

Ralph's Half Ironman California 2004

by Jim Hoppes

Driving home from the race, my legs totally shot and my body completely drained, I started wondering, "and I did this why?" "Because it was a lot of fun" kept running through my head. After all the pain and sweat my realization was wow that was a great weekend.

I've been racing now for a little over a year. My goal like any new triathlete was to do some sprint and Olympic racing with Ironman not even in my dictionary. So how did I get into this situation? We were sitting around Mark and Kristi's house deciding on the reimbursement races and possible training Master schedules for next year and someone said "How about we do a club Half", somehow my hand raised and said yes I would do it. On the way home I'm thinking "What did I just do? I can't do a half, I'm not in good enough shape, I have no coach, Olympic and Sprints put me in serious pain."

January comes and the club puts out the first month's schedule for the Half. I'm thinking, there is not way I can complete this. Reluctantly I started the schedule. The first couple of weeks were extremely difficult and my doubts were really starting to surface. I didn't seem to be getting any better and I was always tired.

After the first month I was dreading the second month because it was even more. I think my big breakthrough was after listening to Paula Newby-Frasier at the club meeting. She basically said listen to your body, it will tell you what to do. It's okay to miss a workout.... I was thinking if it worked for her then what the heck. So when my body said no, my mind said no. I would skip weekday workouts or cut the volume or intensity in half and save myself for the weekend main workouts. This was the trick. I had basically fallen in to the common overtraining scenario that many of us do, and by evaluating myself along the way I was able to avoid some of the pit falls.

The third month came and went with much improvement and general satisfaction of my accomplishments I had made over the last three months. With a goal of under 6:00 hours and a stretch goal of under 5:30, I'm thinking I can do this.

Race weekend was finally here. I had setup some housing arrangements with 6 other PTC members. Kris Barber, Mark Jokisch, Joel Clapick, Mike Flynn, Lucas Sutter and I headed to the race. Never a dull moment with this crew.

THE RACE

5:30am

I got all my stuff together, jumped on my bike and headed over to the transition area. I met up with Philip Rein and we did a short warm-up run. 6:30am and still a half hour to go, I was going nuts. Along came Amanda Davis with a smile on her face and her normal happy go lucky personality. She could tell I was whacked out, so she started talking about her first half and brought me back down to earth.

THE START

The Swim

7:00am

The gun goes off and I'm out in the water. The water was a warm 60F and with 150 of my fellow age groupers to keep me company. The swim went exactly as planned, I rounded the last buoy and headed for home, 38 minutes, hit my goal. I stumbled out of the water just to hear Stu Gibson yell "Way to go Jim".

The Bike

My favorite and my strongest leg: The bike was hilly and windy, just my kind of race. There was one hill in particular that was brutal. I saw it coming from afar and it was massive, but I was thinking this has nothing on Bartlett. I climbed up and over and down and around only to hit more hills. Then to my surprise I heard someone say "Hoppes, I'm going to beat your ass to the top of this hill!" Then there were short words of encouragement as Mark Mattern passed me by. I kept just close enough to keep him in site for the rest of the ride.

The Run

My biggest worry of this whole thing was finally here. THE RUN. I came out of the transition area and who did I see but Mark Mattern again to my surprise. We ran the first lap together with some words of confidence to keep me going. The second lap was brutal. I don't know how I completed it. Only with the thought of seeing some familiar faces kept me going. 10 miles into it with my legs on the verge of cramping, I was thinking of walking. However, still 40 minutes under my goal and with 3.5 miles left I knew this wasn't an option. As I hit each wall, another smiling face and "way to go Jim!" kept me going. I rounded the last corner with the PTC cheerleaders cheering away and the finish line was in site. Then in the last 100yds a guy passes me with a 32 on his calf indicating that he's in my age group. I'm thinking, "I don't think so," so I pass him back. The announcer then says "We have some sprinters", he passed me again, with less than 50yds to go I'm thinking back to the track workouts, oh this isn't going work. I fly pass him dropping him like a stone to finish 20yds in front. I crossed the line in utter pain only to look down at my watch and realized I crushed my goal of 5:30:00 with a 5:19:31.