



So three Ironmans down, one to go and the goal of finishing in the top 4% of each is definitely still on the cards!! I'm still a little in shock but my 3rd place at Ironman Korea gives me 2 podium finishes this year. If you'd asked me 2 years ago whether I'd ever finish in the top 3 at Ironman I'd have laughed at you!

If I'm honest, and especially after St George Ironman in May, I had my doubts about whether I really was worthy of racing in the pro category in Ironman triathlon or whether I was just there making up the numbers. Over the last few years I've been fortunate enough to meet and become friends with some of New Zealand's best long distance triathletes and it still surprises me that we all share varying levels of performance anxiety even when some of us have won multiple Ironman races. The fickle nature of endurance sports means that we only feel confident when we're performing great workouts. When we get a little flat, tired or fatigued that confidence ebbs away and the little doubts about ability and fitness start to creep back in. It's even worse if you underperform in a race when you had higher expectations and you're not sure that your subsequent training has addressed those issues before you're due to race again. This is a bit how I felt leading into Korea. I was satisfied with my result at St George Ironman but felt I was missing the "extra gear" on that day and although I'd tried to address what I thought had gone wrong (unusually poor swim and bike) I had also struggled a bit with training motivation (very unusual for me) and was starting to think that I might be starting to drain the batteries a bit with this "year round" Ironman training.

One of the issues I'd pin-pointed after St George Ironman was that, in an attempt to be as fresh as possible, I'd arrived in Utah 10 days prior to the race to give me more time to acclimatise and to try a longer "taper" than I would normally for an Ironman. I think this gave me a little more drop off in fitness for the swim and bike than I would have liked and even though I ran well I was off the pace from the start.

I also felt that my desire to race had been low as well. I'm not someone who needs to race often as I tend to take a while to build up the mental energy to push myself hard, but I was struggling for enthusiasm before race day.

Therefore leading into Korea I decided to shorten my taper and do a lot of positive sports psych for this race. Arriving late Monday night at the pro's accommodation on the Island of Jeju I made sure I was up early and down to the pool for a 3km session including a lot of sprints and race pace work to keep the swim engine humming. I also made sure that I got out on the roads leading up to race day to bike and run in the heat of the day. I spent a lot of my downtime in mental preparation of the perfect day, running through scenarios that had me feeling calm, strong and fast in the race. The forecast for Sunday was for 26 degrees Celsius and light winds but with every day I was there it would alternate between monsoon rain, heavy fog and high humidity with grey skies, whilst still maintaining oppressive warmth throughout each weather change. I tried not to worry too much about this until the Saturday before the race when, racking our bikes at transition 1, we were

greeted by a sea fog with zero visibility and a warning from race organisers that if the fog persisted the decision to conduct the swim on race morning would be left until 5mins before the start. Considering the extra focus I'd recently placed on my swim I was hoping for good weather.

Race day dawned with the fog still present but lifting and after normal pre-race routines I was happy to be standing on the start line feeling quite calm and mentally ready to race and give it my all for 9hrs.

It was also pleasing to return to the old Ironman days with pros and age groupers starting together as I have had my best swims on these occasions. I positioned myself next to Jan Rehula (Bronze medallist in triathlon at Sydney Olympics) as I know he's a great swimmer and my intention was to sit on him at the start for as long as I could to ensure I was near the lead in the first 200-300m before finding my Ironman pace. This plan worked perfectly as I got a great start and after about 200m felt myself slowly losing the feet of Jan, Hiro Nishiuchi (Team TBB and ex Japanese Olympic triathlete) and Balazs Csoke (eventual winner). I was feeling quite comfortable so I waited to see who was close behind me. Turning at the first buoy I felt strangely isolated so after a few quick strokes of backstroke to see where the swimmers behind me were, I was a little surprised to see I had a gap of about 30m. I wasn't killing myself to achieve this so I settled back into my rhythm and completed the first of the 2 x 1900m laps. I swam the rest of the leg on my own and it wasn't until towards the end of the swim I was joined by one other age grouper and we exited in 4th and 5th place with a gap of over 1min back to the next main pack. I transitioned quickly as I was wearing my entire race gear and only had to put my helmet on when I got to my bike. This was the first chance I had to see my approx. swim time (49min 37 sec) which I was thrilled with. I knew this gave me a chance to settle in to my bike pace without other athlete distraction and I was at the front of the race without a big gap to the leaders.

I was fairly sure the first 3 guys had started the bike together but was hoping to see some separation at the first turn around. This would mean we were all individually time trialling and it would give me someone to chase. I felt ok but not great for the first 30km and my heart rate was a little higher than I hoped, but I had made the decision for this race to throw a little caution to the wind and use perceived effort as my guide rather than my bike power meter. I wanted to push my limits a bit more rather than my traditional more measured and conservative approach.

My rationale for this was that if I was in a position to podium I would lay it all on the line to do so and I didn't want to have anything telling me to slow down. I was pleased to see Hiro had dropped off the leaders at the turn around but unhappy to find Jan and Balazs had extended their lead over me and looked like they were flying. I had a 3min lead over 5th and 6th place which meant they weren't catching me. I had driven the course before the race and aimed to bike around 4hrs 45min if it wasn't too windy. I knew Hiro wasn't the strongest cyclist and it only took me another 20km before I flew past him into 3rd and was starting to feel a lot better. I was riding with an average speed of 37km an hour at that point so I knew that it would have to involve some strong cycling for anyone behind to catch up.

The bike course is rolling with a few little climbs and the road surface is great. For the next 80km I held good rhythm and form and I was starting to consider the reality of hitting transition 2 in 3rd place and how I was going to approach the run. Then from nowhere an age group cyclist rides up alongside me and his first words to me were "don't worry, I'm an age grouper so your prize money is

still safe". My instant response was "I don't give a shit about the money, you're now beating me!!" I wasn't going to let him ride off so like the consummate professional I instead decided to lighten the load and ride with him. We were about to approach an aid station so I went to throw my empty water bottle off to the side and as I did I clipped my own aerobars! The next second my front wheel went from under me and I was down on the road. Tim Beardall (the age grouper) looked around at the veteran pro wondering what the hell had happened and was it his fault! In my complete embarrassment and to the shock of the lovely Korean women working the aid station I quickly dusted myself off, checked the body and then bike, grabbed a full water bottle and tried to look super cool as I mounted the bike and started off again. Once the adrenaline and embarrassment had worn off I assessed it was only a little "road rash" and a drop to 4th so my race wasn't over. I recovered my composure a little more when I road past Tim at the 160km mark to see that he had "blown up" in his bike pacing and was suffering a bit. This gave me extra motivation to finish the bike leg strong and I entered transition after 4hrs and 50mins in 3rd and with a 3 min lead over Andreas Venhorst who had also passed Tim.

Although I felt there was room for improvement from Utah I had been happy with my run and especially the 2nd half of the marathon. I entered this race with the mind-set that I was going to run well and not be afraid to use this leg as a chance to improve my placing when previously my game plan had been to maximise the bike leg and hold on in the run. I was pleased to find within the first few steps that I hadn't gone too hard on the bike and that I found my run rhythm very early. It may have helped that the run course immediately goes down a steep hill for 1km!

Although I knew the day was hot and very humid, the extra air flow allows you to manage your core temperature better whilst on the bike. I always knew that it would dramatically change once out on the run course and it was immediately apparent how tough this was going to be. I have done Hawaii Ironman before in similar if not slightly hotter conditions and nearly died! Part of this was because I kept focussing on the heat so for this race I had already accepted it. I knew it would make the run difficult and slower for everyone, but I didn't want to spend 42km thinking about it. The course itself is hard enough and after the first 1km downhill you run back uphill for approx. 2km before a long out and back leg that is never flat. I had my Garmin watch to check pace and realised quite early that running a 3hr 5min-3hr 10min marathon was going to be out of the question. The undulating course and heat meant that every aid station involved stopping for 15-30 secs whilst you queued for ice sponges and fluid. The half ironman athletes were using the same course and 50% of them were already on the run. I therefore concentrated on running from aid station to aid station and at the first turnaround found I was holding my place but 4th wasn't far behind me. I continued to focus and although I knew I wasn't running super-fast I could tell none of the pros were and that this was going to be a case of surviving to the finish. Andreas caught me around the 18km mark but for the next 10km only stayed 50-100m in front. This gave me hope that maybe everyone was slowing down and that if I could just maintain pace I could hold onto 4th. It was about then I noticed Jan Rehula in the distance and realised that he must have blown completely as the last time I saw him he had been approx. 8mins in front of me. If I've learnt anything from Ironman is that anything can happen and it usually happens in the last 12km of the run! I had to make a quick decision on how I would catch and pass him as any athlete with an Olympic Bronze medal knows how to hurt and won't let me go easily. I caught him on an uphill and put in quite a surge to discourage him chasing but he latched on to me and kept pace even though I was running 4min 20 secs per km. I was surprised by my reaction which was one of annoyance so I lifted pace again and immediately

considered the wisdom in this move! I just didn't want him to key off me and pull him any closer to the finish. I was thrilled when I felt him drop off a bit but I couldn't relax. As we hit the last turnaround before the 11km homeward stretch I couldn't have him see me slow down again and give him hope that I had pushed too hard in my attempt to break him. I was also able to see after the turnaround that there was a big gap between Jan and 5th place of approx. 8 mins but I still treated the next 2-3 km like a half marathon as I attempted to build as big a lead as I could over my pursuers now that I was in 3rd place.

The last few kms always take forever in an Ironman and even though I knew I had 3rd place sewn up I must have looked back over my shoulder half a dozen times. My pace was dropping as the wear and tear of such a hot and hilly run was taking its toll. The last 1.5 km is largely downhill and I was looking forward to this. There is an aid station just before the downhill and even though I was so close to the finish I still had to stop to soak myself in ice water and drink a few cups of coke.

I suppose I've had quite a meteoric rise in Ironman racing in the last few years and I still have quite a laugh when I finish well in races and the race announcers are not quite sure who I am. I usually notice a pause in their commentary as they search through the race manual trying to figure out who this athlete is! I made sure that my race number was visible and I let myself enjoy the run to the finish and the applause of the crowd.

I was very proud of this result finishing 3rd in 9hrs 3mins. I was hoping for my first sub 9hr race but the run conditions would never have allowed that. My 3hr 15min marathon included walking or stopping at every single aid station. Cameron Brown had won the 70.3 earlier in the day with a 1hr 20min half marathon which is around 6mins slower than he usually runs and only one athlete in the top 10 ran under 3hrs 10mins which is amazing for an Ironman. But apart from the finish position I was pleased in how I'd assessed what I felt had gone wrong at Utah, made the necessary adjustments in training and found this resulted in another podium finish at an international Ironman.

I'm also very pleased that I can continue to promote my sponsors through my race achievements and it's through the use of their products and services that allow me to race so well.

It's now on to IM Wales on the 11th September and the prospect of another good race in a more forgiving climate. ☺

Cheers,

Bevan

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