

After the IRONMAN!!!!
By Rick Christensen

A few days after my May 4, 2008 accident, Paul King asked me to write an article about it, which I called "After the Accident" In what I hoped to sound optimistic and not arrogant, I ended the story saying I was giving it everything I have to make it to Ironman Florida on Nov 1. I think it was the medication talking.

While lying in my hospital bed, I did some quick math and thought, okay, this will take 12 weeks to heal and I'll be running like my old self by August. Yeah right. As I became painfully aware of, having a bone heal and being able to run on it are two different things.

With the help of a great surgeon, Dr. Langdon Hartsock of MUSC the bone was fully healed by Aug 4 and thankfully straight. Thanks to my superb physical therapist, Mark Rutledge, I was able to rehab to the point of light running by mid September. He even slowed down to see how I was doing on the run at the Kiawah Island Triathlon as he blasted his way to a second place finish. Way to go Mark!

Training for IM

About 2 weeks after my accident I was back in the gym and the pool. Since kicking was out of the question, I started just swimming easy with pool buoys. After a couple of weeks I could swim about 2000 total yardage. It's tough pulling that long! Feels like an Ironman swim. After a month of this and the lifting at the gym, I started to feel strong. After another month I could start kicking and my swimming really took off. Now I just needed a bike to train on! Despite numerous delays, Angie with TrySports kept after Guru in Canada and the bike finally arrived. Thanks again. Thank you Marshall for building it on a Friday night. If I owned a bike shop that's the last thing I'd want to be doing. Having only 8 weeks to prepare I had to get creative with my training. I kept adding mileage with no recovery weeks and finished 2 Olympic Distance races during all this. I built up to to one 80 mile ride and one 100 mile ride. While tempted to do 1 more 100, I respect the taper rules of IM training and did a 65 mile ride and then a 55 mile ride 2 days later with Jason Burke, who would have a great race. It got the miles in without the recovery ramifications. The running got a little better and I finished a 10 mile run/2 mile walk combo 2 weeks before race day. Would it be enough?

Race Day! (So I don't bore everyone to tears telling this story over and over, here is my race account. Feel free to stop reading at any time. I won't be offended.)

THE SWIM

With newfound confidence in my swimming, I stood on the beach before the start and thought no one had a tougher road to get here. Taking everyone's advice and lining up on the far right, I started out calmly and focused on the first turn buoy. Hit a logjam when a bunch of people stopped. I jumped off to the right and took off for 100 yards. Those interval sessions really helped. Made it to the beach turnaround in 35 minutes! After 5

minutes I was back in the water. Took off again and took the first turn buoy wider and missed most of the crowd. Swam strong and had a 1:14 swim split.

THE BIKE

Hopped on my bike with fresh legs and let experience take over. Started easy and averaged 19 the first hour. The next 41 miles I upped the tempo and felt great. This is getting interesting! Miles 60-70 were the most miserable I ever felt in a race. Sitting up in awful headwind on rough pavement I was going 14 miles per hour. At mile 70 the wind shifted to a sweet tailwind and I took off instantly energized. Averaged about 22mp until mile 105. Knowing I would take my time in transition, I was ready to turn it up even more until more headwinds. Geared back down to 18 and started thinking about the run. Came in with a ride average of 19.8. Reached T2 in 7:10! Could I reach my goal of a 13-hour finish?

THE RUN

To get a sense of pace I ran the first mile in 9:34. It hurt, but slightly less than it had been. Thanks again to Mark suggesting no running the last 10 days before the race. Although I paced and fueled correctly the bike left me more fatigued than normal. I thought there was no way I could take this for 26 miles. While the pain is bearable, it takes a lot of concentration, which is very draining. The thought of not finishing almost made me cry. Walked the next mile in 15 minutes. Did the math and thought I could average around 12:30 miles if I could just keep moving. Continued with my preplanned 5-minute run/5 walk combo. I thought if I have to walk, walk fast. I finally made it to mile 13. Having considered dropping out at 10-mile when I got this was the moment of truth. Keep moving and let's finish this! Jason Burke gave me a high five around mile 15 on his way back in to an awesome 11:25 finish. Great race Jason! Happy to see a friend I continued on and made it to mile 22. Knowing I was going to finish I started running full miles, with short walks at the aid stations. With the finish line in sight I was thrilled. There will be more Ironmans in the future, but nothing will be the feeling I had crossing the line. Look at the photos!

Hoping to finish the marathon in 6 hours, I actually made it in 5:31. Overall time 12:37:14!

This has been a tough experience that still isn't over. I'm hoping in the next few months I can actually go out and run pain free without thinking about it.

One good thing came out of this. After going through the rehab process for a month I was fascinated and decided to begin taking prerequisite classes the summer of 2009 to begin working on my Doctorate in Physical Therapy. With Mark's help I already had a meeting with admissions at MUSC. It will be a tough challenge and I have a 4 year plan to finish. I am in the process of adding staff for my business, Coastal Limousine that will allow for a full time commitment to the program next fall. It won't be easy, but neither is finishing and Ironman 5 months after breaking a leg in 3 places!

Thanks to everybody for all their support the last 5 months. It's pretty hard not to get motivated when people come up to you in the pool and gym and are constantly encouraging you. Also, special thanks to my Mom. Having lost my Dad a few years ago, she has watched me finish 3 IM races and even helped with the drive to Panama City this year. Other than a 140.6 mile day, the trip was actually very relaxing!

See you at the races!

Rick