

Joe Zemaitis: Hawaii Ironman 2005

Ironman Hawaii 2005 is in the books. Even though this was my fourth time at this race, it just never gets old. The electricity of the atmosphere surrounding the entire event is incredible. Over 40,000 people attempt to qualify for this race at the 27 Ironman races around the world and the opportunity to test myself against the best is what keeps me coming back.

The swim got my race off to a good start. It was a very intense swim, I was in a group of about 30 athletes and we stayed in close proximity throughout the 2-4 miles. It was "full-contact swimming" as the group never quite thinned out and I've got the bruises to show for it! I came out of the water with the 20th fastest swim time, out of nearly 1,800 athletes. The swim course was slightly different than in years past. The swim finish was changed to make the course more spectator friendly. Though my time was about two minutes slower than my best, my place was consistent with my swim performances over the years. The swim seemed slower for everyone this year as nobody came within three minutes of the course record.

The winds weren't as bad on the bike as they have been in years past, but there is never an "easy" day in the lava fields. The most challenging part of the bike was the hill section near the turn around where the wind picked up and made for a grueling climb and a technical descent, coming down back toward sea level with some serious cross winds. I had an excellent first 40 miles of the bike, but as the fight with the wind turned more serious I couldn't hold onto the initial pace I set.

The run was hot! Without a cloud in the sky or a breath of wind we just cooked over the last several hours of the race. I held steady throughout the run and finally started to pass a bunch of the pros as we got closer to the finish line.

I finished 62nd in the pro field, out of a field of 86 athletes, so not quite as well as I had hoped, but a strong enough pro debut. With one of the slower qualifying times in the field, I moved up considerably from where my qualifying time would have put me. Out of the 13 Americans in the field I finished 7th, so six of them beat me and I beat six of them. I went solidly under ten hours for the first time in my last three Ironman races. Even though it wasn't the breakout race I was hoping for this year in Hawaii it was far from my worst and an exciting way to end the 2005 racing season.

I wasn't alone in having a good day. Eric and Sharon, two athletes who swim in my masters group in Phoenix, were spectacular. They both had their fastest Ironman ever and, though they don't officially track such statistics, I believe Sharon had the biggest improvement over any qualifying time in the field with Eric only a minute or so behind.

The way the race unfolded gave me some good ideas on what I need to do over the next several months to get stronger and faster for next year. Although I haven't gone as far as to pick my races for this coming year, I'm interested in a race in Pucon, Chile in January and then possibly again at Ironman South Africa in March. Thanks for your interest and the many words of encouragement during the race.

Until the next time,
Joe