

## “LUCKY'S” ROAD TO KONA - 2008

By Brian Kochert

### PRE RACE WEEK

The Ironman vibe started early as every other person on our flight was wearing compression socks and/or some type of Ironman clothing that came from some race around the world. The flight that was to be six hours turned out to be 13. Than is another story. In other words, no work out on Tuesday ... we will start with a swim Wednesday morning.

### Wednesday October 8

I got my first view of the swim start. NICE! Water was a little cooler then I was expecting but clear for miles. Fish and coral were everywhere. I did a nice little warm up out to the Kona Coffee catamaran for a little cup of java, grabbed some swim caps and swam back. After the swim it was time for packet pick up. The individual service you received was outstanding. With a one-on-one sit down, we went through all the paper work, packets and questions I had. After a short trip to Ironman City, Tina and I headed out to go home.



My new biking partner, Norman Stadler

As we walked across Alii Drive to our car, I came across Normann Stadler who was sitting on his bike, by himself with a big German smile across his face. He was riding by and heard Chris McCormick talking on the other side of Ironman City and thought he would hang out and listen to his “friend” to see what words he was spitting out this time. I asked him if I could take a picture with him while he got inspired. He didn’t say a word but nodded, still with that big smile. I spent the rest of the afternoon setting up my bike and getting my race gear together.

### Thursday October 9

Thursday morning brought the famous Underwear run, being led by Huddle and Roch. This is a tongue and cheek event to pokes fun at those athletes who do not know where to draw the line on the use of Speedos around town. After a brief (pun included) oath, over a hundred runners hit the street in a mile or so jog. All money collected went to local charities. After the run I did a brief interview with Ironman for a future broadcast. Not sure where, when or if but that was fun to do.



Ready to run with my PTC sticker

The afternoon brought a preview of the bike course. With Tina, her sister Tiffany and her husband Shawn (PTC member) we drove the course. 10 miles from Hawi, the turnaround on the bike, they dropped me off and I rode the last ten miles up hill and down from Hawi. My first taste of the famous winds of Hawaii. The wind was strong. My only concern is that they were expecting stronger winds on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Great! Love to here that news. Late afternoon I did my first little run up and down Alii drive, which was right in front of the house we rented for the week. All week, Alii drive had been full of athletes running and biking and this day was no different. It seemed normal to see Peter Ried, Norman Stadler, Wellington, Macca and other pros working out throughout the day down this street.

Thursday night was the welcome banquet at the King Kamehamehas Hotel. At this event they introduced some of the original Ironman racers from 30 years ago, plus showed clips and pictures from the past 30 races and fire & hula dancers entertained us. We had our race meeting following this event. Same old stuff.

### **Friday October 10**

Friday brought another swim to the Kona Coffee Catamaran. After that, I went back home to get gear in the right bags and numbers put in the right spots. The afternoon was bike check in. Now the buzz of the race is really starting to increase at rapid speed. As you walk your bike back to transition, there are ten people sitting in chairs holding clipboards and taking count of all the brands....bikes, aeros, components, wheels, and anything else that would help in claiming that their products ruled Kona. Once I entered the transition area, I was assigned someone to take my bike and carry my gear bags and show me through transition. The attention the athletes received was a very nice touch and made the, sometimes, nervous energy at this time go away. Now it was time to get my feet up and rest. I had been dealing with some leg and back pains for the past three weeks and my plan during the week was to do very, very little working out and rest as much as possible to give me the best chance of a great day. It was hard to do, but I did it and it helped.

### **RACE DAY**

#### **Saturday October 11**

I woke up at 3am for some breakfast (banana, half a P & J sandwich, chocolate chip pancakes (one in shape of the M dot (thanks Tiffany) and water) and stretching. I was feeling very relaxed and rested. As I headed out of my room, I was greeted with pictures and posters of motivating words throughout the house, which was done by all the family members and friends that stayed at the house. Nice touch! Walking down to race start was very cool and exciting. I am in Kona and I am going to do this race TODAY! The fact that I have known this for now six months didn't seem to help.



After placing my bottles at my bike, pumping my tires, it was off to body marking. I had heard the nightmares of a 30minute wait for body markings but this was not the case today. As I was walking out of marking, I ran into an old home stay of mine, Desiree Ficker and got some last minute advice to stay on top of my fluids. The rest of pre-race was hanging with Tina behind the entrance to the swim start. Half hour to go and you see the helicopters circling and one huge military plane flying low and dropping three Navy Seals who parachute, change and join the race. I get a phone call from Joel, who along with "Supa", Sellinger, Alan, Jory and a few others who had just finished a ride and decided to check in on speaker phone. Knowing that you have a bunch of your buddies, family and friends all tuned in to see this race gives you a feeling of strength. Sometimes during a race when things get rough and you need some mental pick me up, you think of all the people who wished you luck and gave you support and most of the time it will carry you through the tough times. I gave my goodbye hug and got my last minute positive words from Tina and I was off.

I walked down to the beach, squeezed my way to the front and hung out in waist level water. This is where it all starts. The feelings of Ironman. The feelings of what is about to happen fill every part of me. Words of those who have done it before have told me to smile, have fun and soak it all in. And that is what I did. I stood there and looked around the ocean wall and saw all those people. As far as you can see, the coastline was packed with spectators, all the banners, the NBC helicopters and the fleet of about 30 long-board surfers lining the swim start and course. It went on forever. At this time the National Anthem started. I was overcome with emotion that I could not hold back. I could not stop looking around and smiling. SOAK IT IN BRIAN!

All of sudden I get a big bear hug and it turns out to be a former Pro Triathlete Alain Vervoort from Belgium. Tina and I were his home stay for Arizona Ironman in 2007 and we have remained friends ever since. It was really good to see him. He saw the look on my face and knew what I was feeling. We stood silent for a few moments then it was time to TRI ALL DAY!

## Swim

The swim has been and will be the easiest part of the day. Not to say it's easy...just that it's easier than biking and running for me. Dennis Freeman told me over and over that I would enjoy this swim more than any other I have ever done. I decided to start in the middle, roughly 15-20 yards from the front. While treading water waiting for the start, I would go underwater and look at all the other athletes floating around. I had seen the view before in pictures of years before. SOAK IT IN!



Looks like I'm first

I was feeling very calm, as this day is not about racing hard. It's not about racing others around me. It is about me, coming to swim, ride and run a legend of a course. To do my best at the moment and also enjoy this day as it is given to me. I found a little clearing in the water and hoped it would last for a bit when the cannon goes off. It went off and it lasted for roughly 20 seconds. There were moments when we were on top of each other like salmon swimming up stream and other times where it was wide open.

During the swim I got hit three times in the eye, the last time knocked water into my goggles. I also took some shots across my legs and shoulders, but made sure to send out some warning shots to let others know that I will not go down easy. I found the sighting to be a little tougher going out as you could not see the red buoys as good as seeing buildings on the way back in. The water was a little choppy and this added to the sighting problems. For the most part, I stayed in a nice easy stroke and never felt like I was out of my wanted pace. Other than getting hit several times, I was smiling. I was SOAKING IT IN between seeing all the fish, coral and scuba divers filming. It went very well. My swim time was a little slower than my past Ironman swims but considering I was not wearing a wetsuit, I was happy. Swim time: 1:07:43

## T1

Well the time of 10:12 would lead people to believe that I actually set up a campsite, roasted marshmallows and told ghost stories. Well that didn't happen. I am not sure why it took that long. I had changed into bike shorts, jersey, and had a bathroom break and sunscreen applied. One funny thing was as I came flying out of the tent, there was a NBC cameraman running along with me. I didn't know that as I almost took him down as I came to a sudden stop to get sunscreen lathered on. All I know is when I got to my bike, I had lost my salt tabs, which were in the back of my jersey and were now gone. OPSS! I will not see any salt tablets until the turn around at mile 62. Time in T1 10:12

## **Bike**

The bike took off like it had a rocket to it. I felt great!! At mile 25 or so I thought to myself...this is no problem. At mile 25.5, I thought to myself, HOLY \*\*\*\* THIS WIND! Those 25 miles will be the only time I did not feel the wind. The crosswinds were the toughest I have ever been in. Add in the endless amount of rollers on the road and the heat of the lava fields, and it all mixes up to be a very slow and long day. Most of the time on the bike I was watching the other athletes in front of me and seeing them go from straight up and down to being blown over across the road at a 45 degree angle. When I saw this, I knew I was next and would just hold on.



At mile 40ish you start the climb to Hawi with the same crosswinds sprinkled with headwinds. Brutal! It was later reported that the winds were the strongest they have been in 10 years, 45 mph and constant. Although my time at the 60-mile marked looked good, my back did not. I was having some pretty good back pains that was forced me to only spend half the time down on my aero-bars, which is where I should have been most of the ride.

Shortly after the turn around was the special needs bags. Ahhh, give me my enduralyte tabs, my new bottle of Infinite nutrition and some fig Newton's and I am good to go. The next four miles or so were great. Views of the Pacific Ocean, the wind at my back and Fig Newton's in my stomach. The 5th mile coming back started everything over again, this time for the next 45 miles home. There were moments when I would feel great and others times I was just doing anything to keep moving. You finish one hill against the wind and there would be another hill with a crosswind. Overall the heat was not a BIG issue (reported 108 degrees in the lava fields) until the last several miles when I cramped so bad in my left quad that I had to stop. While screaming some not so nice words out loud I sprayed some cold water on it and within a few minutes I was back riding and arriving with spectators everywhere. Again heading into transition I just soaked it up. T2 here I come. Bike time 6:30:42

## **T2**

It was very nice to get my butt off that saddle. When you enter transition, someone takes your bike and you must run around the whole field of bikes before you get to your run bags, which you have filled with shoes, hat, pills, gels and anything else you think you might need to get you through the run portion of the race. During this time in the changing tent, a volunteer will dump the contents of your bag in front of you. You pick though what you need and then he will pick up the rest, along with your bike gear, re-bag it and take it to a pile of other bags around the corner.

After a brief bathroom stop and finding someone to rub some sports cream on my back, I realized that the volunteer who was helping me earlier accidentally picked up my small bottle of enduralytes. I could manage for half the bike not having them, but not the run. I ran to the area where they were taking them and saw a big pile of red bags. There must have been well over a 700 in that area alone. Three volunteers and I searched the top of the piles and after a minute or two, we found it and my enduralytes pills. All was good.

## **Run**

Running out of transition has always been a good feeling. You run out of transition through the chute of banners. On both sides the crowd is cheering and for a little while you tend to forget all the pains you might be feeling. This was no different. The one thing about the start of this run is that you pass the backside of the finish line. You see the cameras and you hear the announcer



calling names off as people are finishing. A little defeating, yes, but I just announced that I would be back in a few hours to deal with you.

At mile one, I saw Tina. There she was at the bottom of the hill. The one person that I was waiting to see more than ever was standing just off the street with the proudest smile I have every seen. Oh, and I still had 25 more miles to go, but my eyes were already tearing up. After a brief hug and high fives to my family I was on my way for an eight mile out and back. I was feeling really good. The eight-mile round trip was not flat but I could handle it. I rotated my intakes at the aid stations between gels, water, Gatorade and electrolytes. I would always pour water on my arms and head and put ice down my back and pants to keep the core temperature down. As I ran, I would hold a cup of ice to suck on. This would also be the only place for shade, what little there was on the whole course.

My pace was right on time even with the walking through the aid stations. My plan was to keep this pace, while taking in calories and holding off any stress in the stomach. Things were going very nice and soon I was back at the corner where Tina and my family were. One last hug and another round of high fives and I was on my way out to the Queen K highway to do the last 16 miles of the race. This will be hardest part of the run as there is no one out there other than the other runners and aid stations. My plan was to run to each aid station and walk through, gathering all the fluids and food my body can take. Well, I did a lousily job at this part. My stomach could only take in so much and I knew it. I was starting to fatigue ever so slowly and was forced to slow down my pace.

As I entered the road to the Energy Lab, I was given a perfect view of one great Hawaii sunset. The Energy Lab is 1.5 miles downhill. If there is any part of the run that people do not look forward to, it is the trip down and OUT of the LAB. There is really no energy to it. It sucks it out of you. Leaving the turnaround on the run at the Energy Lab left me with roughly eight long miles in the dark. I grabbed a couple glow sticks and it was a slow run out of this hole. These eight miles took, what seemed like, a very long time. It was very, very dark out on the road with nothing but the stars in the sky, floating glow sticks on the road and media vehicles driving by were filming. I spent this time reflecting on my Mom and all the kind words of wisdom and motivation that people gave me that I held onto for this exact moment. I knew this time would come and that I would have to dig deep to keep moving.

At this time my legs were very fatigued and I had to pick and choose when I was going to run and for how long. It was a battle between the mental and the physical. Finally I was within two miles of the finish. A long downhill on Palani Road to a left turn. A half-mile to a right turn, A little downhill to Alii Drive and one last right turn. Then it is a quarter mile through the streets of Kona. I heard the crowd, I saw the lights and everyone one is screaming "great job you are a Ironman"!

People were hanging from the balconies of bars and screaming. All this was going on as my feet just keep on moving. I saw my sis in-law right in front of me screaming "You did it!" I saw my sister, Dad, his wife, my in-law and my buddy from California. I saw the lights, the cameras. It's just me. I saw the finishing chute with the crowds on both sides cheering. I heard the familiar voice of Mike Riley saying ' Brian Kochert from Tempe Arizona YOU ARE AN IRONMAN'! I crossed the finish line with a smile for a job well done and I felt very proud of what I had done.

Just less than 13 hours earlier, I was standing on the beach 30 feet away, holding back tears, smiling and SOAKING IT IN to cross the finish line at the World Championship of Ironman holding back tears, smiling and SOAKING IT IN. Oh yeah that feeling will last for a long time. It felt great..... Now where is that MED TENT...I feel lightheaded!!! FYI..... The lottery is open for 2009. GO SOAK IT UP!!

Marathon time 4:59:33

Total Ironman time 12:57:37

## POST RACE

As I crossed the finish line, Tina was waiting just steps behind the camera and was there to give me the biggest hug. As it seems a habit of mine, I went to the medical tent because I was pretty lightheaded and dizzy. After 20 minutes lying down and checking my vitals and weighing me (lost 10lbs) they decided to give me an IV. One thing I have learned is never turn down an IV if you can get one. I recovered quickly, had some pizza and enjoyed the company of Tif, Shawn, Scott and Tina for a few minutes. The next day was painless and happy. The next week was spent in Hawaii soaking up the sun, surf and reliving my Ironman day.



## RELATED TO PTC

#1 I had a runner, who in the complete dark, ran up on me and yelled, "Is that a Phoenix Triathlon club jersey? God I love Sweet Tomatoes!" That's all he said as he disappeared into the dark.

#2 I was in a store half way around the island when Tina and I stumbled on a family from Canada and the father was wearing the Desert Classic race shirt from this year's race. They will be there again in 2009.

## ONE LAST STORY

**Never underestimate the power of being kind and open to others.**

As we were walking down Alii Dr heading home after the race, we came across a family from Canada. They had two kids with them. One was in a wheelchair and was handicapped and challenged. The other was roughly 16 years old, 6-5 in height and had a mental and physical disability. The mother said that her son wanted to meet an Ironman and asked if I would mind talking to him.

His mom introduced me as a "Real Life Ironman" and you should have seen that kids face. He had this big smile and kept repeating to his mom that he was shaking hands with a real life Ironman. He said he wants to be an Ironman one-day. As he tells me this, Tina hands me the flower lei that I got at the finish. I put the lei around his head and said to him "your half way there". Everyone there started to get a little teary eyed except for the young man who smile just got bigger and bigger and told his mom, "I am half way there!" The littlest things can feel like the world to others, and that moment made my night.

Thanks to all of you that helped me mentally and physically train for this day. It was a big help in achieving one of my dreams. I was very lucky to have your support. I hope one day to help you in the same way.

Brian "Lucky" Kochert

**BY THE NUMBERS****Brian Kochert****IronMan Hawaii 2008**

<b>SEGMENT</b>	<b>SPLIT MILES</b>	<b>SPLIT TIME</b>	<b>PACE</b>	<b>TOTAL TIME</b>	<b>RANK OVERALL</b>	<b>RANK DIVISION</b>
<b>Swim</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>1:07:43</b>	<b>1:46 / 100 meters</b>	<b>1:07:43</b>	<b>879 of 1736</b>	<b>92 of 230</b>
<b>Transition 1</b>		<b>0:10:12</b>		<b>1:17:55</b>		
1st Bike Split	5.5	0:16:48	19.64 mph	1:34:43		
2nd Bike Split	22.5	1:09:18	19.48 mph	2:44:01		
3rd Bike Split	31.0	1:51:58	16.61 mph	4:35:59		
4th Bike Split	29.0	1:46:54	16.28 mph	6:22:53		
5th Bike Split	24.0	1:25:44	16.80 mph	7:48:37		
<b>Total Bike</b>	<b>112.0</b>	<b>6:30:42</b>	<b>17.20 mph</b>	<b>7:48:37</b>	<b>1247 of 1736</b>	<b>192 of 230</b>
<b>Transition 2</b>		<b>0:09:27</b>		<b>7:58:04</b>		
1st Run Split	5.2	0:49:03	9:25 / Mile	8:47:07		
2nd Run Split	5.1	0:51:59	10:11 / Mile	9:39:06		
3rd Run Split	7.3	1:36:45	13:15 / Mile	11:15:51		
4th Run Split	8.6	1:41:46	11:50 / Mile	12:57:37		
<b>Total Run</b>	<b>26.2</b>	<b>4:59:33</b>	<b>11:25 / Mile</b>	<b>12:57:27</b>	<b>1376 of 1736</b>	<b>196 of 230</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>				<b>12:57:27</b>	<b>1303 of 1736</b>	<b>188 of 227</b>