

Ironman Florida, 2007  
By Chuck Hooker

Thank you all for the well wishes, prayers, phone calls. Obviously all that great energy helped! Here it is - the lowdown on my 2007 Ironman experience.

My original goal for Ironman Florida was to finish in, oh, about 13 hours. When the shoulder blew up this week and it looked like it was all going to hell I gave up that goal, and decided that no time/performance goal (other than finishing) was appropriate. I have a great coach - Dawson Cherry - who told me to stay focused and be positive. I went one better. I decided to have FUNN!

Yesterday was a very fast day at IMFL. Several new course records were set. And on a near perfect day I had a great race. The training and planning came together. The shoulder hurt for the first 10-15 minutes but it was manageable and I found a way to swim where it was ok. I chose not to draft but stay outside in clear water to avoid the melee. I kept thinking about Alan's 5 perfect strokes, over and over and over. My swim split was 1:12. I was told I looked confused coming out of the water - yeah, cuz I didn't believe the clock!

The bike felt great. I put it on steady, kept up with the nutrition/hydration, followed the plan, took a few breaks, admired the scenery, had a good time. At 3 hours into the ride the time seemed to stop. The mantra became "smooth round circles". All the while remembering that I wanted to be in good shape at mile 15 of the marathon. fierce headwinds and crosswinds the last 12 miles. Ended up with a 5:45 bike split, just a shade under 20 mph. Thanks Lano - those are fast wheels!

I thought my legs would be dead starting the run, but remarkably they were fine. I clicked off the first 2.5 miles at a sub-9:00 pace and decided it best to throttle back. Made the first 13.1 miles in 2hrs 14 min, even though the winds had really picked up. And all the while I was having FUNN. I stopped to pet the big fuzzy brown dog. Chatted with some local folks. Made sure I looked good for the cameras. Stopped for soup and coke (no joke), gatorade, water at every other aid station. I made it to the last turn-around at twilight. My favorite time of day to run, with the temperature heading down. I kept doing the mental math and couldn't believe the numbers. Closer to 12 hours than 13. My stomach started to cramp at mile 23, but managed to get it under control by mile 24. Just 2 miles to the finish. I looked at my watch and it read 11:30 elapsed. Mile 25 clicked by in just over 10 minutes. A half mile from finish I stopped to ditch my water bottle and long sleeve shirt in the bushes by our hotel. I found Janice screaming her lungs out near the finish (Can't say enough about this woman - she was my one person support crew, and drove all night to get here before the race started. Thanks, sweetie!) I stopped and asked, "Well, are you crossing the line with me???? C'mon!" And she did. It was a team effort - she put up with a lot this year, and deserved to share that finish line.

Epilogue

Ten years ago I came back from Outward Bound with a coffee mug that said, "Never cease to amaze yourself". At the finish line I heard Mike Reilly say "Chuck Hooker, from Charleston, SC - You are an Ironman!". I stopped my watch. Elapsed time: 11:52:02. Never - ever - in my wildest dreams did I envision going sub-12 hours. I guess it just goes to show you what can happen when you have FUNN along the way!

So, why did I do an Ironman? A few reasons. Personally it was a new challenge - the training and the race took me outside of my comfort zone. It took a lot of discipline to train and race the plan. Good stuff. More important is the message: we are all ironmen of a sort, and you too can do incredible things. Yesterday I watched in awe of a truly great individual, the former governor of South Dakota, 78 year old Frank Farrar. The man is 78 years old, doing the Ironman. Here's the kicker. He finished in 16:51, doggedly walking the marathon. Too boot, he was the top charity fundraiser at this event, raising over \$200,000 for South Dakota small towns charities. How freaking AWESOME is that!!!! Frank rocks. Frank is an Ironman extraordinaire!

So folks, I close with this last thought:  
You are an Ironman! Do something today to make the world a better place.

Peace,  
Chuck

PS - FUNN = Functional Understanding Not Necessary.

Chuck Hooker, M.Ed.

