

PORT OF TAURANGA HALF IRONMAN

YAH!! Finally the jinx is broken! I went to New Zealand with no expectations but I didn't particularly want to finish in 4th! To come home with my first Half Ironman victory and a PB to go with it makes all that pain worthwhile.

I know you push yourself in every type of race to the limits whether it is an Olympic Distance race or an Ironman. But on the weekend I found myself in situations and circumstances I had never been in before.

Mum and I traveled to Auckland early on New Years Day (so you can imagine what my new years eve was like!!) taking a full day to get there via Sydney. We spent one night in Auckland then drove to Tauranga) on the Wednesday (which was a public holiday in New Zealand!). The place was chaos! It reminded me a lot of Noosa or Port Macquarie. There were people everywhere and trying to get through the main street of town was near on impossible. After a few dramas trying to find our accommodation we settled in a short walk from the location of the race. I had heard how cold the water could be but ventured in for a "wetsuit less" swim prior to the race and cycled one lap of the course. Some locals had suggested I should go for a run around the base of the mountain where the run went because it appears to be a flat run course except for the 3-4km of rolling sand track behind the mountain that nobody sees but can make or break your race. I decided against it knowing I would have to run it twice on the Saturday anyway.

The days leading up to the race were nice and relaxing. I felt organized. A few afternoon naps and I was over the late nights to get there, mum and I did a bit of shopping and enjoyed eating at some of the delicious local café's.

Race morning was a 6.30am start and before I knew it I was in the water waiting to start. It was one big mass start with the Pro's starting supposedly 10m in front but like any swim starts the line was creeping forward more and more until eventually we were off. I had a good start and was able to jump on feet early. The swim was 2 laps. A larger lap followed by a smaller one but you had to run out up onto the beach and around some barriers before beginning the second lap.

Exiting the water I had no idea where I was but felt good about my efforts and was thinking more about trying to get my wetsuit off quickly and onto the bike (transitions are definitely not one of my strengths!)

Onto the bike and it was now time to see how I could ride! I didn't have the best bike ride in Hawaii and was hoping it was just one of those days. I knew I was capable of riding a lot better than that and wanted to put together a better cycle just for my own confidence if nothing else. It was also my first race on the new Felt DA and I love it!! The first few km's of the ride included a few large speed humps on the road and by the end of that section both of my water bottles from the back of my bike were gone! Bugger!! I had never used the nutrition on course before and I was going to do something that I would tell people never to do!! Use the nutrition on the course for the first time during the race! I had a little bit to start off with and it seemed okay

so I grabbed some at the next aid station as I was going to have to get my electrolytes from somewhere other than my gels! The wind began to pick up on the return leg of the first lap and then we even had a spot of rain! This made the road very wet and slippery. I came to a left hand turn and the cyclist in front of me hit the ground! “Oh my god, here I go! I was sure I was hitting the road! I put on the brakes and felt my back wheel spin out and knew I couldn’t use that option. The next minute (Tour De France style!) I was up over the island, across the footpath and into the middle of the road (thank god there was no cars coming!) a left hand turn and I was back into the race!



It was about this time that I realized I was making time on some of the girls in front of me and had moved myself into third position. Coming back into transition to begin the first of 2 small laps I found out by listening to the commentary that I was in fact in second! Wow! I had warmed up by now and was feeling really good on the bike. I put my head down and focused on the final lap trying to put as much time as I could into the girls behind me. Also limit the damage as much as possible by Jo in front of me. I came into transition roughly 3 minutes down and was thinking to myself “would I have my run legs today? Had I gone too hard on the bike?” I wouldn’t know. I would just have to go and find out.

I began the run with a goal in mind, to get as close as I could! If I caught her, great! If I didn’t at least I would have given it shot. After the first turn around people on the side were given me splits and I was making ground. This was making me excited and I kept trying to push hard. It was then the first time I went behind the mountain and I was glad I hadn’t run it prior to the race because it was nasty! Up and down, up and down on a dirt track and it just kept going. It was nice to know I only had to do it one

more time! Just over half way through the run and the time difference was less than a minute and I could see the bright coloured jacket of the lead cyclist who was riding with Jo. We made the final turn to start heading back and I came up along side her. It was quite strange because I was “Oh my god! What do I do now? I had never been in this position before. Do I go and try and get away now with at least 6km to go or do we run together for a while. All I know is that I was definitely hurting. Had I used up everything I had to get myself in this position and now I have nothing left? We left the crowded streets for the 3-4 km behind the mountain where there was nothing but Jo and I, and those darn rolling hills and sand track. I tried a number of times to break away but she kept coming back. There were so many things going through my head “You know what, second would be great, you have never podiumed before and this has been an awesome effort” “No way! You have worked your butt off to get in this position and you have a chance to win this! The opportunity is there! You have to take it!”

I went again and this time seemed to get a little gap and finally we were rounding the last hill and I could see the road and the last 1km to be run to the finish line! It was on!!

I accelerated as much as I could, running straight through the aid station. The crowds on the sidelines were awesome, I could hear them cheering, but within an instant I could also hear them yelling, “go Jo, you can catch her!” She was still right there! The quads were screaming and I felt like I was going to trip over my own feet. I was so focused on that finish line I saw nothing else! I didn’t even feel I had time to raise my arms at the finish line. I ran straight through the banner and sat down. I was totally overcome with exhaustion and elation. I did it!! I couldn’t believe it!



10 seconds!! That was all it was in the end! I always thought my first victory I would be able to run down the finish line, high five some spectators and take it all in. Not sprint because I was hanging on for dear life! But I wouldn't change a thing!

It was a day that had everything! Including my first drug test! Which I must admit, I had a lot of trouble with due to being a little on the dehydrated side after losing both my water bottles. Finally 2 hours later I was finally able to fill that darn cup!!

It was a fantastic race, well organized with great support from the local community. If you were looking for an early Half Ironman I would highly recommend it. But be early as it was full with in 8 days this year!

For me now, I will enjoy a few days recovery before hitting it hard for the next 8 weeks and heading back to New Zealand for the Ironman!

Safe Training!

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