

## Ironman Coeur d'Alene

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By Nasrin Azari

When I signed up for Ironman Coeur d'Alene back in June 2006, I made a bold and verbal commitment to try to qualify for Kona (IM World Championships). Admittedly, pretty aggressive, since I hadn't even been close in my previous two Ironman finishes, but now I am older and stronger and felt the goal was within my reach. I convinced several of my crazy triathlete friends to sign up with me, and by the time the race closed out a few months later, we had a large NC contingent, many from the Raleigh area. So, destined to be a fun experience at least, I started the Coeur d'Alene journey with a big, awesome group of friends!! For seven months, I trained hard, and by the time I arrived in Coeur d'Alene on June 21st, I felt more confident on the bike than I have before any other race I've ever done. I had developed Achilles tendonitis, which hurt my run training, but I wasn't worried about it affecting my race. My biggest concern was actually the swim. The water temperature at Coeur d'Alene is traditionally in the low 60s, and could be even colder on race day. I was worried that I might go hypothermic like I did at White Lake in '05 when the water was supposedly 62 degrees...

Luckily, thanks to some 80-degree temps during race week, Coeur d'Alene Lake was a balmy 64 degrees on race day, and, in my new T1 wetsuit, I was very comfortable. Whew, what a relief! As I stood on the beach waiting for the start of the race, I thought to myself, "I am going to have a great day. I may not hit my 11-hour goal, but I am going to get out there and give it all I've got!" My friend Brett was standing next to me. He and I met each other back in October '06, and we became close training buddies. We did most of our long rides together, and since we were also pretty close swimmers, we planned to try to stay together during the Ironman swim. Unfortunately, he had been down all week because he had caught some kind of bug and wasn't feeling well at all ☹ I didn't know where the others were... Ali, Carolyn, Scott, Lisa, Amy, Rebecca, Carl, Daren, Dennis... but, I silently wished everyone a good race and a safe swim. It was VERY choppy, and the race director actually offered people the opportunity to skip the swim and do a duathlon if they wanted to!

### The Swim

Brett and I planned to swim on the far left side, inside the sight buoys, hopefully avoiding the worst of the mayhem that defines an Ironman mass swim. We stood on the beach, left of the buoy line and listened to the national anthem, the calm before the storm... The horn blared, and I ran into the cold water. Surprisingly, I hardly noticed it. In fact, although quite cold, the water was actually warmer than the 50° air! After getting caught up behind a few big guys, I saw Brett swim by me on the right. I jumped on his feet, and was there for maybe 2 minutes before losing him. The water was rough, as expected, but I actually did better with the waves today than I had during Friday's practice swim. I had a better rhythm and avoided drinking lake water on MOST of my breaths! However, when I reached the first turn buoy, I headed into complete disaster. There was a lot of screaming going on... I assumed from lifeguards, but it was pretty hard to tell. Legs and arms and bodies were all over the place. The guy swimming in front of me suddenly stopped to lift his head, and did a strong breaststroke kick right into my face. Ugh!!!! He hit my nose and goggles. I stopped for a few seconds to catch my breath and straighten out my goggles, and noticed my right eye hurt like it had been scraped. I had to get moving again quickly because I was getting beaten up by other legs and arms. So I put my head down and started swimming again. After getting around the second turn buoy to head back to the beach... what fun! The waves were strong, and I lengthened out my stroke and tried to sail as far as I could on each one. I felt like I was flying! When I got to the beach, the clock read 32:xx minutes. If I could hold that pace, I could hit 1:05 or 1:06 I thought. That's not TOO far off my 1:02 goal. However, starting back out on the second loop gave a quick reality check. The waves that were so fun to ride in on were punishing on the way back out. I didn't see the clock when I finally finished the second loop, but the results showed me at 1:08:56... a very slow swim for me. When I exited the water and headed into the changing tent, I noticed that I couldn't see out of my right eye

and realized I had lost my contact lens when I got kicked. However, I could feel it sitting somewhere behind my eye, so I just needed a mirror to work it out.

## T1

I had two volunteers on me in the changing tent and one of them ran off to find me a mirror. I spent several minutes trying to get my lens carefully out of my eye so that I could put it back in properly without doing something stupid like dropping it or tearing it. I was successful, and SO relieved, because for awhile I was worried that I might have to ride without it (ha ha...!) I put on my bike jersey, arm-warmers, and gloves; took a few swallows of the WARM chicken broth that I had put into my T1 bag that morning (fanTAStic idea!) A quick hello to Mary Peebles, who was sitting right next to me (!), and, seeing 1:15 roll across on my watch, I headed out to the bike, trying to figure out how to make up some lost time...!

## Bike

I felt good on the bike right off that bat. HR was low, and I felt plenty warm even though it was low 50s. I guess that's the benefit of a 9 minute T1 ;) The first part of the bike course goes out around Coeur d'Alene Lake. Relatively fast part of the course; mostly flat, but very windy. I was less than 5 miles into the bike and cruising down a slight descent by the lake when I felt that troublesome contact lens fold up and fly right out of my eye! Holy sh\*t, now what?? I didn't have any extra lenses with me except back in my hotel room. Should I stop? I started to panic... was it even safe to do this ride half-blind?? But, I really had no choice, because I certainly wasn't going to quit... So, I took a deep breath and told myself to just deal with it. I would be extra cautious on the turns, curves and hills, and close my bad eye when I needed to read the signs!!

Somewhere around mile 20-21, the real climbing began. As I was climbing one of the early hills, I came up on Susie Pantlin. She looked good, and must have done a great job in the chop, because normally I beat her in the water! We went back and forth a few times, with her passing me on the descents or corners, and me coming back on the climbs. There were several tough climbs on the course, and I was dropping into my easiest gear to climb them, as I had expected I would. As I passed people climbing up the hills, I thought of the Crucible Fitness guy's pre-race lecture and realized that I was riding the course all wrong. I.e. I was passing on the hills and getting passed on the flat and descents. Oh well! That's just the way it was going to be today. I kept looking (and listening) for Ali and Brett and anyone behind or ahead of me, but never saw anyone else I knew. Tony Adams had a great spectating spot on the course, and I heard him cheering for me a couple of times! I also heard Courtney out there, which was another great pick-me-up. During the second loop, I struggled up every single hill, and kicked myself for not putting a 12-27 cassette on my bike. Ugh! My quads were going to pay...

## About Nutrition...

I ate and drank FAR less than I had planned or expected. Throughout the entire 112 miles, I ate/drank two bottles of Gatorade and one bottle containing HammerGel mixed with water... maybe 800 calories total? In my Bento-box I had a little baggie with Clif shot blocks, Clif bar bite-sized pieces, and some salt tablets, but I never touched it. Given that the air temp was quite cool, and that I had a big (for me) pre-race breakfast (bowl of cereal and a banana), I guess I didn't need any more than that... ?

## T2

I checked my watch as I rolled into T2... about 7:15 into the race. I had hoped to start the run at 7:00, so I was a good 15-20 minutes behind my goal. Although I felt pretty good, the bike course was hard and my legs were shot at this point. I doubted I had a 4:00 marathon in me, and I knew there were at least 3 girls in my age group ahead of me, so I was a little discouraged. I changed into my running top and shoes, put on my race belt and headed out onto the course. Out of T2 in about 3 and a half minutes, a much more respectable transition... although still a little on the SLOW side!

## Run

As I began the run, I realized my bladder was about to burst and I had forgotten to find a porta-john in T2. I hadn't gone to the bathroom since T1, 6 hours ago. At the first aid station, I ran straight to the porta-john, beating a guy who showed up right at the same time. I kind of said "sorry", but wasn't about to be generous and let him go ahead! Instead, I was super-quick, in and out in a jiffy. He was impressed! I was relieved... whew! I rounded the first turnaround, which was about 1 mile into the run. At around the 2 mile point, I heard Scott call my name going the other direction. I was so happy to see a familiar face, and tried to figure out when Scott would catch up to me. Maybe mile 16?? I was averaging about 8:30 or 8:40 per mile at this point, but when I got to mile 5, my legs demanded my first "long" walk. After running a couple of more miles, I got to the big hill at the 7.5 mile turnaround point, and was SO glad to have an excuse to walk again! I rounded the turnaround and headed back down, looking out for Scott to see how much closer he was. When I passed him, he definitely seemed closer, but not close enough. I continued trudging along. Somewhere near the end of the first loop, I saw (heard) Carolyn. Wow! She wasn't that far behind me! Maybe 6 miles? And, her voice sounded good too... like she was feeling great. Seemed like she was having an awesome race! The half-blind feeling was a huge annoyance during the run. I felt like I was in my own little world, with everything feeling a little fuzzy. I couldn't focus on the beautiful scenery or the faces of my fellow competitors. It made it very difficult to distract myself, and I had a hard time being mentally strong. I finally saw (heard) Ali at some point, but couldn't tell how far in front of me he was, or whether he was having a good day or a bad one. I saw Brett at some point on the run too... I think he was starting his first loop as I was finishing mine? At that point, I didn't really know if he was in front of me or behind me! He could have been either. I saw him again later and realized he was indeed behind me. The second loop saw me walking way too much. I was playing all kinds of games with myself to keep me going, but nothing worked! I drank and/or ate at almost every aid station. My stomach was mildly upset and uncomfortable. I couldn't tell if I was hungry or just a little ill... but it was more annoying than painful. As I passed Scott again after the first turnaround of the second loop (around mile 14), it looked like he was losing some ground. I was disappointed, because I really wanted him to catch up so that we could "run" together. I desperately needed a mental boost! I trudged on... worked through a cramp in my left calf, and tried to ignore the blister on my right foot. At mile 23, I heard a couple behind me saying "ok, three miles to go. If we hold a sub-9:00 pace, we can hit 11:30." Hmm... I thought to myself, I can do that. I tried... and ran an 8:20 mile. But, then I had to walk through the next aid station, eat and drink and then shuffle to mile 25. At that point, I told myself to run it in, but STILL I just battled with myself. I just could not convince my legs to keep running! I walked with a guy who was on his first loop and envious that I was about to finish. I told him it was pretty sad that I couldn't run the last mile. Well, I got to around 25.5 and forced myself to move. I LOVED getting to the fork in the road and taking the "to the FINISH" route instead of the "to the second loop" route. I could hear the crowd cheering! Yeah, I was THERE!! All of a sudden, I had mega-energy. I started running faster, and felt awesome. All the tiredness swept out of my legs and I floated down the finish chute, slapping the hands of the spectators, listening as they called my name: "Nasrin Azari from Cary, North Carolina!" They didn't say "You are an Ironman!!", because I think they only do that for first-timers. Oh well...! I crossed the line at 11:36:42. Yee- haw!! 36 minutes off of my stretch goal, but 9 minutes within my limit goal. With the rough swim and the loss of my contact lens, I really could not complain too much. I was happy!!!

## Post-race

I stood around waiting for Scott to finish, and looked around for Ali. Got some food and an awesome post-race massage. After awhile, I found my phone and listened to my messages. Denise had left me a message to tell me I was 6th place in my age group. Well, it looked like my shot at Kona would be luck of the roll-down, so I would be in suspense for another day! Carolyn had a strong finish, Brett had had a tough day, but managed to finish under 13 hours. We headed to the hotel to get cleaned up and then come back to watch the end. We were able to catch Lisa's "just-in-time" 16:55 finish!!

## Awards and Roll-down

With only 4 automatic qualifiers in my age group, I had to hope for a roll-down slot. Three girls had taken their slots, so there was one rolldown. However, the guy told me that my age group would also get an additional slot if one rolled out of another age group. I ended up getting lucky, because Girl #5 took the 4th slot in our age group, but we were blessed with an extra slot! The announcer called my name, and I jumped up to grab my certificate. Yippee!!!! I am going to Hawaii!!! Oh yeah.

MY STATS	Women	Percent	Age Group	Percent
Swim: 1:08:56	39/565 top 6.9%	7/122	top 5.7%	
T1: 09:07				
Bike: 5:57:13	22/565 top 3.9%	5/122	top 4.1%	
T2: 03:30				
Run: 4:17:56	77/565 top 13.6%	14/122	top 11.5%	
Finish: 11:36:42	30/565 top 5.5%	6/122	top 4.9%	

I was only 2 minutes off of 4th, 5 minutes off of 3rd, and 14 minutes off of 1st! Since I am such a goal-oriented person, and since I have no chance of actually placing at Kona, I have decided that my goal for Hawaii is going to be to beat every girl (in my age group) that beat me at CDA. ;) HA! Take that...

Thanks for a Great Time!!

The trip to CDA was so much fun because of being able to share the experience with my brother and many friends. Special thanks to Carolyn and Brett for extending my birthday into race week with clever triathlete gifts such as a lovely pair of "bike panties" and a very age-appropriate "monkey visor"! Thanks Ali for the Congrats cake that was yummy and had the added benefit of being very useful in making some new friends at the Coeur d'Alene Brewery! Thanks to Courtney for bringing the wonder twins, who were a great pre-race distraction! Thanks much to Mark and/or Marty for taking care of my bike post-race, and to Lawrence/IOS for taking good care of my bike and stuff during transit. It was a great experience... well worth the 7 months of hard work it took to get there. To those of you considering doing the race sometime, it is an incredibly beautiful course (especially if you can actually see it). Make sure you train on hills, get a granny gear on your bike, and go practice swimming in Jordan Lake on the windiest of windy days, swallowing as much water as you can... maybe even chucking it back out so you can breathe. Ewww, yuck! Congrats to my fellow finishers... Especially to Carolyn, who had an awesome race, dropping the most time from her previous Ironman finish than anyone I know! Nobody in our group DNF'ed... even Brett, who had every excuse to stop and quit. Ali and Susie, I know you were shooting for a qualifying spot as well, and I wish you were coming with me to Hawaii... Finally, the best part of the race was coming back at 11 pm to watch the last finishers. So, Lisa gets the prize for the most thrilling finish!!

# Triathlon