

## Hillary Biscay and Mortality - Editorial by Tom Demerly



She thought she could make it. Maybe if she walked. Anyone can walk. Just put one foot in front of the other.

That's what she thought. Don't give up, just keep moving. Push through it.

But this was not the pain of exertion or fatigue. A crack had started in her bone- pelvis to be exact. Her hip was broken. The crack began to come apart and slowly, minutely it moved. The nerves surrounding it sent an immediate message to her brain: Stop now.

The result was the primordial scream of agony that explodes inside your brain, that you can't ignore, when something is really, really wrong. Something structural. This was serious.

Hillary had a broken hip, and she was in the marathon at Ironman New Zealand.

Hillary Biscay is an elite Ironman athlete. She races in the 25-29 age category and just turned professional for Quintana Roo/Timex. This would probably be her last Ironman as an age grouper.

Out of the water she won her age category easily in a blistering 52:11. She surfaced next to German men's professional sensation Norman Stadler, who Hillary had a schoolgirl crush on. The fact that Hillary matched a top professional man, the guy who got third at Ironman Hawaii in 2003, is impressive. No, it's incredible. Biscay is fast.

Hillary had a good bike ride but not great. She didn't feel quite right. Something felt funny in her hip. It ached. It had been for some time. She had what she called a mediocre race in Kona in 2003, going 11:01:57. In Kona, that is a time to be proud of. But Biscay came home wanting to go faster. So, she did the only thing you can do when you are an Ironman athlete and you want to go faster: She entered another race. This time it was Ironman New Zealand, and it was today.

Hillary is a good enough athlete to sense something was really, really wrong. She knew this was not normal. Her father is a physician and she knows a thing or two about medicine herself. She could tell this just wasn't right.

But Hillary Biscay did not get to where she is by giving up when things hurt. This woman is machined from hardened steel, and you can see it in her face, hear it in her voice. She is tough on a genetic level. An elite college swimmer, veteran Ironman. She is a badass.

So Biscay kept on moving. Even though her hip was broken she kept moving. Now, let's talk about two things here:

First- there are broken hips, and then there are broken hips. X-rays at the hospital in New Zealand revealed that Hillary Biscay's hip was broken bad. Not just a little nagging stress fracture, but a full-blown, show up bigtime on the X-ray crack that even you or I could spot on the film. It was the type of injury you sustain from an auto racing accident, a parachuting accident or other life-threatening trauma. In short, she was fuct. The crack was big.

Secondly, I want you to think about an injury like a broken hip. Your hip is one of the bigger bones in your body, and it is right in the middle of your body. So when it goes, it goes in a big way. And you feel it to your very core. A structural and excruciating kind of pain that causes you to instantaneously abandon any athletic ambitions and fear for your very life because you think you are breaking in half at the spine. Picture that for a minute: You're driving through an intersection, a car runs the red light and broadsides you at full speed. Your door buckles and pins you against the passenger door, breaking your hip.

Now, get out of your car and run a marathon.

And that is what Hillary Biscay was doing. And she wasn't giving up.

Hillary kept moving, limping prominently now. It was the drunken stumble of someone intoxicated by pain. The crowd saw it, and they went quiet. She had five miles to go.

Biscay eventually went to her knees. But she did not stop. She crawled. Two miles.

Do you know how long it takes to crawl two miles? Hillary Biscay does. The crowd went nuts. It was an incredible spectacle. The spectacle of determination and suffering. The pornographic, voyeuristic beauty and horror of seeing someone unswervingly follow their ambition- no matter the cost. That was Hillary in New Zealand.

Eventually Hillary Biscay caused such a stir by crawling along the run course at Ironman that an official stopped to see what was going on. The official told her that crawling was not allowed and she would be disqualified and removed from the course in an ambulance, delivered to the hospital where she belonged.

The crowd shouted down the official. They yelled threats and insults at the official. Hillary Biscay had stopped for a moment under orders from the official and was sitting there. She told the official she would continue. She argued that crawling was allowed (it is) and that she would continue any way she saw fit.

And she did.

The official played his final card. He told her that an official can remove any athlete from the event for medical reasons at their discretion, and that their decision is final (it is).

She kept moving.

Finally, and somewhat tragically, an ambulance arrived and Biscay was forced to get into it.

And that is where Hillary Biscay's day ended.

I already told you about the X-rays. The crack in her hip was big. When she was ejected from the race and placed in an ambulance under protest she had a little over three mile to go. And she wasn't about to give up.

Now I'll be the first to tell you, I would have bagged it. The reason I am alive today is because I know how to pick my battles. And I know a battle that I either cannot win, or is too costly to win. So if I had been on Hillary's hip I would have climbed in the ambulance after the bike and asked for my blankie.

That is why they have the race every year, so if one year you blow it (or it blows you) you can fill out that damn form and just come back and do it all over again.

Hillary knew that. But she was made of something just a bit different that you or I.

I looked for something in Hillary that would explain this. She was quite a pleasant person, good conversationalist, good sense of humor, had a normal relationship with her boyfriend and was very well adjusted. She seemed utterly normal. No history of failed relationships, no unfulfilled longing or low self esteem issues that drive so many people to stupid ambitions in an attempt to "prove something". She didn't have any of that. She was just a tough athlete from California. A badass. And this is what she did. So she tried to do it.

I wish I were more like Hillary Biscay. I wish I was that tough, but I know I'm not. The words "give up" are not in her vocabulary.

Now, you can say what you want about this whole thing. And I hear you- it is pretty stupid to crawl two miles on a broken hip in Ironman when you could just bag it and come back next year.

I asked Hillary about that the next morning at breakfast, "Girl, why didn't you just bag it and decide to come back next year?"

"Because" She said as she leaned her crutches against the side of the table and propped her leg up on another restaurant chair, "You never know if there will be a next year..."