

Ironman Wisconsin

Madison, WI

2.4 mile swim, 112 mile bike, 26.2 mile run

September 10, 2006

Reported by Lauren Jensen, *Team Sport Beans/NTTC*

If there is one thing that is consistent about Ironman Wisconsin, it is that it is a race of extremes. Last year was extremely hot and humid, while this year was extremely wet and cold. I guess all of those "heat training" sessions where I sat in the sauna to prepare for the heat were no better than a great opportunity to catch up on some reading.

Race morning started off brisk and it never really climbed much out of the low 50s all day. Rain began before the 6:50 a.m. start for the pros and continued most of the day. Having lived in Illinois and Wisconsin all of my life, the harsh conditions did not daunt me. I was physically and mentally prepared for an arduous day.

I was happy with my fast swim start for about 50 meters. Then I was repeatedly pummeled by a group of pro men who must have thought that we were doing a short, fast ITU race instead of an Ironman. On the fifth beating I had the wind knocked out of me so badly I had to swim to the right of the entire pack to regain composure and breathe. Fortunately I caught back up to a decent group about a half-mile in and even found a male pro to draft who was swimming steady and straight. Yeah!!

On lap two, we started passing some slower swimmers, which made it much like navigating a slalom course. It definitely added some extra yardage and that, coupled with the choppy waves, made it a slow swim this year. Turning the final big turn buoy to shore, one of the male pros (still swimming ITU style) shoved me under with one hand while he shoved an age grouper under with another body part. I drank my share of Lake Monona at that point. Who said that you couldn't hydrate on the swim? The 57:35 swim was very slow for where my fitness was, a theme that would dominate all day.

I reached the shore tied for third with Katja Schumacher from Germany. I had a steady transition and took the time to put on two shirts over my swimsuit since it was cold and starting to rain harder. In retrospect, I should have put on more since the day never got as warm as predicted and having the wet swimsuit next to my skin all day set me up for early trouble with hypothermia. I felt good the first hour on the bike and after that I got progressively colder. My legs would not respond no matter what positive thoughts my brain sent to them. Although I stayed in 4th place the entire ride, I was losing time to the leaders. It was frustrating because I knew I was fit enough this year to bike much faster.

Fortunately, I am an eternal optimist and pretty darn tough when it comes to racing. I threw my nutrition plan out the window and started eating more calories in search of energy. Although my legs got progressively tighter, eating more helped me work my way out of a moderate "bonk" I was having. I found myself with more energy than I had in hours by mile 90. I stopped losing time to Katja Schumacher and Hillary Biscay and actually started taking time back from Andrea Fisher. I dismounted by bike about 12-13 minutes out of the lead but only 3 minutes behind Andrea.

It stopped raining near the end of the bike so I took off my drenched clothing and was back in my swimsuit for the run. I realized this was a mistake pretty early in the run since it quickly started raining again and continued the rest of the day. My legs were stiff and non-responsive from the start of the run. Somehow I stayed positive, ignoring how cold I really was. Doing simple things like trying to get food out of my fanny pack was challenging. (Hmmm... a normal person would have gotten a clue by now.)

The first 13.1-mile lap of the run was steady at a fairly low heart rate as planned. I passed Andrea

around mile 10 who looked like she was in her own world of cold. I came through the turn around point in just under 1 hour, 45 minutes as planned. My heart rate was lower than it had ever been on an Ironman run, so I was looking forward to executing my plan of picking it up slowly over the second half of the run.

However, my body temperature was in the low 90s by now. So, I guess my body had other plans for me and started putting increasingly more energy into staying warm. My heart rate kept drifting down to the point where it was 20 bpm below where I would normally do an Ironman run. Plus, all the fluid I was taking in was being diverted outside of my cells. At this point, I had several pounds of extra fluid all in my legs making me look like the Stay Puff Marshmallow Man. My body was definitely freaking out.

Did I quit? Of course not. I came up with a hypothermia-induced plan, which seemed to make perfect sense at the time. I started walking through the aid stations and getting as much hot broth as I could. I would sip a little then dump the rest of the cups on my head. It helped. After each aid station my heart rate would come up 5+ beats and I would run better for a few minutes until the warmth wore off and I was back in survival mode. Oddly through all this I never had negative thoughts. I know that when Ironman racing gets tough, it is usually hard for everyone. So, you just have to keep moving.

The crowds also helped. After all, they were out there enduring the rain too. Most helpful was my husband Todd who kept leap-frogging ahead on his bike to encourage me. (He also tended to me in the med tent post race, where I was very hypothermic.) I saw so many others through the day that really helped me stay positive -- including my son David, my parents, Grandma, "Uncle Bill", the crew from The Bike Shop in Glen Ellyn, Heather Haviland, the Elmbrook Swim Club, the Knuths, the Boehmers and so many other friends. Thanks for being out there!!!

The final miles were bitterly cold but fun with the cheering crowds. I was so happy to see the finish and regretted that I was not steady enough on my feet to finish with David who wanted to "run" with me across the line. As it was, I barely held off fourth place finisher Paolina Allan who was charging hard on the marathon. Of course the competitive side of me was upset that I did not race as fast as my fitness level would allow. However, in that popsicle moment, I was happy just to finish and get some medical attention so I could start thawing out.

Stephanie Scott from Jelly Belly summed things up by asking, "So, you think this is FUN?" And, yes, in an odd way, I had a great time out there. I love triathlons because I want to answer the question, "how tough am I?" This was a day that could answer that kind of question.

I would like to congratulate everyone who endured on such a challenging day, both competitors and spectators. I would also like to extend a special thanks to all of my wonderful supporters. I could NOT do any of this without my family and friends. I also could not continue to pursue what I love without my amazing sponsors.

A BIG thanks goes to my coaches Fred Russell (swim), Todd Jensen (bike++), and Martha Grinnell (run) as well as my steady training partner, Brent Boock. Also, I am forever grateful to my amazing sponsors: Team Sports Beans (Jelly Belly)/NTTC (Stephanie and Mark), The Bike Shop in Glen Ellyn, IL (John, Rich, Chris, Drew, Susan, Anthony & crew), Chiropractic Associates (Dr. Mark & Kendra), New Balance (Jeff), Javelin Cycles (Dave, Jeanne, and Rob), Computrainer (Chuck and Tim), and Aquaman wetsuits (Emmanuel). As they said in the movie "Cars" - "No one is a one-man show". I could not have had such a successful season without your help, friendship & support!

(Pictured below: A happy, broth-covered, and very cold Lauren Jensen finishes the 2006 Ironman Wisconsin in 3rd place! Photo courtesy of www.asipho.com.)

