

Beach to Battleship (B2B) Iron Distance Triathlon – November 1, 2008

By Paul Sappie

WARNING: Very long diatribe. Hey! Indulge me. It was a long race.

Thursday (two days until race)

I left Cary late Thursday morning to drive 2 hours to Wilmington, NC and stopped for lunch at a local downtown deli before checking into the Hilton Wilmington Riverside. Grabbed my wetsuit and drove 12 miles to Wrightsville Beach – site of the swim start. I have a sleeveless (“long john”) and was eager to see what mid-60’s water felt like. It felt cold. Real cold. I went in slowly up to my shoulders, letting the cold water seep through my suit. Wetsuits work very well, but any exposed areas – arms, feet, and face are on their own to keep warm. Next...put my face in the water. This is always the toughest part.

I put my face in the water a few times, trying to adjust and settle my breathing. Then starting with some slow easy freestyle strokes. I swam easy for about 20 minutes up and down Banks Channel staying close to the docks. Not too bad. Arms were obviously cold with mid-60’s water temp and air temp in the upper 50’s. But how would I do during a 2.4 a swim that might take me 1:20 min or more? Hypothermia? And after I got out of the water, I was still cold (slight shivering) for a while. Would I be able to hop on my bike after the swim, with air temp only about 50?

Returned to the hotel and walked a block or two to the convention center where they were having a dinner for the athletes and friends. What do triathletes eat? That’s right – salad, various pastas, rolls, and bread pudding. Love them carbs! I had a nice visit with a couple from Raleigh that were sitting at my table. Beverly (husband) had done several Ironman (IM) races and Margaret was doing the B2B Half. It was her first Half Ironman. We crossed paths many times over the next few days.

I returned to the hotel, watched some tv, and tried to relax. I slept to maybe 4am, then stayed in bed trying to fall asleep until about 7 am. I guess just nervous anticipation about the race. I wasn’t so much worried about my fitness or readiness for the race. Probably still concerned about the cold water. Plus general uncertainty about having everything I needed (right clothes for changing temps, nutrition, etc.). Have you figured it out by now? Triathlete is synonymous with Obsessive Compulsive behavior.

Friday (one day until race)

After breakfast I then went back to the convention center for packet pickup and the “expo” where various companies sell everything related to triathlons. I knew that some triathlon

shops rent wetsuits for about \$50 so I stopped by several booths hoping one had a full sleeve wet suit in my size that they were willing to rent. No luck. None were renting, but all were selling them. I ended up buying a full wetsuit for more than 50% off. It still wasn't cheap. But with so many triathletes living in our area, I can always resell it and get most of my money back. Cold water? No longer on my worry list.

I returned to hotel with my race packet and began to organize my things for the next day. Each athlete gets 6 bags for the race:

1. Pre event bag. On race morning, you put anything you brought to the swim start (clothes/shoes/hats/gloves) in this bag
2. Transition 1 (T1) – Swim to Bike bag. Bike clothes, helmet, bike shoes go in this bag. After changing, wetsuit and swim gear go in this bag.
3. Bike Special Needs bag. Anything you may want halfway through the bike. Could be nutrition, clothes, whatever you anticipate needing
4. Transition (T2) – Bike to run. Put run clothes/shoes in this bag. Deposit Bike clothes in this bag after finishing bike leg.
5. Run Special Needs bag. Anything you may want halfway through the run. Could be nutrition, clothes, whatever you anticipate needing
6. Post event bag. Clothes/nutrition for after the race.

Some how, as if by magic, all these bags end up back at the finish area after the race. Now do you see how someone could easily fret over all the details of the race? As I told my family, this event has more clothing changes than "Project Runway"! Clothes/items for 6 bags. Am I doing an Ironman or going on a week long trip?

I picked up a sandwich to go to eat during the noon Athlete's orientation – back at the convention center. The orientation started with some demographics – I don't remember the exact numbers, but athletes from over 30 states and 9 countries were entered. They basically went over all the details of race day. And what do you get when you have several hundred triathlete's with OCD? You get LOTS of questions. The most interesting question came from a young man standing behind me at the back of the room. "Will the bike handlers be wearing gloves?". The bike handlers grab your bike and place it in the bike rack after you finish the bike leg. Gloves? Was he worried about them scratching his bike? The whole room seemed perplexed by the question. He then said "I don't stop on the bike". A few seconds of more confusion. Then ahhh... And then oooh...What he was saying was that he didn't get off his bike to use the port-o-johns. Be sure to get that man's race bib number. I don't want to be riding behind him when he makes a "rest stop". Now you know how serious some of these hard core triathletes can be.

After the orientation, it was back to Wrightsville Beach to drop off my bike, some of my bags, and get things ready in the swim to bike transition area. Advice I received from other triathletes and coaches was to have an early, quiet dinner away from the other athletes. So I headed to Carrabas for an early 4pm dinner of salad, grilled chicken and pasta. Yum.

Then to the hotel for last minute preparation of some of my sports drink for the next day. Lights out at 9pm. I had trouble falling asleep. Drank an Ensure around midnight and then fell asleep...I was actually happy that I even got a few hours of sleep before the alarm went off at 4am. I had already prepared my liquid breakfast of a sports drink called Perpetuem by Hammer Nutrition. A powdered mix of mostly carbs, with some protein and a little fat. Advice is to have your last full meal at least 3 hrs before race start. This insures that your glycogen levels are high.

Saturday (race day)

Some light stretching and down to the lobby to get on buses that left just after 5am. I dressed in several layers including wool cap and gloves as temperatures were in the low 40's. Brrrrrrr. We were dropped off at the transition area for final preparations. Bottles on bike, pump tires, etc. Ran into Todd Spain, a fellow triathlete from Cary that did Ironman Florida last year. He gave me some welcome encouragement and wished me luck. Then back on another bus to take us to the swim start. Only athletes were allowed on the buses. Because of limited parking, any spectators that wanted to see the start had to walk a few miles to the beach. So there were only 50-100 spectators at the start plus the 400 or so triathletes

Around 6:30am, I put on the wetsuit, placed my clothes in the pre-event bag and began walking on the cold sand to the point at the southern tip of Wrightsville Beach. They were playing "Lose Yourself" by Eminem.

Look, if you had one shot, or one opportunity
To seize everything you ever wanted-One moment
Would you capture it or just let it slip?

...

You better lose yourself in the music, the moment
You own it, you better never let it go
You only get one shot, do not miss your chance to blow
This opportunity comes once in a lifetime yo

As the sun was rising – beautiful sunrise – all the triathletes faced the American flag they had set up on the beach as they played the national anthem.

I ate two GU energy gel packets (100 cal each) and drank some water as my final preparation. Anyone tired yet? The race hasn't even started yet.

Swim

The race was schedule to start at 7am, but they had to wait for enough light at 7:15am when they sounded the starting horn. At least 500 people had registered for the race, but looking at the results – only 397 made it to the start of the race. Registration for this year’s race opened on Jan 2, 2008. The 500 slots were filled in 12 days. I’m guessing some number of people who signed up couldn’t race because of injury, struggled with training, personal reasons etc. Still, I wasn’t eager to jump in the water right away with close to 400 people (1600 arms and legs) thrashing in the water as they swam to the first buoy marker. My strategy was wait a few minutes after the horn sounded before I started swimming. Give the swimmers some time to spread out

I was literally the LAST person in the water.

Took about three minutes to adjust to the water before I started swimming. It was going to be a long day – up to 17 hours for some. Waiting for three minutes wasn’t going to make any difference. And boy, was I glad to have the full wetsuit....my arms were nice and toasty! Just before starting I turned to face the 50 or 100 spectators on the beach. The must be wondering....what is that guy doing? For a split second, I thought maybe I should start off doing the doggie paddle or side stroke.....nah.

My swim strategy was simple. Easy effort. Long smooth strokes. Technique. Efficiency. Bilateral breathing. Sight on the orange race buoys that were every 150 yds or so. Swim down the channel with docks on my right. When we reached a yacht in the middle of they channel with a large inflatable wiggly or dancing man. Turn left. Cross the channel and head for Sea Path marina. Stay relaxed. Enjoy it. I’m doing an Ironman! No problem.

I had three things working in my favor during the swim. I was wearing a wetsuit that provides buoyancy, makes you swim higher in the water (less drag), and makes you swim faster. We were swimming in salt water – again making you more buoyant and faster. Finally, we were swimming with in incoming tide. Everyone said that this was going to make for a very FAST swim. So I just took it very easy during the swim – letting the wetsuit, salt water, and tide help me.

When I reached the end of the swim at Sea Path marina, I felt pretty good. Climbed the ladder onto the dock and saw Daren Marceau, a local triathlete coach who coaches many area triathletes, the NC State triathlon club team, and leads the Tuesday night winter indoor bike training rides at Cycling Spoken Here. He was at the race coaching Deanna Babcock. Back on the Sea Path marina docks, we ran through some showers to rinse the salt water off. We then stopped while “wet suit strippers” helped us take off our suits.

It was about 300+ yds from swim exit to the changing tents --- which were standing room only. I grabbed by Swim to Bike bag and dumped the contents on the ground outside the tent. When there was enough room, I entered the tent to take my swim trunks off and put on my bike shorts. Then back outside to finish my transition – dri-wick shirt, bike jersey, arm warmers, bike gloves, light gloves over bike gloves, helmet, and sunglasses. You can buy expensive arm warmers at you local bike shop. I just cut the toes off some long tube socks and used those. Grabbed my bike from the rack, exited T1, mounted my bike....and off for a 112 mile ride!

Bike

Here was my bike nutrition strategy. Consume about 300 cal/hour to keep replenishing my glycogen stores. Why not consume more? You can, but that's all the body can absorb. Any more and you can start to have gastro-intestinal problems. I have two bike bottles on the frame of my bike and one bottle in front between the aerobars with a straw for easy drinking while riding. I put Hammer Heed (sports drink) in the aero bottle and one of the bike bottles. In the other bottle I had a pre-mixed high concentration of Hammer Perpetuem with about 1200 calories. Enough to last four hours – plenty to get me the ½ way point on the bike and the special needs stop where I could get more Perpetuem. Because Perpetuem has protein, it only lasts so long before it starts to turn bad. That's why I had pre-mixed only one Perpetuem bottle for the first half of the bike. And put a pre-measured amount of Perpetuem powder in a bike bottle in my special needs bag. Just add water to it at that bike special needs stop and that would be my primary fuel source for the second half of the bike. Every twenty minutes I would take a few sips of perpetuem and wash it down with about 1/3 bottle hammer Heed. About every hour, I would take two endurolyte pills (sodium and electrolytes). Every 90 min or so, I would eat an energy GU gel. And I would replenish my Hammer heed drink as needed at the various aid stations.

During the first part of the bike, I felt pretty good. Not pushing it. Keeping in a gear that was comfortable and keeping my cadence at 90+. Although it was still in the 50's, I didn't feel cold. And I knew I could remove some items as temperatures would rise into the low 70's during the day. I stopped at the first aid station (about 20-25 miles out) to use the port-o-john, remove arm warmers, outer gloves, and replenish heed.

I think there were a total of 6 aid stations on the bike course. Each aid station was stocked with bottled water, Hammer Heed, oranges, bananas, E-caps, Hammer Gel packets and Hammer Bars/ Power Bars. And a Port-o-john. I think I stopped at four of them. Either to use the port-o-john, get more heed, apply chamois butter.

I tried to keep the stops short, but at about the 60 mile mark I took a longer break at the Bike Special Needs stop. I ate a Hammer Energy bar, removed my shirt that was under my bike jersey. Added water to the bike bottle with Perpetuem powder – fuel to get me back to

Wilmington. The port-o-john line was three deep. All this contributing to a fairly long stop at Bike Special needs. I also called Alison to let her know that I was feeling good, where I was, and approximately when I would be arriving at the Battleship – Transition (T2) in about 3.5 hours. I think it was about noon. Arrive at Battleship around 3:30pm? We'll see. I would call them again when I got closer.

The bike course was a circular clockwise loop. Most of the road surface was pretty smooth. Because of some bridge/road construction they had to re-route the original route and take us over some rougher road surfaces. More risk of a flat. And any vibration was tough on the hands, shoulders, neck and lost energy meant slower speeds. Not too bad though.

I had some slight/minor stomach disturbances (gas) heading back to Wilmington. The perpetuum with protein can make one a little "gassy" plus it probably meant that I was just at the limit of how many calories my stomach could handle. Stomach issues can be a real issue for some ironman participants...if your stomach "shuts down" and you can't take in any more fluids and calories – that's it – there's no way one can finish without your body absorbing and producing the necessary energy. Fortunately this was not a serious problem for me. I cut back a little on my calorie consumption. My minor stomach upset went away. This is also why it's so important to practice and refine your nutrition strategy during long training rides...you don't want to be trying to figure this out on race day.

The ride back toward Wilmington was long.... Flat long straight stretches along highway 421 into a light headwind. All the long training rides throughout the summer were to prepare me for long lonely rides like this. Just as you need to keep your body properly nourished, you also have to keep your mind filled with positive thoughts and reminders. Here are a few that I called upon throughout the day.

1. "Pain is Temporary. Quitting Lasts Forever". I think this is attributable to Lance Armstrong.
2. SMILE when you pass volunteers at aid stations and spectators. It's a long day for them too. Smiling makes both you and them feel better.
3. W.I.N. – What's Important Now. Don't dwell about something that might not have gone as planned. Don't think about the miles/hours that lay ahead. Just focus on the moment – what do you need to do now. Focus, relax, efficient pedal strokes, proper running mechanics. Enjoy the moment. Enjoy life. I'm in a Ironman!
4. Thank God for everything I have. Family, friends, good health, freedom, and much more

Somewhere around the 90+ mile mark, I was starting to grow weary of riding on the bike. After 6 hours in the saddle many things begin to hurt. Your hands, neck, shoulders, back, just about everything. At this point, I saw a very professionally made banner by the side of the

road – “Tailgate Party – 1 mile ahead”. It was Saturday – could this be for a local or nearby college team? Maybe the high school playoffs. Actually, it was the last aid station on the bike course. High school cheerleaders in uniforms, pom-poms, music, etc. It was a great boost to help me finish the last 15-20 miles of the bike course. And knowing Kerry, Alison, and Brian were waiting for me at the Battleship.

As I approached Wilmington, some lanes of traffic were closed for the cyclists and runners. It looked like traffic was backed up for miles across several of the bridges leading into and out of Wilmington. Just another example of the size, logistics, cooperation between local officials, police, EMT, and residents to host an event of this magnitude.

A quick call to the family as I was riding across the last bridge to let them know I would be arriving soon. What a welcome sight to see Kerry, Alison, and Brian! They surprised me by all of them wearing tie-dye t-shirts with “TEAM PAUL” across the front! Alison made them! And they had something else I needed. Something I had a fever for.... That’s right – I NEED MORE COW BELL!

The only way for spectators to reach the Battleship site was to take a water taxi from downtown Wilmington. While waiting, a woman asked Alison about her Team Paul shirt. Was he a famous or top triathlete competing that day? Alison just smiled and replied simply with pride. “No, just my Dad”.

Many athletes affectionately refer to family and friends that support them at these events as “Sherpas”. Sherpas are people from Tibet that are often employed as guides to carry equipment, food, and provide assistance to climbers as they try to climb Mt. Everest. The most famous Sherpa, Tenzig Norgay, was the first to climb Mt Everest with Sir Edmund Hillary back in 1953. So Team Paul – Kerry, Alison, and Brian – they were my sherpas as I tried of climb my Mt. Everest.

Dismounted my bike and handed it and my helmet to a volunteer who took it to the bike racks. Into the changing tent – running shorts, shoes, belt with race number, running hat and outside for hugs and kisses with the family. A quick stop at the aid station...then out on the road...I swam 2.4 miles, biked 112 miles. 26.2 miles to run. Still feeling pretty good/confident – considering I had been racing for 8+ hours.

Run

The run course was a two loop course crossing two bridges, through downtown Wilmington, Greenfield Park, back across another bridge, before returning to the Battleship area. Each loop 13.1 miles.

My run strategy was simple. Run to every aid station – one every mile. All run course aid stations had Water, Hammer Heed, cookies, bananas, oranges, Hammer Bars/ Power Bars, flat soda, chicken broth, grapes and pretzels. And of course a Port-o-john. At each station I'd either drink 6-8oz Heed or water, eat energy gels or bars, maybe some banana, and take two endurolytes every hour or so. I'd then walk for a minute or so while I drank and ate. The W.I.N strategy helped me here. I never thought – “Oh my God, I've got 20 or 15 or 10 miles to go” or “I'm only on my first lap. I'm being passed by runners coming the other way finishing their second lap”. All I thought about was I just needed to run 1 mile to the next aid station. All I need to do is run 1 mile.

I still felt reasonably well. No nutrition or stomach problems. I was keeping my heart rate at a good aerobic level – low 130's. My quadriceps were pretty sore with every foot strike. Either my running mechanics need adjusted or I need to do more quad strength training. I had the same pain after the Myrtle Beach marathon in Feb. But I wasn't going to let that stop me. W.I.N. Just run one mile.

Somewhere inside Greenfield Park I passed Deanna Babcock who was walking. Daren Marceau was with her riding a bike. We gave each other some words of encouragement as I passed. She was obviously well past the official half ironman finishing cut off time of time of 9 hrs....but she wasn't quitting. She looked determined to finish.

I called Team Paul as I returned to the Battleship to complete my first lap. More hugs. More cow bell! It was still daylight but it would soon be getting dark and cooler during my second lap. I put on a dry shirt and long sleeve running pullover. Back out for lap 2. Not 13.1 miles to go. Just run 1 more mile.

As it got dark, most of the course was well lit. But there were some dark areas. With much of the course on the streets of Wilmington, I was careful not to turn an ankle on a crack or pothole. There were even some short stretches on cobblestone streets. There were volunteers at every turn directing the runners. Except for one. I was inside Greenfield Park, not well lit, not clear whether to go left or right. They also painted turn arrows in orange paint at every turn. No orange arrow. A minor “oh no” moment. I stopped. The thought of turning the wrong way...nope. I was not going to runner farther than I had to. What to do? I looked both ways. No one behind me that might know the way. Then off to the right, in the distance, between the trees, I caught a glimpse of a flashing red light – some runners were wearing them clipped to the back of the shorts or shirts. That's the way....W.I.N....just one more mile.

I knew that Team Paul had long wait times between seeing me, so I gave them call sometime during my second lap (or did they call me?). Kerry said they were in a long line for the Water Taxi. I thought she was telling me that they were on the Wilmington side trying to get back to

the Battleship finish. Uh-oh, I thought. I told Kerry I was guessing that I was still 45 min to an hour from finishing. What if they missed my finished? I thought about calling Kerry back to tell her I could slow down if they needed more time.... But just kept moving forward. I later learned that they were actually on the Battleship side but were calling me to see if they had time to cross to Wilmington and return before I finished.

As I crossed the last bridge leaving Wilmington I could see the Battleship in the distance....only at that point did I thinking about finishing. After crossing the 25 mile mark I called Team Paul. I'm coming in! Turned onto the road into Battleship park. At the end of the road, I turned left and headed down the finishing chute. I slowed and adjusted my run number so the announcer could see it clearly. "No need to do that sir" he announced to the whole crowd. "All you have to do is make it across the finish line. Ladies and Gentleman, please make some noise for Paul Sappie from Cary, North Carolina!"

They set up bleaches on the left hand side and I began looking for Team Paul. What a welcome sight! Stopped for more hugs and kisses. Only a few more yards to cross the finish. Just before crossing the finish. I stopped, turned around to face and thank Team Paul one more time. I raised my arms in celebration. Savor the moment. W.I.N., Smile, Thank God for everything I have. I am an Ironman!

What was my finishing time? I was so focused on family and finishing that I didn't look at the finishing line clock.

Post race

Volunteers removed the timing chip from around my ankle, gave me a finisher's shirt, and put the finishers medal around my neck. They gave me a sports recovery drink and a silver space blanket to keep me warm. A volunteer stayed with me to make sure I was ok until Team Paul met me behind the finish area. More hugs, kisses and congratulations. I also learned that as I was finishing, my brother Doug from California was texting Alison to see how I was doing. He relayed the results to my brothers and sister. I laughed when he told Alison to tell me "Run, Forrest, Run". But it also meant a lot to me that Tim was checking on how I was doing and made me feel closer and more connected to my other brothers and sister at that moment.

I knew that after many hours of exercise, it wasn't a good idea to stop immediately – but to keep walking for a while. We walked together for a few minutes. Still feeling pretty good – after a journey of 140.6 miles. Temperatures were back in the low 50's. I was beginning a get a little cold. The had a portable medical tent unit set up right there. We decided to go in just as a precaution – and did it feel good walking into that warm tent! When I stood still, I got a little light headed. So I just kept slowly moving. I was still wearing my heart rate monitor from the race. It was reading 84 bpm. My resting heart rate is upper 40's/low 50's. Staff said that

my slightly elevated heart rate was fine. My heart rate would likely remain slightly elevated for a few days while my body recovered. They suggested I lie down, elevate my feet, and put a warm pack under my armpit. That was nice. I wasn't eager to go out in the cool night and take a water taxi across the river just yet.

We left the medical tent a short time later and with the help from Team Paul we went to the transition area to collect my 6 bags and bike. I ran into Sam Suarez, another NC State grad student that I know thru winter indoor training rides. Sam was not racing. But he rode his bike 120 miles from Raleigh to Wilmington to cheer on the B2B participants. The Myrtle Beach Marathon was also the first marathon for both Sam and I.

Water taxi ride across the Cape Fear river. A few short blocks to the Hilton. While putting some things in our cars, we were approached by a few young men. Very polite. They were curious about the silver cape draped around my shoulders. I was still wearing my space blanket. It might not have been a curious site the night before – Halloween night. But not something you see in public every day. I explained the race to them. They were young marines. That's amazing they said. That's incredible. That's unbelievable they kept saying. Then each one of them asked to shake my hand. I thanked them for their service to our country.

Up in the room for a nice warm shower and into bed just before midnight. I slept in a long sleeve t-shirt to stay warm. In the middle of the night I woke up in a cold sweat. The sheets were soaked. It was similar to what happens when someone breaks a fever. But in this case I felt fine. I guess my body's thermostat was still trying to adjust from long day's exertion. I changed into some dry clothes, stripped the bed of the wet sheets and went back to sleep under to clean/dry blankets.

Sunday

Sunday morning we slept in. The extra hour of sleep coming off daylight savings time was very welcome. We packed up the cars, checked out of the hotel and joined other athletes and their families for a riverboat cruise. Very enjoyable. Nice breakfast buffet. Nothing fancy, just good food. Eggs, pancakes, bacon, sausage, rolls, egg casserole. We triathletes love to eat! The river boat had three levels. After eating, we sat outside and enjoyed the mid-day sun.

We left Wilmington around 2:30pm. Brian and Alison drove 2 hours back to NC State. Kerry and I drove to Becky's where we had a nice dinner at a local Chinese restaurant. We then picked up our dog Shelley and headed back to Cary.

Race Results

You may be wondering.... This long meandering story.... But nothing about time? How did I do?

Every person who enters their first Ironman triathlon shares the same goal – to finish the race before the midnight cutoff – under 17 hours from start to finish. If everything went very well – and that’s a big IF – no flat tires, no nutrition problems, good weather, etc – maybe I could finish around 15+ hours. But everything would have to go as planned. And with a race of this distance, you can almost be assured that something wouldn’t go as planned. If I finished under 15 hours, then I’d have to be tested for performance enhancing drugs. Well, I’m rolling up my sleeves.

My finishing time was 13:56:01! Under 14 hours!

Unbelievable! With my W.I.N – just one mile at a time strategy, during the run I really did not have a clue as to what my finishing time was going to be. I didn’t know I had run that good a race until running into the Battleship area. A spectator shouted – “You’re looking good. You’re going to finish under 14 hours!”

Complete results of all the participants can be found on the Beach to Battleship website.
<http://www.beach2battleship.com/>

Post race analysis

Although a bit chilly in the morning, one couldn’t complain about the weather – ideal. Low 40’s at the start. Highs in the low 70’s around mid afternoon. In the 50’s at the finish. And most important to me for the bike leg, little or no wind (5 mph or less).

Swim. During training, I would take me about 1:30 to swim 2.4 miles in a lap pool. For the race, I covered the 2.4 miles in only 1:03:11! That’s a time savings of about 30 min or 1/3! That’s the difference a wetsuit, salt water, and the tide can make. And even when compared to the rest of the field, I was very happy with my swim time. I was the last of 397 triathletes that entered the water. I was the 242nd swimmer out of the water at the swim finish which meant I must have passed 155 other swimmers during the swim leg!

Purchasing the full wetsuit turned out to be a good choice. I heard of several swimmers who wore sleeveless wetsuits and had troubles. Margaret, who I had dinner with on Thurs and was attempting her first Half Ironman, had to stop after the swim because of mild hypothermia. She was wearing a sleeveless wetsuit and was in the water for a much shorter time than me. Another Full Ironman participant said they had to wait in T1 for 40 minutes before he warmed up enough to continue on the bike. Boy, was I glad I bought that full wetsuit.

Bike. It took me 7:07:38 to ride 112 miles. Ave of 15.7 mph that included stops. Average speed while on the bike (not including stops) was probably about 16.5 mph. Pretty slow consider I have averaged close to 18 mph for 56 mile bike leg in a Half Iron man, 19+ mph for 25 miles in Olympic distance, and 21+ mph for short sprint triathlons with 12-14 bike leg. But that's ok – I was certainly being cautious knowing I still had a marathon to run. Save it for the run.

Run. I ran 26.2 miles in 5:26:48. Including walking breaks at each station, this was an average pace of 12:28 per mile. I very happy with that. Especially considering that I ran the Myrtle Beach marathon in just under 5 hours. This was just 30 minutes slower than Myrtle Beach and this 26.2 mile run was preceded by a 2.4 mile swim and 112 mile bike ride. Really happy with that time. Taking it easier on the bike. Saving it for the run. W.I.N. really worked....

Overall. Just finishing would have made me happy. So finishing just under 14 hours exceeded all my expectations. So how did I do relative to everyone else.

I placed 36 out of the 47 men in my age group (45-49).

I placed 271 out of all 324 men.

I placed 331 out of all 397 men and women.

See. "I didn't win, but I beat everyone that stayed home."

My Triathlon Journey

Anyways, it wasn't until '92 or '93 before I did my first I did my first triathlon – while living in Maryland. The Robin Blackburn Memorial Triathlon. I think I did it because it was the shortest distance triathlon I could find. Then in 1995 (13 yrs ago) – I completed the Triangle Triathlon which was conveniently held in our Lochmere subdivision here in Cary. At that time, did I ever think I about doing an Ironman? – absolutely NOT. Not even a chance. Finishing the sprint distance in just about an hour and 45 min was all I could imagine doing. It wasn't until 2004, 9 years later, that I moved up to the next distance – at the Pittsburgh Olympic distance triathlon. Three years after that – my first Half Ironman in the spring of 2007. And two more Half Ironman's since then. I was doing some group rides with people that had either completed an Ironman or were training for one. It made me think that maybe it was possible. So while I was still in Half Ironman shape, knowing it wouldn't get easier as I got older, and a new Iron-distance race being planned for the following year, in Wilmington - only 2 hours away. This meant it would be easier for Alison & Brian to attend even though they would be in college. If I was ever going to do one, this seemed like the perfect time.

When Alison and Brian were young, they would ask me after every race if I had won. "No. But I beat everyone that stayed home" was my standard reply. Meaning trying to win is always a good goal – but maybe just as important – was to be a participant. To give it your best and to

finish. Today, if you asked them if their Dad won this weekend's Ironman race, they might say "No, but he beat everyone that stayed home".

Ironman training

How did I prepare for this? I begin training specifically for this race about 8.5 months ago – shortly after the February Myrtle Beach marathon. Each week I swam 2-3 times, cycled 3 times, and ran three times. Shorter workouts during the week. Longer workouts on weekend. One day of rest each week. Generally 8-12 hours of training each week. Peak week was 16.5 hours. Based upon my training research, this should be enough for me to finish the race. But I would say that most athletes in this race trained more than that. Remember the guy who doesn't stop on the bike. I guarantee he trains a lot.

Training consistency is the key. Gradually increase in training time/distance. No more than 10% from week to week. Was it hard? Sometimes. Getting out of bed at 5:30-6 am to swim before going to work wasn't easy. Heading outside to run or bike when the weather was cold, hot, wet, windy was not always fun. I had to resist the temptation to use that as an excuse for not training. But most times, if I was dragging or not motivated to train...I actually had more energy and felt better after my workout. So while there were certainly times when I struggled and suffered during training, those moments were more than offset by feelings of accomplishment and reward. Letting my mind wander during countless pool laps...forgetting about life's challenges. Thinking about others...and not myself. The joys of peaceful long runs through Umstead Park or the American Tobacco Trail. Enjoying nature. The woods. The deer that would cross in front of my path during runs at dawn or at dusk. Traveling the back roads of Wake and Chatham county and parts of NC on my bike. Good stuff.

I think my toughest stretch of training came during hot/humid July-Aug. My training plan called for more hours/miles of training. It felt tired and exhausted pretty much up all the time. My body wasn't recovering enough between workouts. That could also be a sign of overtraining. It was then that our family went up to the Poconos for the Knerr family picnic. During that time, I reduced my training hours significantly. Returning home, I felt a bit more rested and strong. Enough to make it thru the final two months of challenging training.

During the 8.5 months, I ran a marathon, a half marathon, a half ironman, 3 century (100 mile) rides, and countless hours/laps in the pool. 2.4 miles is 85 laps (up and back) in a 25 yd pool. This year I swam 145 miles. Rode 3556 miles on my bike. Ran 822 miles. Run Forrest Run.

But that's still not enough. It takes more than that to complete an Ironman. You need the support of family and friends. Without the encouragement, understanding, and love from Kerry, Alison, and Brian – this would not have been possible. There is NO WAY I could have done it without them. And I don't mean just coming out to the race with shirts, cameras, and

cowbells. Those were absolutely needed on race day. But their understanding and support throughout the year. So while I may have had the timing chip around my ankle throughout the day and I was the one who walked across the finish line – I knew and felt Kerry, Alison, and Brian were with me the entire race.

What's next? No plans. I'll enjoy this one for a while. I enjoy swimming, cycling, and running – so I'm sure I'll continue training and doing triathlons. But not on this scale. I actually got an e-mail from Coach Daren today (Tuesday after the race) congratulating me and asking if I would be at tonight's indoor training ride. Coaches can be tough. Good job. Now get back to work. Daren also gave me an update on Deanna. She made it to mile 8, but the bleeding and tissue damage was just too much to continue. She could have walked to the finish line, but the resultant damage would have kept her out of work for a week. Daren said she was disappointed but was already talking about doing the White Lake Half Ironman next spring. Incredible. Deanna didn't win, but she certainly beat everyone that stayed home.

Physically, I actually feel pretty good. Quads are still a little sore/weak. A few blisters. Other than that – I'm good.

There's actually a double Ironman – can you believe it. Hmmmmm. Maybe someday? Not to worry. Not going to happen.

Oh...just one last thing. I promise. If you tell others about my experience. And they ask you how I did. Be sure to tell them....

"I didn't win. But I beat everyone that stayed home"

And if you know of anyone in the market for a wetsuit, I have one with only 2.4 miles on it.

I hope that this did not come across as boastful, arrogant, or preachy. That was not my intent. Thanks again for your indulgence and tolerating my ramblings....

Paul

