

My 21st Ironman

Sue Shafer

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It was Saturday night before my 21st Ironman, the fourth Ironman to take place in Arizona. I was excited and I was playing through my head my races plans for the next day. This race was very special to me as it was my 21st Ironman but it would be the first one that I was a volunteer. I was excited but not quite as nervous as the athletes participating. I was wondering how hot and how windy it would be the next day and I was also trying to figure out how to put a Toga on since this was the theme of our aid station

I got up at 4 AM on race day. I promised Amy Engel, a PTC member competing in the Ironman that I would pick her up at 5 AM. I wanted to make it a stress free trip to the race. Amy lives about four miles from me. Luckily I turned my cell phone on about 4:56 AM as right at 5 AM it rang and it was Amy. "Amy", I said, "I am only half mile away. I will be there in a minute." When I pulled in the driveway she ran out to greet me. I went into her house to help her carry the four bags she had packed with nutrition, clothes and of course her cell phone. She tried to take a picture of me in front of her refrigerator with her digital but it was not working. She wanted to capture the start of her race day.

We finally were on the road at 5:20 AM. I dropped Amy off at Rio Salado and Ash and then went and parked at my regular parking spot. I walked over to the transition area and could feel the excitement and everyone seemed to be focusing on their race. So I decided to get out of their way and head to the waters edge. I was nervous now since I was being picked up at the boat dock and my friends were not in site. But a quick phone call reassured me I was at the right place and they were on their way to get me. I boarded the boat with friends who carried the media people every year at this race. Sitting across from me was the Ironman live commentator. He looked like an athlete and the voice sounded familiar and I confirmed that it was Greg Welch. Of course I was excited since I knew him from Hawaii Ironman. He competed eight times from 1989 to 1999 and won the race in 1994. He did not think he was anybody now but I thought he was the MAN. "Welchy", I think, was what they called him. .

I watched the swim from the boat and was impressed how Greg was able to spontaneously comment about how the race was evolving during the swim. We watched the pros and then headed out to watch the age groupers. The only person I was able to recognize in the water was Debbie Gobbins. She spotted us on the boat and we waved and wished her good luck.

After I got back on land I went home to rest before my 3 PM to 9 PM duty at the run aid station. When I got home I tried to sleep but I was surprised how wired I was from being around all the energy at Tempe Town Lake. So I used all that energy I received at the race and had a productive morning. I was outside for a couple of hours and noticed that it

seemed awfully windy and was happy I was not out on the bike course. At 2:30 PM I headed down to Tempe Town Lake but this time to volunteer at the run aid station. When I was driving I noticed my car said it was 95 degrees. As I drove into the designated parking lot I started seeing the runners. I was really joyous at this moment that I was not out there running with them.

I recall at Ironman races I have raced and how happy I was to see the volunteers at the water stops .I always thought they looked like they were having so much fun and I would rather be in their place. Now I was able to do that. I was amazed at all the volunteers and all the duties to be covered. You could choose anything from washing sponges to cutting up fruit. There were many moving parts to this aid station.

We could not hand out sponges fast enough. We helped all the racers endure the tough conditions by giving them water, coke, food, sunscreen, sponges and yelling encouraging words. Eric Chebi was always there to walk fellow racers through the aid station. I saw everything from a guy running in his Crocs to guys trying to run with as many sponges on their body as possible. At 8 PM I asked Eric who won the race. He gave me the run down of the top four men and top four women. But to me it really did not matter as all the people we were supporting were the real winners. Congratulations to all who endured.

And as John Bingham would say: “Waddle on friends”. I will see you in November at the next AZIM.