evident that the majority of swimming is over by 1:39. Oh well at least I'm finished.

Onto to the first portion of the route towards MacLean Creek Road 22 km away that presents a short steep nasty steep hill that certainly gets one attention.

Approx 15km out of town I'm passing a number of competitors fixing flats. Now I'm wondering what's up?

Arrive at MacLean Creek Road and start my ascent. There's a group of 8-10 of us. Some of us are riding either close together when a race official vehicle rides alongside and yells something about tacks and to stay off the shoulder – now the flats are beginning to make sense. I relay it on to the others. I remain seated while climbing on the bike – breathing and heart rate are great; excellent news although its early.

Next stop – OK Falls

The entrance to OK Falls is not steep. It has a false bottom that provides the opportunity to get good speed to 40kph. As I approach a tight downhill turn I see lots of volunteers milling about an ambulance. Traffic officers are now hollering for us to SLOW down. As I come out of the turn an ambulance attendant is standing over a pool of blood. Shit, some poor bugger has had a bad spill.

Next up, Oyosoos with the first of two mountains climbs, Richter Pass, but first Oliver. Mt. Oliver is approx 30 km from Oyosoos, a perfect spot to get some Motrin in me. My varicose vein in my left leg is causing some discomfort as well as the ball of left foot has a hot spot. An aid station provides some cookies, banana pieces, fresh water. I spot and take 2 mortins. This should leave enough time to get allow the Motrin to its work.

Start the 30+ min climb up Richter Pass. The climb is again great – a little better than expected. Breathing is under control and heart rate is not exceeding 160 bpm. Cadence is even slightly better than the training ride weeks a couple of weeks prior. No discomfort from my leg. I'm being dropped by some riders but that okay. One of the Seitz boy flies by me...I getting a feeling he's recovering from a flat.

At the crest of Richter Pass spectators are cheering, screaming encouragement, music is playing. Wow!

Next up – the rollers. These are 6 short semi- steep climbs that need to be managed otherwise they can eat you up. All goes well and ride them strong.

Next up, Cawston where the out and back section lies. It's a road that leads to the special needs bag pickup area. This is never a pleasant trip for me. Today there are terrible head winds and along with the undulating terrain is making the trip even more difficult. Throw in desolate landscape that reminds me of the likes of Drumheller and well yuck.

Just then I hear Sandy's voice. She's passing in the opposite direction. Lucky bum is on her way out. She screaming to us that it's a heck of a tail wind. Finally, there's something to look forward too. As I approach the special needs bag area a volunteer is yelling into a megaphone, each competitor's numbers as we approach. This is advising the volunteers

on the other side of the street to have on our bags ready on our turnaround. Ah, I am so looking forward to my twizzlers and salt and vinegar chips!

As I approach my 1300 block of my designated numbers I am handed my bag. I start to unpack its contents in my bento box when I can not help but hear a voice a competitors voice screaming 1106 “where's my bag”. He's lined up with the 1500 block of numbers?? He continues yelling his number louder and louder. The Volunteers are not responding to and now he's now he even more irate...wow... I depart to see a volunteer and him standing nose to nose and exchange unpleasancies. He's being warned repeatedly now that he's getting close to a DQ unless he shuts up.

I enjoy my twizzlers and chips which are going down much to my delight! The tailwind is also delightful.

I see my buddy Ian S heading up and he advises me that my buddy's wife, Lynn is approx 20 seconds in front of me. I stop for a moment to take another Motrin. My back has been somewhat sore for the last 15 miles or so. I come up from behind Lynn and see her cadence is a bit slower - obviously getting tired. I ask how she's doing. She's somewhat tired and I explain my back is aching. With neither really wanting to talk too much, I pull ahead.

An ambulance is ahead now and there's some commotion in the ditch. An attendant is standing in the middle of the road asking me to stop. I must have looked pretty dumbfounded. He permits me to move along with advice not look into the ditch; I may not want to continue. Wow!

Exit Cawtson and now we are back on the highway, moving towards Yellow Lake, the second mountain climb. My arms/shoulders are tired, so its getting difficult to sit up. I decide to limit sitting up until when it will be most needed; the climb up Yellow Lake.

Yellow Lake is a 3-hill climb and a STEEP short ascend at the crest. When I arrive I climb the first section well. Excellent breath control, good cadence, only drops below 60 for a very short time. Good onward to the last two ascents. There's a turn in the roads on the last ascent...Traffic is alternating along the highway, so it's busy with spectators either sitting on the roadside cheering. Those patiently waiting inside their cars are honking, and passengers are hanging out car windows cheering. Boy I feel like Lance Armstrong. I see my friends Ken N and Miriam who are taking photos. Imagine this, I even have enough energy riding uphill to sit up call their names to alert them I'm coming up for my photo op. Boy, things have changed from a few years ago!

I see a rider midway up the ascent laying roadside flat on his back. He's being attended by a spectator... ah poor bugger. The spectator (girl) is getting her boyfriend's attention to call for medical help...

I continue up and over Yellow Lake. Hurray! There awaits an aid station. Wow, I'm only 25 km from Penticton. I toss my water bottle in the drop zone and as I yell out my need for another water bottle, I'm told there's no water at this station. The next station is 4

kilometers way. Ouch. This is going to be a long 4 km, but I have Gatorade with me. However, the taste is getting on my nerves.

There are some small climbs but nothing too significant. I am now so looking forward to the big downhill. Its a great descent when I notice the wind is whipping around. When I start my descent I build speed quickly and pass some riders. I keep a good speed that is manageable. My left eye is tearing. Visibility is being a bit strained but I'm doing well. I see the switchback coming up ahead when the suddenly the wind switches and hit me broadside. My front wheel starts shimmying...wow...scary. I continue downhill but riding the brakes.

When I reach Penticton, the winds are horrendous along side Skaha Lake. Its hitting me broad side so hard that I have to lean into to keep from being blown over. Arrive at transition with clock reading 3:40 pm, a little past my 3:30 goal. Thank heavens this portion is done. People

Official time: 6:55:00 / place: 1654 of 2245 - hey a gain of some 460 places. Alright!!

Chapter 4 – The Run

When I started the bike ride I was looking forward to having my running shoes on.... now I'm not so sure, but hey, one event left. I leave the bike with volunteers and head towards the bike-to-run rack. My wife is working there, so I look for her and my bag. Taking a quick inventory of my body, I'm surprised there's no discomfort in my groin area and I can actually run, whoa! I see Julia ahead. She has the camera, so shesnaps a pic as I approach her. I'm greeted with a welcome kiss and hug. I ask another volunteer to take a pic of us together. Ah ...now isn't that that love, huh??

With bag in hand I move ahead to the change tent again. I see my friend Mike - we call him "Bike Mike". I immediately wonder what's up? Mike is a 6:15-6:30 rider. He shouldn't have been in the tent with me. He motions that he has been dealing with a queasy stomach and is having difficulty processing food. I continue changing into my run clothing and see Mike exit the tent.

I complete changing and head out exit the change tent for my run. Decide to try a pee and hey it works.... great.

Official T2 time 9:58

Next up, a 26.2-mile run. Lakeshore Road is lined thick with people. The winners have arrived and good age groupers are now coming in. It's 4:00 pm. I am somewhat tired. I notice the heat. My legs are moving but with a struggle. The famous stitch has appeared on my right side although it's been worse. I now remember it being mentioned in the change tent that the temperature is 29 C.

The orange dri-fit Nike hat Sandy gave me in remembrance for Rob Leviton seems like a thermal blanket on my head. Wow, and I had Julia buzz on hair on Saturday. Thank heavens I did!

Mandatory rules state I must wear my bib number in front (ps – it has your name printed on it.) This is fantastic if you're feeling fine, but lousy if you feel like crap. As I move along Lakeshore, North Shore Tri Club members and family (Rob's old club) are treating me as one of their own, but I still feel crap without anything in the tank. At this point I'm wondering how mad Sandy will be with me if I toss the cap. Suddenly I realize that I hadn't stopped at the sunscreen start prior to the run, oh well - too late now.

Making the right turn from Lakeshore onto Main Street I can again feel this is going to be a long day. I decide to adjust my watch to measure my pace between aid stations.

Inventory time. No pain from the feet, no sore groin area, I don't understand what's going on. I must be pooped. Main Street is a slight uphill grade that gnaws at your muscles. Must be that. However I was getting down that I couldn't get into a rhythm to start a run for any great duration.

So I walk for one minute...run some.... walk for 2 minutes...run some.

Every aid station I eat and drink. Pretzels, bananas alternate my liquids between Gatorade and water. At mile three I feel a need to pee, so I stop at a biffy. It's busy with someone inside. I start talking to another competitor who tells me she intends to run 5 min, walk one. She goes on to say that she will run walk 3/2s or 2/3s if needed, whatever it takes. I file it away for future reference.

I head off and hit the next aid station on the 4-mile marker. I hear a yell. It's Marie (Bike Mike's girlfriend). I ask how Mike is doing. She hasn't seen him yet. Huh? She said that he had been suffering bad on the bike, yikes. Soon after we reach the top of Main Street. We are directed left to start our run along Skaha Lake road. By now the crowds are thinner. I take the opportunity to switch my bib around to my back. Suddenly I see my friend Ian J (Lynn's husband) ahead. He's walking with another runner who has a bad limp. I start to shuffle to catch up. Some spectators give me a big cheer. I tell them to hold the applause; I'll be stopping in about 10 feet once I catch my friends. I mentioned that misery likes company and I need company. Ian J states that he's absolutely wiped. He's left his performance out on the bike and intends to walk the whole marathon. His friend is in bad shape; his Achilles is shot. I knew there was no way I would be able to walk because I would cool down too much which could prove disastrous for my stomach and me. I wish them luck and shuffle off.

The headwinds along the lake are making the run really difficult. The lake is wavy with whitecaps. Geez, another 6-7 mile of this crap to the turnaround. At an aid station I miss pretzels and I am too tired to go back when a fellow competitor offers me his. His name is Jesus Lopez from Huntington, California. We share his baggie and compare our days.

Jesus is thrashed and intends to walk in. I tell him I can't and am heading off. He offers to join me and after 200 metres; he tells it's the most running he's done since the start of the marathon. We stay together, running when we can.

I'm meeting other troops who are in some distress. Brent calls my name. Brent is walking and when I ask how he's doing, he shrugs. No Hawaii this year. We continue. I meet Ken Scott, a newbie, a 2:50 marathoner. Ken's walking with another buddy Ken Rutland. I make a light joke seeing them both walking. Ken S tells me this is all he has. Ken R lets me know that Ken S would still be on the side of the road had it not been for him. The reality of today has more to do with weather than my fitness.

Jesus and I walked the hills and generally keep each other moving. There are plenty of hills on our way to OK Falls. Finally we make the turnaround point. Jesus's Garmin GPS states we have made it 3:02. A first for me! We decide we will attempt to shuffle run the whole way in. Neither of us really want a 6 hr marathon.

Several miles later, I meet my friend Ian S making in way in the opposite direction towards the turnaround. He tells me Lynn J is about 50 yards ahead. I can see her; she's walking. A short time later, I see her husband Ian J who is still walking on his way to the turnaround. Ian is no longer with the guy with the limp.

The headwind we looked so forward too has now shifted and is back in our face. No! It's 7:00 pm and the sun is starting to set. We approach Lynn who is struggling. Jesus and I continue the run / walk thing. Lynn's run pace is quicker than ours, but she is unable to keep it up for any length of time, so we pass her (back and forth) several times. Then she joins us. A short time later a kid, Chris Flicker, 24, from Vancouver asks if he could join us. It's Chris's 5th IM Canada. He likes the pace we're doing. His hamstrings are shot and as long he moves, they won't seize. Since the halfway point I'm feeling better. We have a great pace that I'm confident that I can keep. My calves are getting a little tight especially on any up hills. We all agree that we will walk the uphills. We comment on the amount of ambulances on the road. Some have had sirens blazing, while others are being escorted by police.

Chapter 5 – The Finish

Our little pack of 4 stayed together for the next couple of miles. Jesus meets another fellow Mexican, and he moves ahead to run beside his buddy. We're down to three, Chris, Lynn J and me. It's nice to have company. As we approach town, Lynn mentions that she's finding the goings on somewhat surreal. We're running three abreast now, and we start to discuss how we are going to arrange the finish order. With a mile to go Lynn J makes her move. It's down to Chris and I when a friend who recognizes him comes from behind and Chris motors forward.

I see my wife standing by the entrance to the finishers chute. We join hands for the run down the finisher's mat.

I see 14:29:08 showing on the clock as I say to my wife that I want to be in before it turns to 14:30...The finisher's banner is raised for us and - paff we break it at 14:29:48 - yippee. wow – I'm a 2 time IM finisher!!

Official marathon time: 5:35:46 / place: 1391 of 2245

The end of the story is:

- 2,245 competitors started the race
- 2,045 finished

In our little army of 12:

- 4 were DNF
- 8 survivors
- 4 spend some time during the day in the medical tent.

So it was an excellent day for me!! 18 minutes slower than last time, but I survived!

Cheers

Paul Christie
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