

Tri-America Race Report-July 13, 2003  
International Distance

When I sat down in January to develop my race season, I tentatively put Tri-America-Rock Hill on the schedule. This race was to prepare me for the upcoming hills for my true test of the year-Sept. 28<sup>th</sup>-the Atomic ½ Iron-man in Lenoir City, TN followed by the Great Floridian 1/2. And let me tell you, Rock Hill is appropriately named!!!!

The crazy thing about triathlons is preparation and planning is so important. After every race, my respect for the elite athlete, male and female, grows and I see how far I am away from competing at that level. Hey, but that is what keeps us old married men/women with children still dreaming about that one “perfect race.” I had a great time, but let’s examine all the mistakes that I made before, during and after the race.

Doug Cole, Logan Hill and myself met at my house Saturday at 9:30 am to head up to Charlotte, NC. The plan was to go up a day early to register, relax, and eat well before the Sunday start. On the way up, Doug said let’s stop and eat. Thinking I was in a Nascar race and needed a fast pit stop, I exited and pulled into Wendy’s. It had been over a year since I had eaten at a fast food site. NOT a good choice! My quick pit stop turned into a long visit (most of the time with me in the men’s room.)

The web site had Holiday Inn as the closest to the race-so I thought Holiday Inn-always known as new, contemporary, can’t go wrong. Boy was I wrong. How do you have a hotel that doesn’t have a refrigerator, cot or elevators? After carrying multiple bags and three bicycles up many flights of stairs, we decided to go check in and enjoy the “festival.” One of the main reasons I picked Tri-America was Logan came to watch and Doug and I needed a longer race in July. So, I thought sprint, international distance and a festival-what a cool experience.

We pulled in Ebenezer Park and the finish line, transition area and lake looked awesome. But where was the festival-vendors, clothing, interactive booths, and live bands? We checked in and quickly found out the finish line and transition area was the festival. With only 125 international competitors this race couldn’t have been profitable. (One little note-Charleston races are always packed and the directors do a great job, keep up the attendance and if major venues come to Charleston let’s come out in big #'s.)

After eating at Olive Garden and watching T3 with Arnold, we returned to the room. Instead of laying awake in bed from 9:40 pm to 12:15 am, I should have been thinking about taping my helmet that night-wouldn’t stick after the rain-which took me about 20 minutes before the race to find tape or maybe I should have thinking about thanking the exceptional volunteer who put a bike plug on my L handlebar-stopping me from immediate DQ. After a quick walk to the gas station at 12:30 am to get a sleep aid, which I forgot, I finally dozed off.

Okay, I think you get the point, enough about all my mistakes-let’s get to the race. We woke at 5 am and looked outside to see the bottom dropping out of the sky. I pulled the Jeep under the shed at the hotel and we packed our race gear and bikes. As soon as we got to the race site, the rain stopped. This was a sign, good things are going to start to happen! We got body marked and hung out in the car until about 6:25 am. I took my bike out for a trial spin because once you racked you bike you could not remove it from the transition area. After a quick run, I hit the porta potty and Doug and I headed to the swim start.

The swim sprint start was 20 minutes late, which didn’t help with my anxiety of swimming a mile w/o my wetsuit-the temp was “81”. Finally, the three waves of the sprint were gone and I could take to the H20. I got in and warmed up for about 10 minutes with the rest of the 39 and under competitors. The start was 15 minutes after the last sprint. I sit in the water, teeth chattering, begging for the horn to go off, just to start racing. It was a long 5 minutes-(I think it was a toe test that determined the 81 degrees.) Finally the horn blew and I was swimming. The swim seemed longer than the 1.5K more like 1.15/1.25miles, but it could have

been just been me. I exited the water, as Logan described, in the front of the second pack. I immediately knew I was off my time goal by about seven minutes, but I was finally racing, so who cares!

I transitioned, mounted my bike was up the hill, over the speed bumps, out of the park and on the open road. I flew by several bikes and felt great. I made it to the sprint turnaround and was gaining ground and still passing others on downhill and uphill stretches. My nutrition plan was to drink a good bit accelerade mix at the beginning of the bike, which I was doing, and drink water out of my aero bottle. I keep telling myself-if you get thirsty, it's too late. I picked up a water bottle at mile 10 and emptied it in my now empty aero bottle. At mile 15, I stayed on course and had a Hammer gel shot. A couple miles before the next water spot at an intersection, a volunteer said "be careful the road is rough for the next couple of miles." He was not lying. I became cautious and slowed down my pace going downhill because I feared hitting one of the giant potholes and being thrown over my handlebars. My Cat Eye became dislodged from one of the holes I slammed into earlier and I had no clue on my speed from this point on. I took water at the next spot and was ready to get back to the park.

Throughout the bike race, motorcycles came flying by with referees dying to give time penalties for drafting. Our masters swim coach, Brian Ramsey, had already warned us about the fine happy referees. My time is slow enough, no way this was going to happen to me! Completely clueless on where I was, I finally hit the main road and headed down Mt. Gallant road towards the park. I tried to pick the pace back up, but w/o a computer who knows what my pace was. Coming back into the park, I stood on my speed play pedals and stretched my legs-still feeling good.

I came screaming into the dismount area almost running the volunteer over. Doug, and I bet almost every racer, said he did the same thing. I quickly transitioned, putting on socks-I learned from two week blisters on my feet from New Wave, grabbed my race belt, hat, flask of Hammer Gel and took off through the run start and up the hill towards Lake Wylie road and the two loop 6.2 mile run. I started to feel my legs, but then I heard "that was Kevin Branche looking good" from the race announcer and I immediately felt superhuman and picked up the pace passing cheering spectators.

The race director, Fred Sommers, said they took it easy on the bike course-still questionable-but he described the run as a roller coaster. That was an understatement because never was there a flat area on the run course. I made it on Lake Wylie and got some sweet revenge by passing the 46 yr old man that passed me on his Litespeed with about 2 miles left on the bike. I gently said "looking good Litespeed" as my 33 yr old legs zipped by him. About this time, the familiar face of Gregg Crommer(1<sup>st</sup> place in our age group- He's Da Man), lapped me and told me "looking good Kevin." **What comes around goes around!**

Later, I saw Doug and he looked fresh as always, being a marathoner, with a huge smile on his face. I shouted "slow down man I can't have you lap me." I felt great on the run and stuck to my nutrition plan of taking a shot of gel every 2 miles. I completed the two lap course and figured out on the second lap that the faster you go downhill the faster you will go uphill (DUH!).

The highlight of the day came when I came sprinting through the racks down the finish line chute and the race announcer said over the loud speaker "that's Kevin Branche from Charleston SC, he still has a lot of juice in those legs, great effort. These folks train hard to compete this distance." **Pretty Awesome!**

I didn't make my 2:30 time goal, but 2:43:10 at Rocky Hill was still under the 2:45 range that I said I could live with before the race. I lost the time on the swim, which is par for the course. Masters swim class is helping, but I am still too slow in the water. On Monday am, I went to class and told Brian "you got to make me faster, man." I didn't mean that day, but he punished Doug and I with a 3200 meter sprint interval workout. By the way, Doug did great placing 4<sup>th</sup> in the over the hill age group (no offense to any other over 40 competitor besides

Doug)! I will keep training and have learned my lesson of not taking two months off from swimming. This year is year round swimming.

I had a great time and am looking forward to competing in another one of Fred's races, The Great Floridian ½ (very hilly) and will do Tri-America next year if it gets close to SC. Very organized, strict rules, and I got a medal for finishing and even got a plaque in my age group-they went 10 deep (very generous).

The reason I went into such detail about all my bonehead mistakes is that if one person doesn't make one of those mistakes, this race report was worth the time.