

Finally EARNED that piece of paper to KONA!!!

Ironman Arizona Part II 2008

By Dan Beaver

I have put off for several days now actually sitting down and putting fingers to keyboard. Not because I didn't want to, but because I wanted it to all set in. I wanted to convey all of the thoughts and feelings that I have experienced over the last week. So here it goes...

Sunday November 23rd

I awoke at 4:15am. Feeling very calm, with a great desire to just get out there and test myself. Unlike any other Ironman or Marathon that I have ever done before, I had an amazing feeling of comfort and silent confidence. I never felt like I had to double and triple check my equipment and bags of gear. It was just a really strange feeling to have. Normally I am so type "A" that I must pack and unpack, and then repack my bags several times. I ate my normal pre-race breakfast of oatmeal and bagel with honey on both. Then after putting on my oh so comfy TRISCOTTSDALE one piece race suit, and a few layers to keep warm, off Mary and I headed from our hotel 1/2 mile walk down Ash St. to Tempe Lake and the transition area.

Upon arriving at the transition area all went smoothly, air in the tires, water in the bottles of INFINIT, then just relax before putting the wetsuit on. I did try one new thing and that was to throw my running shoes on and do a 10 minute warm up jog just before heading to the water, thought this might help me in the start of the swim.

The Swim

The cannon fires and all 2000 plus of us are off, let the elbows and feet begin!! After about 10-15 minutes it started to thin out a bit and I could actually find my own water. Trying to take the straightest line to the 1st turn buoy, I felt good at the turn and just wanted to keep it straight all the way back. Maybe for the first time ever in an Ironman I found someone's feet that I could stay on for most off the way back. (I still need lots of practice at this). When I went under the last Mill Ave. bridge I heard my watch beep indicating 8:00am seeing that we started at almost 7:02 I know that I would be close to the time I was shooting for 1:04-1:05. I exited the water and my watch said 1:04, ok right where I need to be.



After a little problem getting my wetsuit over my size 14 feet I was up and running to T1, In and out pretty well, I saw my buddies Brian Folts, and Marc Rubin changing beside me and knew I had a good swim for me. Where is my Felt time to go hammer the Bee-Line for a while!!!

The Bike

Off onto the bike and feeling real good, I just wanted to stay steady to the turn around and fly back down the road back to town. As usual there was my old friend I had worried about not seeing today (the wind). Though it was very mild, you could still feel it in your face. My bike goal was to try and keep my average pace for the day always at or above 21mph. So when I hit the turn around at about 20.5 I was extremely happy, because I know I get to take the down hill into Tempe and up that overall average. After loop one my 21.5 average was stellar for me, now just keep it here the next two loops and you will be golden. Honestly, I just tried to stay focused out there and look for calves with 40-44 on them.



On my start of my 2nd loop I saw Marc Rubin and Billy Dean Johnson in the penalty tent, and could tell Marc wasn't happy if you know what I mean. Just as I passed them Marc comes past me still pissed off and hammer the bike like a mad man, so I decided to see how long I could stay close to him knowing that Marc is a much stronger biker than I am. I thought it might help me up my average pace if I could hold onto him as long as possible. Of course Marc and Dean were trying to be very careful at this point and trying to stay clear of other riders so this made for a challenge as a big group of about 10-15 guys riding in a pack came by us. Marc and I are trying to stay honest and they are just cheating their asses off! It made for a nervous 2nd loop as the ref. was right next to us the entire way out the Bee-Line waiting to give out a card, and he gave out plenty, but we killed ourselves to stay out of trouble. At the 2nd turn around Marc and I were off the front and pushing it, finally Marc dropped me and I was on my own. No problem still way ahead of where I need to be. Off to the 3rd loop, still feeling great and my average is at 21.5.

Then like a light switch going on I realized that I had probably just biked too hard for my abilities and would end up being sorry on the run. So at the 84 mile mark I had to decide if I should back it off some to save for the run or just go with it, and try to get as much time as possible on the bike. I went with the later figuring that at this point the damage was probably already done and I might as well just hammer the last 25 miles and survive the run. Most of this last loop was back and forth with another of our boys Brian Henry. He was doing his first Ironman and was having a really solid race. I kept trying to encourage him each time I saw him!! The 3rd loop was my best and I came in with a 21.9 mph average heading to T2. Brian and I came in together off the bike and now it was time to see what I was made of!

The Run

I came out of T2 and the clock read 6:28:00 and I was like "What"? That can't be right, where did I lose ten minutes? I had a great T2!!! By the time I reached 1/2 mile of the run I realized that the time was the pro time and I was actually out of T2 at 6:18:00! Ok, just take it easy and run a conservative 26.2 miles and you are going to have the day you have dreamed of. (Sub 10 hours and a Kona slot). My Ironman math told me that if I just ran the pace I trained for (7:30 pace/ 3:16 marathon) I would be somewhere in the 9:30's. I repeated to add and subtract this equation for about 4 miles because I couldn't believe it, and because my Ironman math has been off before and has cost me on the run several times.



As I passed mile one I also passed Marc, and told him to just keep it focused and steady. Before I knew it I was at mile 4 and realized I needed to slow down badly. I had gone out running a 6:30 pace and only needed to go 7:30's. The next eight miles were great! I passed a lot of pros (male and female and just kept it solid at 7:30's. I went through the Phoenix Tri Club aide station at the marina where my biggest supporters were hanging out. My BEST half Mary Knott was as crazy nervous as I have ever seen her, taking the microphone and screaming my name as I ran through the station. Everyone working the aid station was so great, screaming for me and encouraging me with all their energy. Thanks guys!!! A special shout out to my 10 year old little girl Megan, and Hillary Biscay who were yelling for me as I came through, when Hillary yells something at you, it is a good idea to listen. Who is stronger than her when it comes to Ironman racing?

So onto my next eight miles and they were not pretty. Just after I passed the transition area at mile 12 things started to come unraveled. I was losing energy, my stomach was starting to hate me and I was starting to panic!!! No, not again. I kept trying to figure out how to fix things. I tried some more PowerGel, No way!! Then I went to cola, Nope!!! I walked a minute. Shit, don't do this! Start running!!! I did everything and anything possible for those eight miles.

Finally at the 20 mile mark I said "THAT IS IT! You are going to run through whatever happens until you cross that finish line. Remember how bad it sucked in April when you didn't get to Kona because of 11 seconds? Remember watching Hillary Biscay come back from done and win her first Ironman in Wisconsin?" She should have been dropped but somehow dug deep and went to that place that few of us ever visit, that place where the suffering is so bad that you just kinda leave your body and get through it. "Remember all those days running when it was 115 degrees!!!" So I went to that place, so focused that I couldn't talk out loud when I tried a couple of times. I could see everything and nothing at all. It was as if I was watching this all happen 2nd hand.

When I hit that Curry Hill for the third time and the people were laying on the ground, and walking, and I was the only one running, my legs were screaming at me, but I promised no matter how slow it was, I must keep running, just get to the top and it is home free and down hill. Through the PTC water station again, up onto the Rural Rd. Bridge and back down onto the dirt trail. Mile 25, this is where I got pushed out of my slot in April. Do not let up, matter of fact, pick it up damn it, pass everyone you can from here to the line. I passed one, and then another guy with a 40 and 41 on their calves. OK, there is the Mill Ave. Bridge, you are almost there, keep pushing to the line. Just then I see someone ahead of me make the final turn at the 26 mile mark into the parking lot. Shit! Does he have a 40 on his calf? I can't tell, damn it. This is where you got dropped and beat by 11 seconds in April. You have to pass him with all you have. Do not let him have a chance to stay with you. Go with all you have in you.

Just as I get to him I see a 41 on his right calf, and I go by with all my might. As I pass he shouts out "That's right, run it on in...", but before he finishes his sentence he sees the age on my calf and attempts to go with me. No way! Not this time! Do not let him pass you! I can hear him breathing soooo hard on my neck, but I am not giving in, just push a little longer and he must break before you. We make the final turn onto Rio Salado with 50 yards to go. All of a sudden I notice that his breath on my neck is gone. I figure I have to look over my shoulder, because if I have to go to black out for this finish I will, but he is dropped!! Yes!

I look at the clock for the first time and realize I have beaten him and it is 9:53ish. I have broken 10 hours and given myself every chance possible for that Kona slot!!! As I cross the line, I am totally freakin done, finished, cooked and spent. I am non-verbal and am put into a wheelchair (not my first time for this). Mary is there to take care of me and get me through the first hour after I finish where I can do nothing but lay on the ground in a fetal position.

The Wait

I had given everything I had and then some and now all I can do is sit a wait to see where I finished and how many slots there are. Sometime that first hour someone texted Mary and said that I was 11th. We knew this would be very, very close, but didn't think I would know until Monday morning for sure.

After a very slow walk to the hotel to shower, and cry a little, we headed back to the finish line to see everyone else suffer!!! HA!! Sitting in the VIP tent with some friends someone says that the slots for the 40-44 age group ended up going 11 deep! What? How do you know this? Is this information for sure???



I hobble over to the registration area and there it is, the slot allocation, in bold black. "Age 40-44 (11 slots)". I am in!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! I grab Paul Huddle as he is walking by, and make him translate for me. Does this say what I think it says? He confirms it for me and after a big hug I call Mary who was back working at the aid station. No answer, Damn! I call my buddy Jason to see if he is there with her. No, he is headed back home. I try Mary again and when she finally answers I give her the news!!! Mary puts me on hold, grabs the microphone one last time and announces to all our friends at the aid station that I have qualified!!! Wow!!! What a day.

I want to thank everyone out there screaming and cheering for me all day, all of the little words helped. Also every volunteer on the course was fantastic. We couldn't do it without you. Thanks to Hillary Biscay for helping me find that other place. Big thanks to TRISCOTTSDALE, INFINIT NUTRITION, FELT BIKES, FOCUS CYCLERY, FIRST ENDURANCE, PHOENIX TRI CLUB, RUNAZ, all in no particular order!!!

Most importantly my little girl Megan, and Mary Knott for believing in me, loving me, pushing me to be all I can be, and for being there to support my crazyness. I love you girls!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Cheers, and I will see you in KONA!
Beaver