

Race report, Gulf Coast Triathlon May 10, 2003 (Half Ironman: swim, 1.2 miles, bike 56 miles, run 13.1 miles)

As always, I felt slightly rushed getting to transition and through body marking. This year, they had us parking at Wal-Mart, which was a switch and we hadn't allotted enough time. The body marking line went very quickly, though and everything went great after that. My time in the "Gotta-Go" was the quickest ever (a PR for the PooPoo!), since the announcer was hurrying us out of Transition. Everyone had to get to the beach since the same ramp was being used to exit the swim. I feel sorry for the people who believed him when he said there were Porta-Pots on the beach. There weren't!

Once on the beach, I felt oddly calm. Of course, I worried a little bit about that. Seas were reported to be 2 ft. swells. Ours was the 2nd wave, so I watched the pros go and have a rough time getting past the initial breakers. A couple of people had to really track hard left since it looked like they were pushed to the right of the first buoy.

I always start way left (if the current is going right) and moved even further left after seeing the pros. When the cannon went off, I waited for the initial rush, then kind of waded in until I could dive through the group right in front. The swim out was much easier for me than it was the day before in practice. The day before, I was tired after diving through multiple waves. On race day, I swear I only counted one wave I had to duck through, so I was able to establish a rhythm right away. The swim out to the turn around was "bouncy" and I caught myself having fun. THAT was unusual. Normally, it's about 150 yards out when I ask myself, "Why am I doing this?" I didn't ask myself that for this whole race.

At one point during the first 500 yards, someone came up on my right and we kept bumping bodies. She very deliberately placed her hand on my right thigh and shoved me over. I just grinned underwater. I could have frog kicked her, but why? It was just funny! After the turn in, I got a little tired of being out there and just wanted it to be over. Then I realized my arms weren't turning over fast enough and I wasn't staying in my HR range. I wasn't working hard enough! I was pretty pleased with swimming fairly consistently. Over the last two years, I had been trying to get out some bad open water habits: I would just stop swimming and look around or I would start imagining creatures under me and have a little anxiety attack. What a waste of time! This swim I was able to keep my form the whole time, concentrate on head up, good catch and follow through and my arms didn't get tired on the follow through (they usually do, and my stroke shortens).

Finally, I headed into shore, trying to swim in until I touched sand, but a wave tore my goggles off my head (they were practically new!) and I stood and trotted through the surf. I understand in the time I was out there, the wind picked up and the waves got considerably rougher for the subsequent waves.

SWIM: **48:07 (26 out of 70 in my AG)**

It was a long, long way to T1: **2:49 (19/70—sprints pay off here!)**

And a short way to the BIKE (I was racked near the bike exit).

I was pretty happy to be on the bike. You know the feeling you get when you ride enough to feel like you're home when you get on your bike? For the first time ever, I was able to drink some water and eat a gel right away. I usually can't breathe. After that, I ingested a gel every 30 minutes and alternated sips of water and Gatorade. I was pretty oblivious to wind conditions, since I rode according to HR ranges, first half 77-80%, last half 80-84%. This turned out to be a very, very good plan. I noticed that the ride was considerably cleaner than in 2001. There were no big packs of drafting peletons, just small groups of 2-3 cheaters. I talked with Charlie the rules enforcer after the race and he said there weren't enough violations to keep him busy—he had to pull his truck over and park for awhile. That is really good, since in 2001, a large pack caused a girl to wipe out and break her collarbone. I did see a lot of litterers. What's with just tossing your bottle no where near the stations? One guy did try to pass me on the right over the bridge, but since I'm a Mom, I was able to boss him over to my left. I just think he didn't know better. I nearly wrecked after the turnaround, when I was trying to get ride of two bottles and get two new bottles. I found I couldn't hold the Gatorade bottle they handed me in my teeth, so I sort of pulled to the side and would have gone down had my foot not come miraculously unclipped on the right side and I saved myself right in front of the cheerleaders, who said "Good save!" There was the only port-o-let on the course there and I didn't have to go. Significant later.

We had unrelenting headwind the last 15 miles or so, but again, when you're not riding for an average, but are riding according to HR, it's all good. This became interesting later, when I compared my time to my friend Nancy's. She's a much better cyclist than I am, and she rode for a relay team and rode for an average MPH. Her time was only 5 minutes faster than mine, so this really justified the HR ranges I aimed for, I thought. I had one guy ride by and say in an Arnold Schwarzenegger voice, "Good posture." It was sort of an odd thing to say, but I work hard at roadie type stuff like good form so of course, I was pleased. I got real sick of the rough roads.

Bike: **3:02:28 (30/70) 18.4 average**

T2: **2:15 (18/70)**

My friend Cal and new friend Richard (hi Richard!) were outside of T2 cheering me on. I kept saying, "I'm taking way too much time here." I dumped my Speedplay covers out of my back pocket (in case I had to walk through sand to pee in the woods) and put in my Bodyglide (had chafing under the arms from the swim and knew it would get worse. At about mile 10, I really hated the feel of that bodyglide container on my back.)

I felt really strong on the run and kept wanting to go past the HR range set out for me (6 miles: 78-80%, 6 miles: 80-84%, last 3 miles: 85-90%). I thought I'd run at 82% for awhile, but backed it back down and kept it at 80% when I started feeling nauseous. The wrinkles I noticed in the bottom of my right sock in T1 were with me the whole run, of course getting worse in the last two miles. My legs felt fine and I was able to concentrate on fast cadence. No dead leg problem at all, until the last two miles. Everything about the run was pretty good until the last half. Then it became so unbearably hot. I had used

another brand of sunscreen that didn't last, so I was getting fried, too, which didn't help. I walked through nearly every aid station, I think. It's just easier to drink from a cup at a walk! Put ice over my head and down my shirt, ran through every hose offered by the great neighborhood supporters (thanks!). The first time I walked on the run (except for the aid stations) was in the state park. That place is a mental fry station! It was about that time that I started telling myself I wasn't doing too bad for a 44 year old, and I almost yelled, "Go 44!" to a guy who ran past me with 44 on his calf. But one thing—I'm not 44. I'm 41. I think this happened before to me—I forget how old I am. I kicked it up into the 87% range a little too soon at mile 9—thought it was mile 10. Walked again at mile 12—I couldn't believe I was walking so close to the finish, but I just couldn't help it! Thanks to the guy who encouraged me and I encouraged him too when he needed it. At that point, even though you can no longer acknowledge the cheerers, their encouragement becomes really meaningful and necessary. Noticed during the whole run that I didn't have to pee, which was definitely not good. I was able to finish pretty strong at about 88-89% HR, but needed some complimentary fluids in the med tent, since I still had not peed in 6 hours!

Run: **2:22:32 (25/70)**

OVERALL TIME: **6:18:09 (25 out of 70 in AG)**

I didn't meet my first goal of knocking an hour off my 2001 time of 6:33. I readjusted that goal to try to knock 30 minutes off, but I'm happy with improving by 15 minutes. After all, I aged 3 years on that course, so in fact I'm 5 years older than I was in 2001!

I realized afterward how important staying in the HR ranges had been to the race. If I'd gone out according to "feel", I would have blown up. You can see that in my bike and run placements. My bike was comparatively slow, right? 30 out of 70 in my age group, yet what happened to those girls on the run? The run put me back at 25 out of 70, and I am a VERY slow runner! 10:53 pace? Yikes! And another thing. In 2001, I began a persistent left IT band problem. This time? Only a sunburn and blisters on the bottom of one foot from sock wrinkles. Pretty cool to finish with 0 injuries!

Once again, I was impressed with how well this race is organized. No complaints at all! They do a great job there and the people are so great. What about the enthusiasm of the volunteers, huh? They are SUPER!