

IRONMAN FRANCE- NICE 19TH JUNE 2005.

3.8k swim, 180k bike, 42.2k run.

Introduction to my Report.

I have included this section within my report to help you understand how it has been written, why it was written and any other information that will help you understand some of the comments.

You may note that I try to write with my heart to enable the reader to understand my thoughts and feelings at the time. I have to admit that writing this report is hard-work due to the emotions felt. The last report I did was comical in places, and I tried to inject a little humour (well I thought so!). I make no apologies that this report is very serious, very emotional and heart felt.

The motivation

I have a list of things I want to do unwritten in my head. One of which was an Ironman Triathlon. The distances involved just blew my mind, and for a recent non-sporting background, I decided it would be the ultimate goal for me.

My next race report will be as a full Ironman. I have no doubts. I have no fears.

Nice, France, 19th June, 2005 is the venue and date.

The comments above were in my last report and summed up the motivation behind my entry to IRONMAN FRANCE 2005.

IRONMAN RACE.

I decided I would enter the Ironman race in France as it was a place that my family and I could get too easily. It was to be held in Nice, which is a fantastic place to get to and stay in. My coach Richard was also entering the race which would help with training, and I do actually like France.

Nice had held a classic Long Distance event for a long number of years, and was renowned as one of the hardest bike rides in any Triathlon event. As I may only ever do one Ironman event in my life, I decided I may as well make it as hard as possible (fool!).

The training.

Richard and I devised a training plan that would focus completely on the course at Nice. Any events I raced prior to Ironman (IM) would also be focused on practising for the day itself.

There are a number of things to consider for a long distance endurance triathlon, and all of these needed to be included in my training: - Strength, technique, endurance, feeding, hydration, and the mental aspect as well.

I decided to do the majority of my long distance cycling in France. This may seem extravagant, but with a coach based there and Ryanair offering low fares I had to take advantage of the Pyrenees and the good weather. Nice has over 1600mts of ascending to complete, so my training needed to focus on this part.

I was using a periodisation training plan that started by building my technique from about November 2004, went into endurance over the early months of 2005, then into race speeds, followed by endurance at race speed (between 15-20hours training per week) and finally tapering 5 weeks out from the event.

As the IM event would take me between 12-14hours, my heart rate would be low on the day, and I needed to build my leg strength to compensate for this on the bike. I got to the stage of riding at around about 15-20beats lower than I had ridden before but without losing any speed. My target heart rate was still to be determined for the race as we got closer to June.

The best decision in my race preparation was to go to Nice prior to the event and ride the full course. I needed to see whether the gearing on my bike was low enough, and I did not want any shocks on the day. I am so glad we made this decision. The course was very hilly with

a 25km continuous climb at one point, but the gradients were not as hard as I had expected. This helped with my mental preparation as I now knew how hard to race, how hard it would be, and also how I needed to pace myself.

Prior to the race I went on the TRI-PRESTON training weekend in the South lakes. This included lots of open-water swim sessions, some running and a great bike ride. I noticed quite quickly that my heart rate would be well over my target, but I needed to know how strong I was. I rode with the fast group who were definitely trying to drop any weak members of the group. But I kept up, and even started to drop other riders. I struggled on Kirkstone pass, but mainly due to the low heart rate I had trained at for 8months. But what inspired me most was how strong I was at the end. A great number of Tri-Preston were much faster than me, but after 50miles I came into my own and was able to stay with 3 of the strongest riders (I was riding nearly flat out though, and I don't think they were). I felt great after this.

In May I raced an Olympic distance race in the South of France (1.5k swim, 42k bike, 10k run). This event was ideal as it had a steep climb on the bike course (done twice), and the run was very undulating so would replicate the pain I knew I would feel in Nice. I loved this event. I did not have the top end speed, and my swimming was actually slower than before, but I went harder than I should and still managed one of the fastest 10ks I have ever done. My strength on the bike really pleased me, and showed that the training had been perfect. I was ready, I felt good, and I had taught myself to get about 2500 calories in whilst riding long. Bring it on!

Now I started to taper for the race. This meant that I eased off on the distances, but upped the effort for 3 weeks, then with 2 weeks to go I eased off on everything. I went to Nice about 4 days prior to the race to be able to really relax and enjoy the build up without stressing.

Race.

Psychology

This section is here because I will refer to it in the race description below. With one week to go to the race I decided to look at info on t'internet regarding "The Psychology behind Ironman". Most of the information I found was from American sites, and I thought at the time how "Americanised" it was. Rubbish I thought! How wrong can you be?

The other information I found regarded "pacing". This was great advice. I will refer to this again in the report below. If you are ever going to consider a long distance event of any type, this information is invaluable.

THE DAY BEFORE THE RACE WE HAD TO "RACK" OUR BIKES IN THE TRANSITION AREA. THE TEMPERATURE SHOWN ON MY ON-BIKE COMPUTER WAS 102⁰!! BEAR THIS IN MIND WHEN READING BELOW.

The emotion starts here!!!!!!

Swim 3.8k.

The swim was held in the Nice bay. The swim was to start at 630am, and we had been awake for hours to try and get fuel on board. Now I stood on the cobbled beach with 1400 other competitors. It already felt hot. There was a carnival atmosphere, added too by the TV crews and massive crowds. I remember standing on the beach looking left and right at other competitors whilst the speakers blasted out U2s "Beautiful Day". That feeling will be with me for ever. It feels like a dream. I can hear my heart beating inside my head. I am totally focused and as ready as I will ever be. You can only work with the tools you have on the day. I knew that and I knew I would finish this race. The Hooter

blew. The site of 1400 people getting into the swim together can not be described in words. I felt so proud of myself and the effort I had put in. Let me at it!

The swim was 2 laps with a beach run in between. I had already decided I would swim easy because 10mins lost here would not affect my finish position but going too hard may affect whether I finished or not! I swam the first lap, and would reminisce later that I never actually felt relaxed or strong. I had definitely not done anywhere near enough swimming in my training! But I was never worried about it either. After the first lap I exited the water to walk around the stand. The crowd was massive, and the atmosphere electric. I think I even smiled at this point.

On lap 2 I noticed how weak and tired I felt. I knew I should have done more long distance swims, but the water was really warm too, wearing a wet-suit is not ideal. I finished the swim in 1 hour 16mins 37 sec which was about 6 mins slower than I expected. I was still not worried though.

Bike: 180k.

The pacing strategy I had read and decided upon was a slow build-up strategy. It worked like this: - Break the whole bike (and run) into manageable chunks. Only focus on that part of the race. Then focus on the next "chunk". I had decided to ride the first 30miles easy working out my feeding and hydration strategy, 30 to 60miles would be where I would determine my race pace, 60 to 90 would have an higher heart rate and 90miles to the end (112miles) would be dependant on feel. My goal was to finish the ride feeling like I could have gone 30mins faster. That would set me up for the run.

As soon as we started the ride I noticed how hot it was, and decided my race time today was irrelevant. I did not check my computer as I was only focused on my heart rate. My heart rate was at about 120-130bpm (very easy), but I was being overtaken by loads of people. I knew that my strongest discipline is the actual pacing. I always finish stronger than I start. So I presumed I had got it wrong, or more likely, they had all gone too fast. With a long distance event you have a plan and you stick to it. I did. The people going passed included riders I just KNEW where not as strong as me. I could tell by their technique.

I also knew that if I went too slowly for 30miles or even 80miles I could speed up at the end. I told myself "let them go, it's a long day and we have a run after this". Within 40miles I knew I had got the pacing right. I started to overtake athletes that had flown passed me after 5ks. We were now on the 25k climb, and my strength was paying off. My heart rate was still only at 140bpm max. I was controlling myself, and my pace. One English guy who had flown passed me was now picked off at ease, I exchanged some words of encouragement, and he then accelerated again. Around the next corner I again overtook him, he could not even talk. He was never seen again.

The ride was so hot. When descending (which I do very well and fast) there was no breeze. The air blowing in your face at speed was like a hairdryer (at the Windsor triathlon on the same day, 20 athletes ended up in hospital due to de-hydration). This was what dictated my race pace. I went easy as I knew it was going to be a killer.

On a long distance bike ride (or any event actually) you have what I describe as peaks and troughs. You go through low points where you feel rough. You teach yourself to ride/run through them, because just round the corner is a high (well, not as low) point. I have trained against this so did not worry when I went low after 55miles. What did surprise me was how difficult it was to get out of this low. I never actually felt "good" for the rest of the ride. There were numerous people abandoned at the side of the road, people asleep as their bodies just shut-down. But I was focused and it never once worried me.

I overtook most of my athletes on descents. I was never overtaken once and really enjoyed this part. The training in the Pyrenees had paid off!

The feeding and hydration is obviously the key to these events, and I ate every 20mins, drank every 15mins and collected loads of standard water on the circuit. I drank an electrolyte drink I had used in all my training and had encountered no problems with. This made sure I had no sodium shortages through taking on board too much fluid.

Towards the end of the bike there was a nice flat section of about 10km. I got on to my tri-bars and just pushed with a strong pedal technique. Here I felt good and strong, but I was on auto-pilot. I overtook about 15/20 people on this section and it motivated me to keep on pushing to the end.

I can honestly say I never actually enjoyed the bike section. I usually do, and I had hoped to ride strong but to smile as well, it was just too hot to enjoy and my training and endurance got me round. I finished the bike in 6;48;25 and I did not care about the time.

My average heart rate was 138bpm, which was 7 or 8 below my target and I know I could have gone 30mins faster, but how would that have affected my run?

WHEN I FINISHED THE RACE I CHECKED MY COMPUTER. THE MAXIMUM TEMPERATURE ON THE BIKE WAS 111°! THE AVERAGE FROM 6AM THAT MORNING HAD BEEN 88°!

Run: 42.2k. YOUR BODY WILL GO MUCH FURTHER THAN YOUR MIND.

My training planned by Richard had involved loads of bike-run sessions. I would ride a 75-90mile bike quite hard, then jump off and run 8-12 miles. This was the most valuable training I had ever done.

I started the run feeling good. I had loads of sun-cream applied by the helpers before I started, and I set off feeling ok. My legs were sore, but I have had them feel worse. The run was a 4 lap affair, straight down the Promenade des Anglais and back again (8 lengths) I used these lengths as my "chunks" to start. There were two feed stations on the run, but passed in each direction thus offering four chances to feed. I also had gels in my pocket. My target heart rate was 155bpm. I set off at about 156-160, but felt ok at that and as though I could go all day.

The first lap went well. I ate a gel and drank some energy drink at each station. I ran the whole lap and never once walked. I think this was where I had problems. I felt better than I had on the bike, and was glad to be running. I now think this made me run harder (only very slightly) than I should have done. When your body is stressed trying to keep you cool, trying to make your legs move, and just running it decides that it cannot use extra energy to digest food.

Because I ran about 5 beats higher on the first lap than I should, my body stopped digesting food. I got real bad stomach cramp. But the brain is a strange thing. I actually had to stop to physically throw up. I was sick at the side of the road for about 1min. then I stood up, wiped my mouth and carried on running!! Amazing.

On the next 2 laps this happened 2 more times and I visited the toilet 3 times also. My stomach was in bits.

This was where my American Psychology helped. I had read that you start to have conversations with yourself when you are on the run. I did! I was convinced that my stubbornness would make me finish. That thinking to myself "I will finish, I will not be beaten" would be enough. I was wrong. I really started to question my motivation behind this stupid event. If I gave up, who would care? Actually I was never going to give up, but I knew I could walk a lap with dignity, which was something I did not want to do when I started. If I walked once, I would have lost my incentive not to walk. I would have walked to nearly the end (loads did), does this make sense? My mind

started to answer the questions I had asked "you have sacrificed so much to train for this event; you have missed friends, family, beer, nights out (even pork pies! What?) and loads of sleep for this. That's why you must carry on". It helped me continue. But the key was something I worked out for myself during lap 2. **YOUR BODY CAN GO MUCH FURTHER THAN YOUR MIND!** I even worked it out. If you did not eat for 7 days you will live but your mind starts to crave food every 4 to 5 hours.

Half way round lap 3 I started to break the run into smaller chunks. I ran from one feed station to the next, walked through it whilst drinking 2 glasses coke (watered down) poured 2 glasses of, now warm, water over my head and then ran on. Repeat.

This breakdown worked. I started to speed up. I felt strong again. My body was no longer trying to digest food as I was not eating. The coke gave me an instant spike in energy.

At the same time I started to overtake runners with the same wrist bands on as myself. You are given a different coloured wristband at the end of each lap. I focused on one individual and my leg speed. Overtake, and repeat. Focus on my technique. Only 5km to go, lets speed up slightly. Feeling good and strong. Can't feel any pain now.

500mts to the finish. I had run the whole marathon. I crossed the line and just felt numb. I felt relief and a great sense of achievement, but did not feel elated. My run time was 4:41:58, giving an overall time for **IRONMAN FRANCE 2005 of 12hours 47mins.**

I can honestly say that I did not enjoy the race. It was hot, and even though I expected it to be hard, I was amazed at how hard it was. A guy who had done Lanzarote Ironman the year before (advertised as the hardest Ironman) in 12hrs30 actually finished this event in over 13hours 45mins. It was a killer, but I know they can only get easier.

Conclusion.

The next day I was over the moon. 1400 people started the triathlon but over 300 dropped out. I had finished, I felt ok at the end even though the medical tent had numerous people on drips.

The mental side was much harder than I expected, and I know I would have finished but my extra mental strength saved me at least an hour on the run. The pacing was crucial, I got the bike perfect for my first IM in such heat. I know I can do one of these in under 12hours now. I wish I had run easier on the first lap and speeded up as I had on the bike, but I have something to improve on if I ever do another event.

I cannot explain in writing the sense of achievement I feel. I feel so proud of myself. You may even call it arrogance. I don't care. At the end of 2000 I struggled to run 3 miles or ride 15miles. Now I had done the unimaginable to me- swum 3.8k, rode 180k, and run 42.2k in temperatures up to 111°.

There is one thing I have to bear in mind after this event. I have to keep reminding myself after 6 weeks of inactivity. I have lost my focus, and my motivation. But I am, and always will be, **an IRONMAN!!!!!!!!!!**

*Thanks once again to Richard my coach and his family, Mark and Ian who have trained with me. And to Mark and Leigh Ann for visiting Nice to watch the event. But mainly thanks to **me** for been so determined, so focused and so intense. I apologise to all the people I ignored in this period.*

Greg Parkin



SUNDAY SEPT 18TH

5.30 AM FROM HEBDEN BRIDGE
CO-OP CAR PARK

APPROX 25 MILES

SIX TRIGS - Sun Sep 18th

This autumn's chance to undertake the Six Trigs (Hebden Bridge-Hebden Bridge via Hoof Stones Height, Boulsworth summit and High Brown Knoll) is on Sunday Sep 16th. About 25 miles (but who really knows or cares?) This year's run guaranteed pleurisy-free. An early start: 5.30am at the HB Co-op carpark, to allow for a little gentle limbering up before dawn breaks (the sun should come up somewhere around the Bride Stones). Late breakfasts available afterwards at Andrew Bibby's, who can also give more details to any 6 Trig neophytes out there thinking of giving it a go (01422 844026).

Commemorative teatowels unfortunately out of stock this year.