



Bathurst Tri Spin

Ironman Memoirs April 2009
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Bathurst Triathlon Club - <http://www.bathursttriclub.com.au>

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Bathurst Triathlon Club
Established 2006

Australian Ironman

Location: Port Macquarie

Cut-off time: 17hrs

Swim 3.8km

Cycle 180km

Run 42.2km

The alarm went off at 3:00am but I was already awake. I had been sleeping lightly all night, waking up on the hour every hour. Outside it was raining heavily, the transition area was already a quagmire and our gear bags would be sitting in flooded waters after this latest deluge. The only break in the rain seemed to be the odd gust of wind. The more positive and optimistic competitors said to treat the race like any other wet weather training session, the problem was that my wet weather training sessions involved sleeping in and opting for a coffee at a café! This was going to be a tough day.

The training for Ironman had started the day after Boxing Day and I'd had the perfect, injury free lead-up with good health and no missed core training sessions. I had been setting my alarm for a 3:00am wake-up all week to get my body clock in order and I started the day with a banana, a piece of dry toast and a glass of water with wheatgrass. I had been carbo-loading the previous two days so I already had plenty of energy, this was just a bland top-up for the 3.8km swim ahead.

After a half-hour stretch session I went through my final checklist that I had prepared the night before and sat down and looked through the Polar training reports that I had printed off for this very moment. The training load for an Ironman drops off dramatically in the last two weeks and by race day there is always the feeling that you haven't done enough, so I find going over my training for the last few months a good way to calm those pre-race nerves. I had averaged 7km swimming, 260km cycling and 45km running each week since Christmas. A month out from race day my weekly total had peaked with 10.5km swimming, 340km cycling and 60km running. My longest sessions had included a 4.5km swim, a 130km cycle and a 21km run. It was more than I had done for the 2007 Ironman, I was ready to beat my previous 12:20. I was also determined to go under 12hrs... but Ironman 2007 had been a sunny day, today was wet!



*65km into the bike leg
and feeling good*



*18km into the run leg
and not feeling so good*

THE PODIUM

Ironman Australia
April 5th 2009

Richard Hobson	9:49
Swim	0:53
Cycle	5:06
Run	3:42
Terry Roberts	10:09
Swim	1:00
Cycle	5:26
Run	3:37
Graham Wheeler	11:46
Swim	1:14
Cycle	6:01
Run	4:21
James Deagan	11:48
Swim	1:07
Cycle	6:05
Run	4:23
Jody Parker	12:16
Swim	1:16
Cycle	6:13
Run	4:38
Mark Booth	12:36
Swim	1:36
Cycle	6:14
Run	4:36

Note: Transition times not included

I arrived at the transition area at 5am. It was ankle deep in muddy water, the type that sucks your footwear off! I checked my tyre pressure, said a quick hello to Mark Booth who was heading up to his bike and then changed into my wetsuit. At least it was warm and waterproof! Heading out into the waiting area I saw Richard Hobson and Mark Booth getting fitted into their wetsuits by the Blue Seventy sales rep, it looked like a good idea so I went over and joined them. If nothing it occupied my pre-race nerves. We headed down to the entry ramp for the swim. On the way I received 'good lucks' from former Mudgee team mates and Terry Roberts. I still hadn't spotted Jody Parker or Graham Wheeler. I gulped down two High 5 energy gels and then entered the water. The National Anthem was played and then the starting cannon fired. I started the swim slowly, remembering to breathe (to avoid an anxiety attack from hyperventilating), getting into a rhythm and avoiding a hit by a wayward kick or arm stroke by one of the other 1400 triathletes. A few hundred metres into the race I had settled comfortably to what was to be a 1:46 per 100m pace. The tide was going out which made for slow swimming when swimming against the tide but was made up for when swimming with the tide. After 1:07 the two lap leg was finished. I was 3 minutes behind my 2007 swim time but I wasn't phased as the race is neither won nor lost on a swim leg.



Terry Roberts



Richard Hobson



Transition consisted of peeling the wetsuit off and remembering my race number in order to find my gear bag and bike. The bike leg hits a lengthy climb about 1km into the race, just as you are getting your bike legs. Scores of cyclist were overtaking me but I tried not to get perturbed by this. I knew my strength was on the long flat sections. I settled into a rhythm and was soon passing other cyclists. I had trained consistently in an aero position on my tri-bars and this was paying dividends in the windy conditions. I hit a flat spot around the 80-100km point, and I was feeling the pinch on the undulating back section of the course. I focused on the next 100m rather than the next 100km and fueled up with some extra gels I had in my bento-box. I was soon feeling good again and settled into the third and final 60km lap.

The professionals started the race 30 minutes before the age groupers this year, which meant on the third lap we were overtaken. It was a buzz to have the lead motorbike momentarily in front of you, followed by a peloton of professionals rushing past, making your 30km/hour pace feel as though you were stationary.

I spotted Richard Hobson heading in for his last lap as I was heading out and after about 1-2 km after the final turn-around I spotted Jody Parker on my tail. I still had no idea where Terry, Graham or Mark was but no doubt I would spot them on the run.

At the bike transition there is a volunteer who catches your bike so that you can focus on getting your run gear. I had a quick look at the clock and it said 7:19. I had ridden a 6:12 which was 27 minutes faster than my 2007 time. The new bike was worth it (if \$200 per minute is considered good value!). My actual bike time was to be officially 6:05 after my notoriously slow swim transition was taken out of the equation. Graham Wheeler was seconds behind me in the transition tent and was out a good 1-2 minutes before me. I wasn't too concerned by Graham's quick transition as I had done plenty of bike-run brick sessions so I was feeling confident for the run. I knew he was a good runner as he had beaten me by a few minutes in the Mudgee Half-Marathon in 2008. If he was having a bad day I would soon catch him and if he wasn't, I didn't want to be pacing him, so I was happy to give him breathing space. On the way out I glanced at the clock and it read 7:25. I ran a 4:36 for the 42.2km in 2007 and if I ran the same time I would come in at a pinch over 12hrs. My goal was to go under 12hrs so I had to have a good run. I was feeling great on the first lap, I spotted Richard Hobson who was on his second lap and Jody Parker who was still 1-2km behind but looking very comfortable. If my run went pear-shaped he was soon going to be overtaking me. I ran my first 14km lap in 1:19, this was great, and I was running a sub-4 hr marathon pace! Graham was still a few hundred metres ahead of me but there was 28km to go, plenty of time to catch him. I saw Mark Booth for the first time since the race start and he was also looking very comfortable, it was going to be a good day for Bathurst.



Jody Parker



Graham Wheeler



Mark Booth

I hit a flat spot at the 17km mark. My legs were fatigued and it was taking every ounce of will power not to just stop. I walked through my first aid station at this point and I saw the gap was widening between Graham and me. At the end of the second 14km lap I had ran a 1:32 lap and the clock read 10:16. If I continued to diminish at this rate I was going to go over the 12hr mark. Although my body just wanted to stop and walk the race out, I thought of all the training I had done for this race and how I would feel in the morning if I gave up on my goal. Half an hour earlier, I had spotted Terry Roberts giving every last ounce of energy as he ran his final lap, desperately trying to qualify for Hawaii. On the back of his shirt there was a quote about the pain only being momentary whilst the memories lasting forever, that was enough incentive for me so I pushed the pain aside and focused on maintaining my running technique and a consistent pace.

My wife Phoebe, four sons; Seamus, Leoghaire, Conaire and Finian and parents were supporting me throughout the day. On the bike laps they called out from our apartment balcony which overlooked the course spurring me on and making me pick up the pace a little. For the run leg they were cheering on each lap as I ran along the breakwater. On the first lap of the run there were plenty of high-fives and cries of "just livin' the dream baby - lovin' this" our in-house family joke taken from a Ben Stiller-Owen Wilson movie. By the third lap it was an effort just to grunt "yes"

as my wife Phoebe asked if this was my final lap, so they could make their way to the finish chute and my boys were left standing holding their hands up as I passed, too exhausted to high-five. I had no idea of what my time was since I had passed for my final lap at the 10:16 mark. I do not race with a watch (although I train religiously with my Polar Heart Rate monitor) as I find it becomes too much of a focus, so with 8kms and a long stretch of hill ahead of me I had no idea how I was venturing. I decided to run through the last three aid stations, they could hook me up to an IV drip after the race if I became dehydrated; I just wanted to finish under 12hrs. At the final turn-around with 4km to go, Graham was just leaving the aid station as I entered, I had closed the gap, maybe I could even try to overtake him, but he soon picked up the pace on the downhill stretch. The last 4km of the race were spurred-on by supporters calling out encouragement. I heard a person yell '1500m to go', I hoped they were right, my legs were aching, it had been a tough run but it was soon going to be all over.

The day before, the race director had warned triathletes not to let their family cross the finish line with them as it caused obstruction. He used disqualification as a threat and that was enough for me. We had plans to run up the finish chute as a family but that wasn't going to happen now. As I passed the finish chute on my second lap I heard the announcer remind spectators not to enter the finish chute, I hoped Phoebe remembered our conversation the night before about making sure the boys stayed behind the barricade with her.

As I entered the final 100m finish chute all the pain disappeared, it was almost over; it was time to savour the moment. I looked ahead at the time and initially thought I saw a 12, the moment of disappointment was soon gone as my eyes focused and I saw an 11, 11:48, I had done it under 12hrs. I spied Terry Roberts behind the barricade, he had finished less than 2hrs earlier and already he was back spurring on the other Bathurst triathletes. I went over to high-five Terry and his wife, oblivious to my own family calling out as I passed them. The less obedient of my 10 year old identical twins, Leoghaire, had jumped the barricade, I looked around horrified and was about to tell him to go back when I looked up and saw my five year old son, Fin, following his older brother's initiative followed by a slightly embarrassed Phoebe in pursuit. It was too late to do anything so I made light of the situation and put Fin on my shoulders and hoped for the best as I was announced an Ironman for the second time. Fortunately there were no dramas and I was escorted by a volunteer to the recovery tent with my finisher's towel and medal. Graham had finished just two minutes before me (maybe I should have followed him quicker out of transition!). We congratulated each other, swore that this was our last Ironman ever and went to the massage tent. Fifteen minutes later we had collected our finisher's shirts and were sitting down for a hot meal. Graham took himself to first aid tent whilst I met my family waiting patiently outside in the mud. We walked the 2km to the apartment with my bike and gear bags, although I don't remember much of the walk, too tired, too happy... I was an Ironman, second time around!

Footnote:

Richard Hobson finished in 9:49 followed by Terry in 10:09. They both qualified for the World Championships at Hawaii in October. Jody was to finish shortly after Graham and me in 12:16 and twenty minutes later Mark Booth crossed the line in 12:36.

Since 2007, Bathurst triathletes have crossed the finish line 13 times, all of them under 13 hours. No one has quit.

Thank you to the Bathurst supporters who gave their support on the day. Each cheer makes us go that extra yard with a spring in our step.

Patrick Vernay won the 2009 Ironman for the third consecutive year and World Champion Chrissie Wellington blew away the female field finishing with a lead of 24 minutes and 11th overall, even beating Ironman legend Jason Shortis.

My next triathlon race will be the Gold Coast Half Ironman in October. I have had a six day rest up and am eager for a new challenge. I am looking at doing the North Face 100km trail run in the Blue Mountains in May. I am banking on my Ironman training and a good four week running program to get me across the line (although the only time I have ran over 21km has been in my two Ironman races) but hey, "just livin' the dream baby - lovin' this".



Crossing the line after 11:48