

Gulf Coast Half Ironman 2003

Swim 59:46

Bike 3:40:15

Run 3:34:13

Total 8:22:37

After several years of Sprint Triathlons – including some with short swims in the Atlantic - I set my goal on a long course tri and chose Kiawah as my first attempt. The day before the race the waters were nice. After an evening of listening to my Dawg friends cheer on their football team, I settled in for a night's rest only to find it difficult to sleep through the noise of a howling wind.

As we gathered around the race director, the winds were picking up, the skies darkened and lightning scarred the Eastern horizon. I was not the only person who thought the swim portion might be cancelled. But no, off went the first wave as I watched in disbelief. With butterflies in my stomach, I left with my wave – the second to the last. The first few waves knocked me back. I tried to dive through them, but they were just too big and powerful and I was driven back to the shore. I became sick from the salt water and sea motion, then cried with disappointment – this has been a goal for at least 2 years – as I watched the last wave of swimmers leave the shore. A man approached me and said, “You are going back in, aren't you?” I shook my head yes and back I went.

With a long course under my belt, trophy of finishing on the wall, I then set my sights on a Half Ironman and chose the Gulf Coast Tri. Mother's Day, 2002 in Panama City was one of the most beautiful days I have ever seen. The water was warm and flat as a swimming pool. What fun. I took my time, relaxed, ate everything in sight and finished feeling like a real Triathlete.

The only dissatisfaction was learning that I had come in second place – less than 5 minutes behind Joanne Pope from Albany, Ga. Now there was a new goal: first place Gulf Coast 2003.

The day before the race, red flags adorned the shore, cautioning swimmers of the rough waters. Of course, the Savannah Triathletes pay no attention to those kinds of warnings. Off we went for a short practice. This time I could not get through the surf. Then there was the newspaper article predicting that the swim portion would be cancelled, so I relaxed and enjoyed the rest of the day.

The race director started her speech at the Mandatory Meeting that evening with the words: Let be begin by dispelling the rumors. There will be a TRIathlon tomorrow -- as in all three parts.

Forget trying to sleep. I must have gotten up to look at the Gulf of Mexico 20 times. Just before my wave started, several of my friends were sending me off with positive comments and advice on where to start so that the current did not carry me to Pensacola. I reminded myself that I am one with the water and the waves and that I was a mermaid in another life, then dove in.

What a surprise after getting through the breakers, that the water was quite nice. I settled in and finished in 59:46 – only 5 minutes slower than last year. What a joy to know that I could do it. The best part was seeing bike #525 – Joanne’s – still in the rack. I was ahead!!

Now it’s my favorite part – the bike. At mile 40 I was averaging 19 mph on the Quitana Roo’s first Half Ironman. About 7 miles from the finish I approached the portion of the highway that was being repaved, slowed down and got out of the aero bars to traverse what looked a little bit like a washboard. I don’t know what happened next, but I was trying desperately to regain control of a bike that was slip sliding away.

One of the motorcycle monitors came by to help. When I asked him to unclip my right foot, he let me know that he did not know the first thing about one of these funny kind of bikes. I told him to just pull on the bike until it was loose and get it off me. Then we saw the blood. There was road rash from left knee to shoulder and big gash in my elbow that the motorcyclist declared needed stitches. His girlfriend had a couple of tissues that I pasted over the cut, brushed myself off, tested the brakes and declared the bike in good running condition.

The run was anything but. After attempting a few times to make the left hip go, I gave up and walked the course, applying ice to it whenever I could. We made it back from the hospital – after several stitches in the elbow – for the awards party. It was the sweetest second place I have ever received. I will resume training as soon as the cracked rib heals and the stitches in my elbow are out.

Look out Joanne – I will be ready for 2004!