10-9-2010

The Hawaiian dream - Vincent Tremaine's story

Vincent Tremaine

Follow this and additional works at: http://epublications.bond.edu.au/tri_dreamers

Recommended Citation

http://epublications.bond.edu.au/tri_dreamers/1
The Hawaiian Dream – Vincent Tremaine’s Story
Swim 3.8 kms, Ride 180.2 km and Run 42.2 kms

Pre Race

Three crashes, twelve stitches, nine broken ribs, two punctured lungs, a broken collarbone and numerous other strains and pains. That is what my five year campaign to qualify for the Hawaiian Ironman cost me.

Unfortunately, thanks to a high speed bike collision with a dog, four of the broken ribs and one of the punctured lungs came only 3 weeks before my long sought after quest to conquer Hawaii.

It wasn’t easy to remain positive whilst lying in hospital vomiting (a side effect of the pain killing drugs) with a chest tube jabbed under my armpit into my lung cavity - The tube allows the air to escape from around the lung so it can reinflate.

The reality is that I didn’t know whether it would be possible to compete in Hawaii but I convinced myself that this was just another challenge. Triathletes challenge themselves every day, we love it. That is the nature of the beast. There is no doubt that it is better to aim, hope, strive for the positive than to dwell on the negatives and that goes for everything in life.

Aside from the physical difficulties, including the accidents, calf and hamstring problems and trying to balance training with work and family, there was also the difficult process of qualifying. Over the five years I missed out once by four minutes and, on a blinder of a day performing at my peak in Taupo, New Zealand, last year, I took a wrong turn and did an extra 20kms on the bike, ruining my chance of qualifying.

A year later, 2009, I took the correct turn and qualified by 25 minutes with fellow Lakers Triathlon Club member and mate, Peter Lines. Waiting at the roll down ceremony to find out whether I got the spot was one of the more terrifying experiences of my triathlon career.

In the three weeks between my discharge from hospital and the Ironman I got back on the bike without too many dramas and managed to move through the water using one arm at a great enough speed to be confident of finishing within the swim cut off time of 2 hour 20 minutes, providing no one smashed me in the ribs.

The jarring associated with running was a more serious problem. The broken ribs remained so painful, that I didn’t know right up to race day whether they could cope with 42 kms and then I had the problem of badly undertrained legs.

I was however going to Hawaii and intended to be at the start line.

Arriving in the Kona heat was a shock to the system but, after the SA winter, it wasn’t all bad. The town is beautiful with palm trees in abundance, stylish little shops and, of course, the coffee Mecca, Lava Java Cafe, where the coffee is great and the World’s best athletes (and me) mix in the sun. The actor and triathlete, Daniel McPherson was there, the Canadian star, Lisa Bentley was chatting and South Australian’s own Matt White was there.

I was fortunate to have, arguably, the World’s best Age Group athlete and probably the fittest 50 year old in the World, acting as my travel guide, Kevin Fergusson took me on a ride and run along the course and led me to the swim start. A quick summary of the experience would be – the ride was hot and windy, the run was hot and the swim was sensational.

The water is warm, deep and teaming with every different size, colour and shape of fish as well as stingrays and turtles. The best swimming I have ever experienced, even with only one arm working.
Kev stuck to his training programme to the very end. I played around a bit but was very protective of my body so that I would at least get to the starting line. I tried running with a makeshift collar and cuff sling holding my arm to my chest. It helped protect the ribs but I felt ridiculous and in the end it was too uncomfortable. I eventually went into the race with a Nurofen (anti inflammatory) based plan.

The day before the race we set off to transition our bikes and race bags. It was at that point I realised what the World Championships are about. I was greeted by a volunteer who slowly walked me through the whole transition area, explaining exactly how it all works, where I enter and exit and pick up my bike and run bags.

The bags hang on hooks from two open roofed shelters through which you run (if you have the energy) and the bikes sit in a numbered bike slot rather than hanging from a fence. The transition area is magnificent. You hear German, French and American accents, a truly international atmosphere and the superstars are there racking their bikes.

19 hours to go.

Race Day

The pros were to kick off at 6:45am with the age group race starting at 7:00am.

Kev and I, my partner Debbie and a mate, Kirts, set off for the start at 5:30. Given that my performance expectations weren’t great I was considerably more relaxed than for a qualifying race. The plan was to load up on Nurofen and to do whatever it took to finish, even if I had to use the whole 17 hours to the midnight cut off.

Tyres were pumped up, gels added to my Bento box, Gatorade biddens attached, sunscreen applied, I put on my swimming speed suit (Hawaii is a non wetsuit swim) and I joined the queue for the start line.

Given that I could not afford to have my ribs further “relocated” I stayed at the back and clear of the starting line crush. With a minute or so to go I remembered all my triathlon friends back in SA advising me to “take in the experience” so for a few seconds I turned around and looked back at the huge crowd of spectators, the palm trees, the finishing line, the sponsor banners, the blue Hawaiian sky and the emotion of it all hit me. I really felt the battle was won and that I was starting the greatest triathlon event on Earth already a winner.

I turned back to the job ahead, and the cannon fired, signalling the start. My swimming technique involved a very long, strong left arm pull through the water followed by a very short underwater right arm pull with a breath every 4th stoke. This worked like a dream, I was keeping a reasonable pace and was avoiding other swimmers without too much trouble. I even had swimmers drafting off me.

Despite the entertaining fish life and the changing underwater terrain, the 1.9 km turnaround buoy seemed to take an eternity to reach. Strangely the return trip seemed to be over in a flash. My time, of 1 hour 25 minutes, was a very pleasant surprise given I was expecting around 1:40 with my one and a half armed technique. I barely remember the run up to transition but I remember being handed my bike bag by an enthusiastic volunteer and running into a very wet transition tent.

The 180km bike ride was like nothing I have ever experienced before. After a short ride through town you move onto 90kms of highway flanked by black lava rocks. It is like a rough black dessert. I remember thinking that the course really suited me. It was undulating but not what I would call hilly and I could stay down on my time trial bars for almost the whole race. Collecting drinks was a bit
of a challenge because they had to be handed to my dodgy right arm. This meant I had to slow
down to snails pace to collect fluids. It was more painful, however, to throw out empty bottles
because I needed a decent throw to ensure the bottles were clear of the bike path.

The other challenge was to do the whole race on my own. Having come out of the water later than
usual, all the better bike riders had gone so I spent the day overtaking 343 of my fellow competitors.
That is 20% of the field. There was no one to chase.

The turnaround is at the end of a 10km climb. It was great to get to the top. The down hill was fast,
exhilarating and a bit scary on TT bars with unpredictable cross winds and some very nervous 40km
per hour riders in front of me who I was overtaking at about 60kms per hour. It was going beautifully
until I reached the bottom of the hill and hit the Hawaiian “Trade Winds”. The next 70kms were into a
very hot, strong headwind. It took an eternity. The 5 hour 30 min ride I calculated at the turnaround
turned into a 5:55 bike time.

It is always a great relief to return from the bike leg unscathed and very importantly, punctureless. In
my case there was no way, with broken ribs, I was going to be able to change a high pressure
tubular tyre anyway.

I felt reasonably comfortable jogging through the transition area although the ground was so hot I
wondered whether the soles of my feet were going to burn.

By the time I exited the transition area I realised that my quads were going to be a problem. Both
had been sore for a few days with the very limited training I had been able to do and 180 kms on the
bike had not been the ideal recovery.

I reached the first drink station down Alli Drive after passing through the enthusiastic cheering
crowds in the main part of town and I felt very average. I was already hot and thirsty, gulping down
serious volumes of water and Gatorade and I was certain that my quads wouldn’t last 5 kms let
alone 42. My quest to hydrate in a hurry left me bloated, like a 44 gallon drum on sore legs.

For the first 10 kms the aim was to keep the quads running to the next drink station, to fill up the 44
gallon drum on legs and to load up with anything that would cool me down. That included ice in my
cap and cold sponges in my tri suit. A few more Nurofen also helped dull the arm ache caused by
the broken ribs.

I reached the 10 km mark and realised that my quads had not got any worse. By now I was well
hydrated and running to the halfway mark seemed a real possibility. Given that in the preceding 10
weeks I had averaged only 12 km of running per week I was pleasantly surprised at my progress but
I still felt that running the full 42kms would be virtually impossible.

I came across Kev at the turn onto the highway and the lava fields. He was looking over his
shoulder and running hard. I considered quickly what I could contribute to help him. The best I could
come up with was to tell him the race time. At that point it was 9 hours 22 minutes. I guessed by his
urgency that he was in a strong position.

The aim became to run as far as possible so as my supporters would not be waiting too long for me
at the finishing line. Coach, Nigel Pietsch had advised me that you can walk at 7 kms per hour so 21
km would take me 3 hours - a very long time.

At the half way mark my “keep running” target became, 30kms, the Energy Lab turnaround
(apparently during the day the temperature at the Energy Lab hit 40 degrees). My confidence was
growing as the kilometres passed by and my quads and body generally held up well. The Energy
Lab came and went, my mate Pete Lines and I crossed paths, and I came to believe that I would be
running all the way home as the sun set and darkness approached.
It was a lonely trip back to town, in pitch black darkness with no street lighting. Often at the last minute, I had to dodge runners still heading out of town.

Once in Kona the crowds grew and my dream of finishing a Hawaiian Ironman was becoming a reality. Kev cheered me on Alii Drive and I was boosted to hear that he was now a triple age group World Champion, having already won the Aquathlon and Olympic distance races. (Two weeks later he became a quadruple World Champion after winning the Long Course title by a massive 23 minutes).

I slapped hands with the crowd over the final 200 metres whilst looking for Debbie, but no sign of her until right on the finishing line a hand was thrust out in front of me. A quick hug and kiss and then a trot up the ramp and with a blown kiss to my children in Australia and a tap of the Laker logo on my tri suit, I crossed the finishing line, a Hawaiian Ironman at last.

Two volunteers appeared under my arms as my legs became shaky and my balance questionable. Ironically I had controlled the rib pain with anti inflammatory drugs all day but it was after crossing the line that it all fell apart. I was offered a drenching with ice cold water to cool me down and given it was still over 30 degrees this seemed like a great idea. I had not, however, expected that the cold drenching would cause all my chest and back muscles to cramp around the broken ribs, causing me more pain than I had experienced for two weeks. At first I had no idea what I had done to cause the horrible pain. It felt like I had been stabbed and I feared that the lung had been re-punctured. After a minute or two it settled down and so did I.

And so ended the successful quest to be a Hawaiian Ironman.

The encouragement and support I received from the Lakers, members of other SA triathlon clubs, my coaches, physio, family and friends was extraordinary. The memory of all this support will live with me as long as the memory of the race. I can’t thank you guys enough.