

The day starts at 3am, the alarm ringing in my ears. It only seems like moments before I fell a sleep. Zombie like I roll out of bed and begin to get ready, checking to make sure I haven't missed anything. Over and over again I go through the routine what comes next begins to be a natural reaction. My breakfast today is a little depleted compared to previous days. A cup of tea, and half a loaf nicely toasted and smeared with jam, it's only half a loaf because I've run out of jam.

It's 3:30, and I decide to go to the car, still holding my toast and now drinking some generic carbo/electrolite drink that I had made up the night before. At a previous race I had lost copious amounts of salt and struggled towards the end of the run, this time I had added salt sachets to my drinks as recommended. Normally a sickly syrup, today the taste was neutralised but still with a kick, just what you require in the early hours before a race. The 30-minute drive to the competition was over quickly, and I soon became aware that I was one of only a few people there for transition opening. Normally I'm there early to set up, panic, check and tinker; today I was there to just panic. Having checked and re-checked a thousand times, the hustle of transition picked up and became a hive of activity with every one checking, re-checking and checking once again for luck.



I was luck to be in transition next to John Wagg, 82 times this man has done this routine. Calmly looking over everything, he looked at me and said "don't worry it'll start soon and be over before you know it". He was right. 30 minutes later I would be entering the water to begin the first 200m swim to the start. I was aiming to stay out of trouble on the swim and start near the back, following my usual routine I would pick of the weaker ones and slowly move my way through the pack, like a cheater out on the hunt. In the hustle and bustle I soon found my self too close to the front. It was going to be make or break time, go for it or drown.

After the oggy, oggy oggy calls, a real buzz of anticipation fell over start. The pros were bobbing nervously in front of me. The clack son rang off in my ears, the white water frothed in front of me like a motorboat engine. With elbows sharpened, I swam keeping a tight inside line, staying on the toes of faster swimmers; until they flagged then I would move over to draft another. Time seemed to stand still on that first outward leg. On every buoy, I kicked for a few strokes then settled back into a steady bi-lateral rhythm. At the turn the hustle and bustle returned as everyone bottle necked. Staying strong and confident that I belonged at the front, (by that I mean first 100) I plugged on picking of more people to draft. This must have been the first time I was confident during a swim. Coming into the last 200m I began to kick, giving life back into my lifeless legs, that moment of panic was coming up, was I going to cramp on the exit in front of every one. Reaching the edge of the lake in 1:00:39, I was hauled out with such force that the momentum carried me through to T1. No cramp!



Straight into T1, blue bag-collected, wetsuit off; helmet on, bag dropped and on to the bike. The transition was a blur to me something I wasn't expecting. Including the 300m run my time was under 5 minutes. Of on the bike, a wave of applause exploding around me, I leave the castle grounds hoping to return in 6 hours time. Everyone I spoke to about this course said the hills were the breaking point.

I'm a local that has cycled these hills many times; they were not going to break me today. The leg to Dorchester is a fast down hill, once you've got up and over Lions Gate. In the smallest of my compact rings, I climbed like a champion, reaching the top in smug mode, 1 hill concurred and tamed. Cruising into Dorchester, everyone passing me that I had passed on the way up the hill. The second of the feed stations just before the turn back, stocking up on everything I could get my hands on. I turned and began the long climb back to Sherborne.

At the foot of the hill all you can see is two miles of single file riders, rocking side to side trying everything in an attempt to move up this monument. Once again, I switch to smug mode and leave many riders behind, using the compact. After the climbs there is a moment of madness a 1:14 decent, with the top riders hitting 55mph. Climbing like a champion, is what I can do. However I descend like a girl. 30mph, brakes smoking, riders passing me so fast I'm beginning to wonder if I'm riding up the hill. Once you go down the only way is back up, climbing back up to Sherborne. The streets and villages lined with spectators, cheering everyone on. Coming to the start of the second lap, I noticed that in 2 hours of riding I had not been passed by a single female rider, was I really that good? Hell no! Within 30 secs of beginning the first descent back to Dorchester I had been passed by no fewer than 5. At least I had managed to hold them off for 1 lap. The second lap began as a blur, legs revolving at a casual 95-100. It turned into a nice ride, I decided that I would enjoy today and take in everything I had missed whilst living in the area. Waving to the Giant, stopping for chats at feed stations. I began to thrive on the experience. Unfortunately, during one of my chats I forgot to actually stock up and during the final 10 miles of the lap, I really struggled. Only the crowds' enthusiasm propelled me onto lap 3, at this point I really wanted to give up and accept that I was not ready. I however turned on to lap 3 and stocked up at the first available station. This lap was going to hurt me if I continued to miss feeding times. Matt's advice those many months ago began to hit home. I had paid attention for the first half of the race. Lost concentration for about an hour the last 2 hours was where I needed to make it back. Feeding at every station, filling bottles and gorging on everything available. I made it to the turn of to Sherborne and descend with some commitment to the castle. You really know you're tired when you go to dismount your bike and can't get your legs to move. I however jumped from the bike in a flying dismount, which allowed me to pass the congested dismount line in a blur and into T2. Having ridden for 6:38:49, you could have forgiven me for a slow transition. Adrenalin pumping, socks changed and trainers on, I was away in 2:34.





Running seemed so easy, and at the feed stations I decided to walk through and have a few snacks. If I had to eat another banana, power bar or gel I would have been ill. It was time to start the party early, pretzels and coke. I would run to every station walk through eating and run on. Covering 6 miles an hour had been the goal, but this was going to bite me in the ass, literally. I had consumed enough powerbars and gels on the run to stock a shop. Now they were angry, and getting angrier with every stride. I had to find a toilet. At every station I stopped, opened the doors to hell. There are certain things I will do, but using a dirty toilet is not one of them. Continuing on, I was just short of leaving the castle when I found the only clean toilet left on the course (with toilet roll). After about 5 minutes of gassing, I began to run again maintaining my pace until I had caught up with my marker man at the half waypoint. The last 13 miles were covered cautiously, time slipped away at every mile marker, and at the 15 mile point came the boost required. The army were helping out at the feed station, well the jibes started "RAF you've crashed and burned", having refuelled, continuing onwards returning an hour later to "You're flying now RAF" and a Dambuster chorus, how bloody original. It was however nice to be recognised. My friends and family were watching had had yet not recognised me until I had gone over to them and waved. The last miles I floated in to the castle, giving a cheeky wave and winning smile to a young lady watching with her parents, which disapproving looked at her and said "I saw that young lady" I replied quickly with "I saw you checking me out Mum" which then sparked of the dad "I can't take you 2 anywhere". Coming into the castle grounds, the crowds roar lifting me higher and higher. Legs, turning quicker and quicker. I crossed the line without savouring the experience in 4:47:13. My day had lasted 12:34:03 and I had finished under 4 hours behind the winner and some 563 places back.





I set myself some targets before the race,

- a. 1 hr Swim
- b. Not to be over taken by a girl until I had covered 1/3rd of the bike
- c. Not to be lapped by a Pro
- d. Ride the bike in approx 6hrs
- e. Run a constant marathon in 4hrs.

This race is great; one I will return to and put some ghosts to rest. Everyone looks back and says they could have gone quicker and then comes out with an excuse. I will instead look forward and say next time I will go quicker. I will go under 11 hours one day.

The Ironman dream has ended this year, and will not resurface again for a while. The next step is the World Long Course in Canberra, Aus. Keep looking over your shoulders boys, I catching up

Mike Masters