

A Tale of Two Races

It was my best of times. It was my first of times ¹. The Lake Norman Triathlon, held Sunday August 23, 2009, was my first triathlon in the first 45 years of my life as we know it. I waited a while to “jump in and get wet” but I’ve never exactly been the Daniel Boone type. After observing my wife and friends do the grand-daddy of all triathlons, the IronMan, I’m reminded that they were lunatics, but my admiration remains quite high despite my better judgment.

Enough with the blah, blah, blah. Onto the race report. I assume there is no standard format for a race report, but what do I know (don’t answer that). I’m winging it since this is my first time. I’ll do my best to state the facts, unless they get in the way of a good work of historical fiction. You be the judge.

We arrived at the race site about 0dark30, found a good parking spot and began unloading the bike and gear. Thanks to my personal sherpa and wife, Amy Buehrle Light (yay, her name change is official), and my mom, Gwen, who was a fine sporting spectator, I only had to make 1 trip to unload. Despite the darkness, I laid out my



transition area as directed by “coach” Amy. I picked up my timing chip, borrowed a sharpie and let my “coach” mark me appropriately, # 84, age 45. I double-checked that we didn’t get that backwards. I then proceeded to the first endurance event of the day, the port-a-john line. I gathered a few tips from an experienced triathlete behind me about not panicking at the beginning of the swim, so I considered the wait time valuable.

I made a bee-line for my first transition stop (T0), making sure everything was where I planned, grabbed my swim cap and goggles, and walked out the long stretch to where the standing start of the swim was to begin. I had enough time to wade in, swim for about 20 yards out and back. The water was a tepid 84 degrees, so minus the soap, I figured I could at least get a good bath.

The paparazzi was very thick around the swim area so I obliged with a few not-so candid shots:



The King and I



Me and Mom

1. I felt I should try to prevent any militaristic literary majors from claiming I plagiarized my opening line. Who in the **Dickens** wrote that anyway?

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By the way, the King I refer to in the picture is the well-seasoned triathlete with a whole 3 previous events under his race belt, Doug Vodicka. Doesn't Vodicka sound like a triathlete name? He and wife Sheree came to the event to (1) show me up and (2) make sure I didn't hurt myself.

"Coach" Amy gave me one last kiss goodbye before I sailed off into the sunrise. She told me to think of a song to think of along the swim. What came to mind immediately was a beach-music song I've heard called Stroking. Then I thought of the old Billy Squier song Stroke Me, but that's another story. Just now, as I was typing, I thought of Wade In The Water. That was more my speed, as I knew, like Columbus, I was charting new territory as a truly novice swimmer.

Doug and I stood anxiously waiting for the Master Novice, aka guys who shouldn't wear speedos, category to start about 7:15, last before the relay teams. When they made the announcement to get in the water, I held back to start towards the back. I took one last look at the shore and immediately spotted Coach Amy and Mom waving. It felt like a scene from Saving Private Ryan when they have just landed, wading into the water ready to storm the beach. While the analogy soon breaks down, I still had that feeling of "going to war", the kind of trepidation that makes a grown man scream like a girl 😊

As I stood tippy-toed in the water up to my chin, I heard the 2-minute warning announcement. I thought it was a good idea to remind the guys closest to me that this was a no-biting event. They agreed and said it was just a leisurely Sunday morning swim. Yeah, right. As the air horn sounded to start, I shoved off and began my first and longest group swim. Fortunately, there was not as much kicking or shoving as I expected. We were off.

I started off at about 45 degrees to angle into the buoy line. I rounded the first buoy well and the same with the 2nd. Whew, I was half-way through and feeling pretty good. I found someone keeping about the same pace on my left and tried to stay even with him for a while. Then I thought, he may not be going very straight, so I sighted and needed to angle back towards the buoys again. About that time, I see a dark green cap swim between us. That was one of the relay team swimmers. I justified them catching me by telling myself if they are on a relay team, then they are likely the strongest in each event, so this guy should be good at swimming.

As I tried to angle back in I ran upon someone else who I never saw in front of me. It startled me, so I stopped to tread water and low and behold, touched bottom. After a step or 2, I thought I should start swimming again. I struggled to keep from running into the guy in front and keep a straight line at the same time. I spotted what I thought was the last buoy on the backside, but it was the next to last buoy. I figured, well I've come this far, I may as well keep going so I swam in what I thought was a straight line for a good 25 m. As I sighted, expecting to be very near the last buoy, I realized I had angled to the right inside the buoy (the one that they required you to stay to the left or be disqualified), so I took about a 90 degree left turn to get back outside the buoy. By the time I got back to the buoy, a few others were rounding the corner too. I snuck in behind a guy only to find him

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stop when he got hung up in the loose ropes beneath the buoy. I continued to follow him as he got free then proceeded to get hung up in the ropes myself. I tried not to panic and just before I was ready to dial 911, I got free. I later calculated that I probably could have finished in the top 3 had I not run into this little snag....yeah right. 😊 About 50 m to go and I was back on terra firma bounding up the shore, avoiding some large tree roots, then following the long path to transition one (swim time 18:41).



The transition area was a welcome sight. I had already pulled off my swim cap and goggles so my first thought was “wow look at all the shiny bikes; so many bikes, so little time”. I searched and searched for a nice one but all of the really good ones were already taken, so I resorted to using the bike I brought. I got my feet dry and clean, slipped on the bike shoes, struggled to get my bike gloves on...



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then decided to take a little breather (T1 time 2:40) before hopping on the bike.

The bike ride started uphill so I had geared down to help get momentum. Too bad I couldn't immediately get my left foot clipped in to get started. It seems my camp towel I used to dry my feet had latched onto the bike pedal or my shoe and was in the way as I reached for the pedal. I finally realized the problem and tossed the towel to the side where a nice innocent bystander grabbed it. Coach Amy told me later I could have been penalized for that little infraction but they must have cut me some slack. (Thanks Lisa Lambeth. She was in charge of the USAT officials at the event on Sunday. It helps to have peeps).



Onward and upward. We climbed out of the hollow where the YMCA parking lot sat and onto the main thoroughfare through the quaint little college town, home to Davidson College (made famous recently when their shooting guard nearly took them to the NCAA basketball championship). The bike course was shortened by 3 miles about a week before the event due to road construction that could not be put on hold. We forked left at the detour signs and were soon out in the nice open countryside of North Mecklenberg county, seemingly far away from the big metropolis of Charlotte.

It took a few miles for my legs to react like a normal bike ride, but I heard that was normal fare for the folks crazy enough to do a triathlon. The air was cool, low humidity, especially compared to the day before, so the ride was very nice. I had been unable to get my cyclometer working so I had no speed or distance readings, only cadence. I guess I've ridden enough to know what "feels" right so I think I kept a good pace around 18-19 mph, possibly cruising downhill in the mid to upper 20's. My hill riding for training paid off as there were a few challenges on this course. I maintained a good pace uphill and passed quite a few who had started the entire event ahead of me.

I should stop and let you uncross your eyes at this point (if you're still reading?). By now, you've either forgotten or are wondering why I titled this "A Tale of 2 Races". That's where The King, Doug Vodicka, steps in. I knew Doug would finish the swim way ahead of me (showoff).

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I thought I might see him on the bike or run, but no, Doug was nowhere in sight, except caught on film by the paparazzi. Since a picture is worth a thousand words, I'll save your eyes from more of my long winded ramblings. Here's a synopsis of Doug's race:



Needless to say, I was the tortoise while Doug was the hare, except I never caught him. Congratulations on a great race to Doug. Ok, enough about Doug...

About mile 10-11 of the bike, we turned left onto Hwy 115 where on the drive through the course the night before, the directional sign for the race had been pointing the wrong way. No worries, there were plenty of riders ahead of me to follow ☺

I maintained a good pace to finish the bike portion as we weaved through a different loop in downtown Davidson which brought us back to the YMCA. (Bike time 44:45)



It was a little crowded stopping the bike so I steered clear of everyone and took my time slowing down. No need to crash and burn at this point. It was party time at the transition area. I couldn't wait to get started, so I rushed in, racked my



bike

powdered my nose a bit



and took a



A moment for a little publicity shot with Coach Amy. Too bad the picture is too small to read these professional designed signs, courtesy of my niece and nephew, Megan and Clay Williams. Fine job, you youngsters! (T2 time 1:47)

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I began to wonder where Doug got to at this point, so I decided to take off running to see



if I could find him.

As luck would have it, I never found him, so I can only guess that he actually biked and ran the full course (maybe he paid off Lisa Lambeth to “look the other way” as he took shortcuts).

Just as with the bike, the run began with a good 25 m incline to reach street level. The rest of the run course was mostly flat with only slight inclines as the course weaved in amongst a nearby neighborhood. It took the better part of a mile to feel my “running” legs, but I remembered the wise advice of the seasoned triathletes who said that was normal. I felt like my belly was full from some late-biking Gatorade gulps. I wasn’t really thirsty so I bypassed the first water stop. I missed the 2 mile marker so I wasn’t quite sure how much distance was left and remembered a hill within the last mile from our drive through the night before. It turned out that the hill was nowhere near the difficulty I expected, so I could have pushed my pace a bit more. I rounded the last left turn, ran about 200 m, turned right into the small cul-de-sac, and ran in between 2 houses and their backyards, through the chute and to the right slightly across the finish line. (run time 26:19)



At this point, the paparazzi thickened again and I let them earn their pay as I scoured the



crowd still looking for Doug

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I found my lovely wife instead who was a sight for sore eyes, legs, and most other body parts.

I would like to thank the Academy (YMCA) for making this special moment possible and the well organized support by the SETUP people. I'll close with a few last thoughts.

Now that I've joined the ranks of triathletes, formerly known only as a *tri-athletic supporter*, I think I experienced the enduring endorphins which follow the event. The sprint distance seemed to lend itself to maximizing the benefits while minimizing the soreness. Not until a Tuesday visit with the PT, was I reminded that it wasn't all "fun and games". I originally told myself I would wait a week to decide if triathlons are for me. It didn't take that long, I've made my decision.

To be continued...

Sincerely, but with tongue in cheek and an almost straight face,

Marty Light



(T3 time)

P.S. Final results:

Bib	NAME			CITY/STATE
153	DOUG VODICKA			RALEIGH NC

Rank	SWIM	T1	Rank	BIKE	T2	Rank	RUN	Total
7	14:28	2:34	20	43:33	1:32	23	25:31	1:27:37

Doug - 8th out of 67 Novice Men Masters, and 54th out of 225 men all ages

Bib	NAME	CITY/STATE
84	MARTY LIGHT	CARY NC

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Rank	SWIM	T1	Rank	BIKE	T2	Rank	RUN	Total
38	18:41	2:40	27	44:45	1:47	27	26:19	1:34:09

Marty - 26th out of 67 Novice Men Masters, and 109th out of 225 men all ages