

White Lake Half Ironman 5/10/2003

The morning started with the very unpopular announcement that the water temperature was a warm 79 degrees, making the use of wetsuits illegal according to USAT rules. Many people still decided to wear their wetsuits, giving up all thoughts of any age group awards or North Carolina Triathlon Series points. I decided not to wear my wetsuit, although I am not a strong swimmer, I was reluctant to throw out my chances of winning an age group award so early in the day. The talk in the transition area before the start of the race hinged upon how hot and humid the weather would turn out to be that day. I had my nutritional game plan down, was well tapered, and ready to race. I was preparing to settle in for a long day of between four and a half and five hours of racing. My plan was to get out on the bike and drink one water bottle of Accelerade before the first of three water bottle handoffs on the bike. I also had a flask of PowerGel attached to my top tube and a Clif Bar in my tri singlet side pocket. My bike was outfitted with two bottles of Accelerade and another bottle of water between my aero bars. If all went well, I would get another bottle of water at each hand off and refill the water bottle between the aero bars. I would start to consume PowerGel about forty minutes into the ride, and devour the Clif Bar around mile 50. After the bike, I had another PowerGel flask I would take on the run.

The swim went very well. I left in the second wave, four minutes behind the elite men, elite women, and the elite masters. Surprisingly, I found myself passing some of the slower swimmers who left in the wave ahead of me. I felt great in the water and although the swim was 1.2 miles long, you could see the bottom during the entire swim. The deepest part of the lake was only about nine feet deep. This felt strange for an open water swim. Although the water was warm, it sure only felt like about 77 degrees! I exited the water in a time of 36:22. There was a long run to the transition area, but I felt great and ready to ride. The transition went smooth with the exception of putting on a tight fitting tri singlet over a wet body. I put on my bike shoes, helmet, and sunglasses and headed out on the bike. During the short run with my bike to the mount/dismount point, my Clif Bar jumped out of my side pocket and was left in the transition area.

I mounted my bike with grace and style and was off onto the bike course. The 56-mile ride was on relatively flat terrain and we had a slight crosswind for the first 34 miles. The bike course was a large loop with a detour down a street ending in a cul-de-sac for the last water bottle hand off. I was cruising on the bike and passing several people who started in the wave ahead of me. I only passed about two people in my age group. Luckily, Set-Up Inc. writes your age on your right calf. This makes it easy to spot competitors in your age group, as well as potential dates for single folks. The bike was fast and furious and my average speed at mile 34 was 23.6 mph. Then I made the final right hand turn heading back towards White Lake. If the bumpy road was not enough to diminish hopes of a new bike PR, the 20 mph headwind sure was. My pace slowed immediately from 24 mph to a startling 19 mph. Just when I thought it couldn't get any worse, I passed my first road sign, "White Lake 19 miles", and that did not include the detour down the cul-de-sac. I pressed on and must have been maintaining a decent pace because I was still passing people, and I had not been passed yet. I picked up a water

bottle at each of the three hand offs, and still ran out of water with five miles to go. It was extremely hot and humid during the ride. My legs were hurting from the hard effort on the bike and I was ready to run. Finally, after cursing at the wind for the last 22 miles, the transition area was in sight. I dismounted my bike and proceeded to my spot in the transition. I racked my bike, changed shoes, and took off my helmet. Grabbed my race number and headed out onto the run course.

As I was leaving the transition area, there was an aid station right outside the transition. I stopped and drank several cups of water and took off running. My legs felt very tired for the first mile and a half, but they finally began to loosen up. I was running comfortably for the next 4 miles or so. The run course was an out and back loop, which was to be completed twice. The first loop went very well. The second loop however, I was starting to fatigue. My lack of long run training due to injury began to show. At this point, I also realized I had made a major error. I decided not to take the extra time to put on a pair of socks for the run. My feet began to blister and by now they were hurting very bad. So bad in fact, that the pain in my legs was no longer a factor. This was also the first race I had done which used the ChampionChip timing system. The plastic hospital like band used to strap the chip to my ankle was now becoming a nuisance and creating some wounds of its own. I ran from aid station to aid station and drank all I could. Despite being tired and running very slow, no one was passing me. This was perhaps the one thing keeping me thinking positive and forcing me to continue my forward progress. I could finally see the point where others were starting their second loop and I would be able to go straight on to the finish. Despite a large painful cramp forming in my right calf, I ran as best I could to the finish line. I crossed the line in 5:09:21. Forty minutes and seven seconds slower than my Half IM PR. I was disappointed, but not for long. When the results were posted, my finish time was good enough for 26th overall and 3rd in my age group. Although it was slower than I would have liked, it appeared that everyone would suffer in the heat on this day. Time to shower and EAT!!!!!!

All in all, the White Lake half IM is a great course. I really like the course and was only dissatisfied with a few post race items. First of all, I have seen more free food after sprint triathlons. They had people catering food, but the only item offered free of charge was red beans and rice. Not one of my personal favorites. Planet Smoothie was offering one free smoothie to competitors. They did provide plenty of water, sodas, bananas, Oreos, and other cookies after the race. There was also a bathhouse with showers available. However, unless you were a guest staying at the FFA center, you were not allowed to use the bathhouse. I proceeded to the lake with my soap and shampoo. I felt like unless they had rooms available for all the 600 competitors, they could at least let athletes use the bathhouse facilities after the race. Try explaining that to the guard monitoring the bathhouse door. I was too tired to argue after completing the race. I will still be going back next year.