

The Rocky Point Tri – *RAIN* or Shine

By Stephen Lawlor

Yes, rain. Not just a mist, not just a drizzle, but a downpour. For those of you who arrived Friday night, the sky looked ominous. Overcast skies could be a good sign for a cool ride and run, but rain? Surely not in Rocky Point, where temperatures genuinely run well over 90 on race day, racers run out of water, and spectators are scrambling for the “shady spots” along the road to Plaza Las Glorias. But storm it did, lightning, thunder, high winds, etc. for most of Friday night. In fact, the next morning there were hotel workers at our place trying to figure out how to remove the two feet of sand that blew into the pool. The late spring storm devastated our race course. Would it be called off?

As if teasing us, the rain had stopped long enough for us to set up our gear in the transition area. Yes, the course was sloppy, but we are triathletes and pride ourselves on resolve and toughness! That is until, the heavens opened again just before 9AM with a vengeance and soaked through everyone and their equipment. The smart racers packed up their gear and headed to a nearby bar for a beer. The diehards, looked defiantly at the sky and shouted, “Is that the best you can do?” The officials decided the race was still on.

Oddly, the poor weather prompted everyone to get started on time. The swim waves began exactly at 10:00AM at Sandy Beach. It was a waist water start. This time it was a triangular course, but the water was choppy with a strong current making it difficult to swim in a straight line. It intimidated many, as it really did feel like open ocean this time, and not a tame little salt water cove. It was not for the faint of heart. A number of swimmers were pulled out because of conditions causing either panic or exhaustion.

Meanwhile back at the transition area, the relay team cyclists were corralled at the top of the transition area, waiting for their swimmers. They watched in horror as the “sprint” tri racers poured in from their bike leg. They were literally pasted in gooey mud from head to toe. We soon found out that just about 100 feet below the exit of the transition, a swamp lay waiting for us that spread across the width of the road. In other words, there was no getting around it! It was at least two feet deep and greedily gobbled up our pedals, shoes, and for some, munched their tires, chains or derailleurs. It was later referred to affectionately as “the Toilet Bowl”, as rumor had it, it’s original lay in a broken septic pipe. Nice.

The next few miles through town could only be described as mud wrestling on a bicycle. Slipping and sliding along the mud streets, potholes were hard to avoid as they were covered with water or camouflaged with mud. We envied those on the mountain bikes that passed us with satisfied smiles on their faces. The other hazard was cars careening along the mud streets right with us. In Rocky Point traffic is never blocked off for the safety of the racers. It’s far more fun to play “chicken” with the drivers or ride down the middle of the road in between lines of traffic going in opposite directions. The bike ride was a challenge to say the least! Finally we hit the highway and shortly after the new road out to Laguna Del Mar. What a peaceful relief after the madness in town. It started to rain again, but at least our bikes we getting washed off! Heading out of Laguna Del Mar (the turn around point) we were “supposed” to have a tail wind or at least a side wind. Mother nature was not about to give up on cramping our fun, so she sent us a frustrating head wind. However, it did allow us to catch those heavy mountain bikes with our lighter steeds. Our weekend training rides paid off with building our endurance. The run was a piece of cake after that grueling ride. Mercifully, a large part of the sand dune portion was re-routed. The cool temperatures keep us going too, as did the local supporters and vacationers along the course.

Those of us who finished this Tri, felt more like we completed one of those extreme endurance races. We were tired, we were filthy dirty, but we were victorious and had overcome Mother Nature's antics. As Rick, the MC said at the Awards Ceremony that night, we really can now say the Rocky Point Tri is on – Rain or Shine!