

#### Pre-race:

Training had gone well with only the one niggle heading into the race so I go to the physio Wednesday for more work on my glute which is getting sore when I run. The physio tapes it up and shows me how to do it for race day.

I wake on Thursday and it is very sore after all the work done to it Wednesday. I spend a good half hour stretching before Clair picks me up and we head to the airport. The flight is uneventful and we find our hotel no problem before heading for dinner with my parents who are over to support as well.

Friday rolls around and it's time to start getting the pre-race chores done. I pick up the bike from ship my tri with Niall and Emily first and then head down to register. Needless to say I spend 50 quid in the expo! After a quick lunch I head for a swim course recce with a Niall, Emily and another of Niall's friends and it proves to be very beneficial.

Following the buoys is not the straightest line so we chart our way through the course and practice the last u-turn as everyone will be funnelled by ropes into a narrow corridor just before it.

Saturday I'm up early and out on the bike for a bit before grabbing breakfast and going for another shorter dip. The rest of the morning is spent with the feet up and I rack the bike early enough in the afternoon before an early dinner and an early night.

Sunday I'm up early and the hotel has breakfast set up at 4am. After filling up and grabbing a roll for later I share a taxi with Niall and Emily out to the start. Here I run through the usual race checks and load the bike with my nutrition, eat my roll and head over to the swim start.

#### THE RACE:

##### Swim:

After the pros and XC wave (such a ridiculous thing I have never heard of before), the AG'ers line up and are off with Ironman efficiency. I line up at the 1hr 8min marker in order to get a draft off a faster swimmer and before I know it I am next to start!

I get a good start and am at the first turn approx 150m out before turning right quite quickly. Here I spot an AWA athlete in a gold cap go past and figure he may be a good set of feet to draft off. I tuck in behind and am not disappointed. I keep an eye on his line and he is staying quite straight so I reduce my sighting frequency and focus on keeping up with him. I stay on his feet for circa 2k before I lose him as he powers through a group of 5/6. I don't mind though as I had decided to do my own thing leading into the final turn anyway.

As we approach the last turn where it narrows considerably I aim for the bridge pylon as planned and head straight for it. It looks like I am going well but when I get to the rope I notice everyone seems to be the other side of the rope to me!

I curse myself for getting the approach wrong and prepare to duck under the rope before the turn before I see everyone on the other side ducking under and coming back to my side! Amazingly I am the right side of the rope!

I turn around the last bouy and head for home. I'm out and in transition with my bag before I even glance at my watch which shows 1hr 11!!! I was hoping to get close to 1hr 12 so I am over the moon!

I take my time in transition putting on deep heat on my glute and having a number 1 before I gather my bike and set off.

Swim: 1:10:09

T1: 6:39 (what a ridiculous time! – I was obviously enjoying touching my ass and rubbing deep heat into it)

##### Bike:

It takes a min or 2 to get the garmin going and I pass my cheer squad just out of t1 which gives me a good boost. The first section of the bike through the city turns out to be technical but it's not long before I hit the open road and start overtaking the longest line of cyclists you can ever imagine. I ace my nutrition until I try to detach a pack of cliff blocks that I had taped to my top tube. In my attempt to make sure they didn't fall off I taped them way too tightly and can't get them off!! Luckily I have an emergency

banana in my back pocket which is a good substitute. After about 80k I hear a roar of support from behind me and turn just in time to see Claire Jones losing her shit. At some point I spot Donal and give him a shout. He hadn't seen me as he was concentrating on his beer. After 100k I finally hit some open road without too many cyclists around. This results in a slightly slower second half to the ride as I am no longer getting the benefit of a draft (which anyone who has done an Ironman knows is unavoidable at the start of the bike due to the sheer volume of cyclists). I also slow down a little as my average speed is higher than I expected so I worry the HR strap isn't working properly.

Before I know it I am back in the city going through the technical section and back to t2. I see my cheer squad at the entrance to t2 and give them a wave before disappearing down the ramp into t2 (located in an underground car park). A volunteer takes my bike and I again take my time repeating t1, putting on deep heat and having a number 1. I psyche myself up running out of t2 knowing that 1; I am ahead of schedule (although I am unsure of how much due to using a watch for the swim, a garmin edge for the bike and nothing for transitions) & 2; this is where it all went tits up last year.

Bike: 5:19:15

T2:6:46 (seriously? I must really enjoy touching my ass)

Run:

Soon out of t1 I hit an aid station and take a salt tab before getting up to speed. I meet the cheer squad soon after who have taken up a good spot where they will see me twice each lap and I nearly go deaf from the cheer I get! The 3d crew randomly rock up beside them shortly after so there is circa 10-15 supporters in the one spot – which is class when you are going by.

Everything goes to plan for the first half of the marathon and I spot some some fellow 3Der's – Sean, Dave, Morag & Sorcha and we encourage each other. Unfortunately I don't see the others. Each km ticks by at faster than 4hr pace apart from when I walk an aid station - which was planned. After about 22k my knee starts hurting out of nowhere. I used to have itb problems which impacted my knee but have been ok for 18-24months. If anything I was expecting glute problems but after touching myself a lot in T1 & T2 the glute is fine. I decide to keep running until the pain becomes too much, stop stretch, take a painkiller and try run again. I keep running for the next 4-5k with the pain varying with each step and my pace suffering as a result. These km are well over 4hr pace and I am starting to worry.

Slowly but surely though, the pain subsides all on its own. I have obviously subconsciously adjusted my stride/gait/foot landing to protect my knee. My pace improves and after I start taking coke at the aid stations I feel great! I power through the next few km and although I am walking more aid stations the pace is still well under 4hr pace. With about 2-3km to go I realise I am going to be close to 4hr and this just spurs me on even more and I average 5min per km to the end. I am buzzing and as I reach the red carpet I know it's close to 4hr so I don't stop to hug my parents or gf and power over the line praying I have broken 4hr.

As I cross the line I know I have broken 11hr but I am unsure of my time (I am thinking I have gone 10:50-10:55). The emotion hits me and it takes everything not to start balling crying. I take my medal and go through to the recovery tent heading straight for the recovery pool. After about 10-15min in the pool I get out and work up the courage to check my finishing time - 10:41:33

Run: 3:58:46

Post race:

I take my time in the athletes tent eating and relaxing before heading to t2 to pick up my gear and bike and drop it back to ship my tri who were very close to the finish. After that I find the parents and gf and thank them and we head for the hotel passing 3D tri club supporters corner where I hug and thank the support crew who are very "merry" at this stage!

Back at the hotel I shower and go to eat but the appetite isn't there. I eat as much as I can knowing it will do me good.

Review:

I knew I had it in me to go sub 11 and after last years debacle I felt I had a point to prove. Despite everyone congratulating me on my first Ironman last year, I was devastated with the result (despite being proud of finishing). It was very hard having to accept the congrats from friends and family when inside I was disappointed.

This year is different! I am especially happy to go under 4 for the run. Had I not had some knee pain midway through I think I would have gone sub 3:50 - once the pain passed I was never in trouble.

Had I had more confidence I think there may have been another 5-10min on the bike also, I was worried my avg pace was too high so I eased off a little despite my hr being lower than expected.

My swim however was perfect. If I swam that 20 times I wouldn't have gone faster.

Overall I am happy to have given a good account of myself and I am happy to retire from long distance after this.

Job done.