

Hawaii Ironman Pre-Race 2005

Joe Zemaitis

I'm back on the Big Island for my fourth attempt at the Ironman Triathlon World Championship in Hawaii and everything is looking very familiar. It's been fun the last several days to go over the historic course and run into many people I've met from different races and different countries as the triathlon world converges on Kailua-Kona for the big event.

This race is really reminding me of my first Ironman back in 1998. That year I was 18 and the youngest in the field by three years. This year, seven years later, I'm the second-youngest in the professional field, which is 84 athletes strong. Only 16 of the 84 pros are in the 20's, proving that the Hawaii Ironman is an "old man's game" :-)

I qualified back in February at the Ironman Langkawi Malaysia Triathlon and this has been the event I've been training for all year. Already the trip is going remarkably better than World Championships in Denmark since my bicycle made the trip this time and everything appears to be in fine working order. So far the best part is the swim training. After years of swimming in boring pools I still can't get used to how nice the water is in Hawaii. It's probably 80 degrees and crystal clear with very interesting scenery along the sea floor.

Last night was the annual Parade of Nations, which seemed to have a higher turnout and livelier atmosphere than in previous years. I'm getting ready to get in the car and drive over the 112 mile bike course. The route is the same as last year, it just never hurts to see it again! Tomorrow is the professional race briefing and the welcome party. Friday is the calm day before and the race is Saturday, October 15th. The pro race starts at 6:45 with the rest of the field launching at 7:00. The race can be followed live on the internet at www.ironmanlive.com. My race number is 48.

That's all for now...more as the race gets closer.

Joe

The clocks ticks down closer to race day. These last few days the energy radiating in town is incredible, I'm trying to stay out of the sun and off my feet as much as possible to save it up for Saturday.

Today started pretty lightheartedly with the annual Underpants run through the streets of Kona. Underpants run participants, about 250 strong, ran about a mile through the streets of Kona clad only in underwear as a protest of sorts against some competitors who apparently believe a tight speedo and sandals appropriate attire to wear as they do their grocery shopping.

The other major event today was the professional athlete briefing, where the race management went over last minute reminders about the course and race rules for Saturday. It was a little surreal when they got to the part about "this is your moment. We've assembled the sports best athletes for triathlons' biggest race and hope you'll put on a good show for the world." The course is very similar to years past, 2.4 miles in the warm calm Kailua Bay, 112 miles through the unforgiving Lava fields of the big island where the reflected heat can reach over 100 degrees and a headwind in both directions is not uncommon, and a 26.2 mile marathon run with little shade from the unrelenting tropical sun.

I'm having a lot of fun running into people I've met at races around the world as well as some of the local Phoenix athletes in contention. Two of the top masters swimmers I coach also qualified for the big event and I've seen them several times during the week. Eric is making his first Ironman Hawaii appearance and seems poised to move up considerably from his qualifying time. Sharon comes in as one of the favorites in her age group as she posted the fastest amateur time at her qualifying race and would have finished third among the professional women. Lars, who I met in Malaysia in 2003, looks incredibly fit and should make waves in the 25-29 age group.

Tomorrow looks to be a pretty calm day as the final race preparations are made. I made it here healthy and injury free, my bike made the trip this time, and I'm feeling ready for a great race. I feel extremely fortunate to be here in my first professional season and I look forward to Saturday as another great challenge.

Joe