



The 2008 Ford Ironman World Championship – October 11th

This years Ironman was promoted with the slogan, “Swim 2.4 miles! Bike 112 miles! Run 26.2 miles! Brag for the rest of your life!” Only a mere 140.6 miles to cover in the allotted 17 hour time window...no problem, right?

Most everyone now has heard of the Ironman, but many may be less familiar with the history of the race. Being the 30th Anniversary of Ironman, the promotions team was very good at delivering the message of the origins of the race and how it has evolved over the past 30 years.

In 1977 to settle a lively discussion of the fittest athlete the idea was conceived to combine 3 separate events, start at 7 a.m., and the first one across the finish line will be called an Ironman. On February 18th, 1978 15 athletes began the challenge. One of these original athletes, 30 years after his 1st Ironman was at the start line Saturday morning for his 2nd Ironman!

It wasn't until after I had finished this years Ironman that I stumbled upon a local jewelry store that further emphasized the history of the race. They displayed every poster from the very first event through today. Each was autographed by the athletes, both pro and age group, that had competed that year. After watching the televised coverage of the race the past 14 years, it's easy to recognize the greats and pick out their signatures! If you ever visit Kona, I autographed the 30th Anniversary poster!



See all posters at: http://www.konainnjewelry.com/iron_man_posters.htm

Brian's Introduction to Triathlon:

It began for me in 1993, in an effort to improve my overall fitness; in the fall I purchased my first road bike, a used Cannondale. Living in Ohio it soon became too cold to ride so I ended up joining a gym to maintain my fitness. It so happened the gym had a pool so all the planets were beginning to align for me to discover the world of triathlon.

A funny story I like to share is my first swim at the gym. I had been around water all my life, but although I had the love for the water I was never a "swimmer". Over the Christmas holidays I invited my brother-in-law to my gym in hopes I could get a few swim basics swim techniques from him. What I didn't realize is that the gym had drained their pool for cleaning and had just refilled it, mind you it was winter in Ohio. Unknowingly I jumped into the indoor pool and swam 1 length (as fast as I could) and could not get out fast enough. I found out later the temperature was in the mid 50's.

Living in central Ohio the multi-sport scene was starting to boom. I filled out an application to race in a biathlon in the spring of 1993. Since I wasn't a swimmer this would be the perfect introduction to me in multi-sport events. A biathlon was only two events where you run, then bike, then run again. I finished my first race and placed quite well in my age group so started to think this might be the "thing" for me.

As it warmed up in central Ohio I raced a couple more biathlons before my first triathlon. Triathlon would replace what I had become familiar with, the first leg of the race of a run (which I was good at), with a swim (which I was a novice). I had spent time in the pool trying to prepare myself for the swim of a triathlon. There were many big differences between swimming in the pool where there is a painted line on the bottom of the pool and swimming in open water.

I even went as far to swim in Alum Creek, a local lake once or twice before my first triathlon. Still open water practice could not prepare me for the first time I would be starting a swim with a bunch of other swimmers all competing for the same space in the water. My first triathlon I think I was nearly the last one out of the water. Once the race started I began hyperventilating in the water and probably spent more time treading water than swimming. By my second triathlon that summer I began to get a better feel for the open water and nearly cut my first races swim time for the same distance in half!

Now still very much a novice in this sport I met someone that would influence and motivate me to take things to the next level. In a couple races I ended up being passed on the bike by a guy that was nearly my same age, as hard as I would try to keep up with him, I couldn't catch up with him until near the end of the final run leg. It so happened that after a couple races I recognized this same competitor during post race massage. We ended up getting tables side by side and I congratulated him for "crushing" me on the bike, ends up he recognized me and congratulated me for "crushing" him on the run.

The guy I met that day was John and would become one of my best friends. John invited me to join him on Tuesday nights where he rode “time trials” with an organization called COTT (Central Ohio Triathlon Team). The meeting place was only a couple miles from my home so was very convenient. The time trials format allowed for the slower bikers to start first and every 30 seconds a new biker would start that was little bit faster with the idea of trying to pass the cyclist in front of you and not be passed by the cyclist behind you. We did a 2-3 lap course depending on how far you wanted to ride, 18-27 miles. I showed up the next two weeks and participated, but there was no John. It wasn’t until later that summer I saw John again and shared with him that I started riding with his club and had began improving my cycling.

We began training together by riding together on the weekends and still I could not match his power on the bike. We had rolling hills on the routes we rode and he seemed to ride so smoothly and slowly I put together the pieces by learning there was more to just pedaling, there was a technique to shifting. Once I began to master the shifting on the hills I could finally keep up with John and actually for the first time started to push him on the bike. We worked well in pushing each other to become stronger and stronger.



Ironman Discovery:

It was one day after John and I had ridden together, we had started from his apartment he asked if I’d ever seen the Ironman. He had ordered the DVD coverage from previous year’s race and shared with me he often rode indoors when the weather was in climate, watching the past Ironman’s to stay motivated. I think we ordered Chinese and I watched the Ironman for the first time. I think I was hooked after that day and thought to myself, “I want to do that one day.”

My first year in triathlon I registered for the Muncie Endurathon which is the 70.3 half Ironman distance triathlon. This was my final race of the year and what I concentrated on the rest of the summer. The end of August I would go on to finish the Endurathon in 5 hours and 11 minutes. I figured if I could do this, maybe I could also finish a marathon, so registered for the Columbus Marathon which would be a few months later in November which I finished in 3 hours and 19 minutes.

Ok, now I proved to myself I could run the marathon, which was the 3rd leg of an Ironman, now it was just preparing to swim a little longer and bike over a century, all in one day! I hadn’t biked over 60 miles at one time before then discovered TOSRV which was an organized bike ride from Columbus all the way to the Ohio River at the southern tip of the state 100 miles away. The ride didn’t stop there, after riding down to the river on Saturday you had to ride back to Columbus the same course in reverse on Sunday. I

signed up and completed the double century, not feeling half bad when it was all said and done.

I didn't know how long it would take me, but I was pretty sure now I could finish an Ironman. In only my 2nd year in triathlon I registered for an October event in 1994 called the Great Floridian, which is the Ironman distance course. That summer I went back to the Endurathon in Muncie, IN in August using it as a perfect training race for the Great Floridian. I ended up shaving off a few minutes from my previous year, this time breaking the 5 hours with a time of 4:59:19! I felt like I was ready. The whole state of Florida is mostly flat, however the Clermont area where the Great Floridian was held is notorious for some killer hills. The bike leg was tough and quite challenging, but I did finish my first Ironman distance course in 1994 in 12:28:01.



Ironman Lottery:

There are a couple ways to get to Kona, first if you are the top of your age group, in a qualifier race there are a handful of slots awarded for Kona to the top finishers of each age group. The number of slots available depend on the race and the number of athletes in each age group. Although I thought I did quite well achieving my personal goals of finishing my first Ironman in 1994, there was a large time difference from my finish time from the top athletes in my age group. This pretty much meant that for the mortal every day guy like me qualifying by placing high enough in my age group was nearly impossible.

This is about the time I learned that there is also a lottery to get a Kona slot. There are 150 US athletes that get chosen by a random drawing. Additionally there is a Passport Club, which means you pay \$50 each year which gives a 2nd chance at Kona with 50 additional lottery slots. Well for 13 years I tried the lottery process with no luck. It's always an exciting day when the lottery winners are announced. In the 13 years, at least 3 other of my good friends or acquaintances through COTT were awarded with a lottery slot. My odds were not great, but each year I kept trying.

The lottery winners are typically announced at noon on the ironman.com website. This year there was TV coverage of another Ironman triathlon in which they announced at the end of the race they would display the names of this years race a day earlier then the names were too be posted on the website. I didn't know this at the time, but the COTT president John Martin had watched the coverage and saw my name, so texted me something like "you won Ironman Lottery...you bastard". All the way across the country I received the text message. Timing couldn't have been more perfect because I had just finished a 100 mile ride with 12,000 feet elevation gain. What better news could I get after a long hard days ride that I would get a chance to compete this year in the 2008 Ford Ironman Championship?

With the lottery things are not as easy as they would seem. First, in the fine print, lottery winners must complete a qualifier event to "activate" their lottery slot. A qualifying race had to be completed within 12 months of the race date of October 11, 2008. I guess this is their protection that any ole Joe can't sign up for the lottery and get to race in Kona. My last Ironman (and 5th Ironman) was in 2006 where I competed in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho and was too long ago to count as my qualifier. I began searching for qualifying races, fortunately it only had to be 70.3 or longer, I didn't have to do whole 140.6 Ironman as my qualifier. The two obstacles is that most every one of the qualifiers are no longer accepting applications because they are already at their maximum number of entries or are too far away and would require much additional expenses.

My Kona Qualifier:

I ended up choosing for my qualifier an inaugural triathlon scheduled in Boise, Idaho which was comprised of the 70.3 course and would be held the first week of June. Boise is known for its beauty and is an excellent location for a new event, only one problem, they experienced record snow fall over the past winter which meant the reservoir that is fed by the surrounding mountains was still being fed in June by snow melt. Race day the water was a brisk 59 degrees! I wasn't racing for a PR this time around, my only goal was to get across the finish line. I finished Boise in 5 hours and 44 minutes. Can we say excited? I notified Ironman that I had completed my qualifier so my next stop was Kona on October 11th!





Summer Preparation for Kona:

Ok, so now I'll finally get my shot to compete in Kona. Kona is historically very tough. Not only is Hawaii hot and humid in October, the bike course which is mostly along the northern western coast of Kona is constantly hammered by trade winds. The run takes you through the lava fields in the area called the "energy lab", where most Kona races winners have been decided.

I stuck to my training program that I knew best. I would try to swim three times per week slowly bumping up the length of my swims. I would try to bike at least one short fast 20-25 mile ride weekdays and longer training rides on the weekend. Running, I stuck to my usual marathon training schedule where I would pyramid my workouts each week raising the millage. The best part in the end is a two week taper just to maintain fitness before race day.

In the past I had the luxury of riding with friends, but now in a new city I hadn't had time to meet a lot of new friends to ride with. I discovered a local triathlon club called the Inland Infernos. I ended up in the spring and early summer riding with some members until I got to know some of the local routes, but for the most of the summer I would ride alone in the San Gabriel's which were in my back yard. I could climb from 500 feet to nearly 8000 feet starting right from our driveway. The mountains were a great training ground for me for many aspects. They were easily accessible and very challenging. There's probably not a greater place to prepare for Kona's heat than Southern California. One weekend I even spent in the Palm Desert to get a feeling for what an all day 100+ degree temperature would be like.

Friends throughout my life have helped me over the years to stay motivated. Two such friends visited Los Angeles prior to my Kona Ironman this past summer. First was Jason who I met while training for Ironman in 2006 in Seattle. Jason was in the city visiting his brother. He was also training for a fall marathon with plans to run 18 miles the weekend of his visit. His brother lives in Hermosa Beach so what better place for a long run along the beach. Now only a month to go before Kona. I tagged along with Jason for at least 13 miles as well as added another new route to my training grounds here in LA. The route was called the "strand" and was a boardwalk along the beach.

A few weeks later my friend Scott would visit as well. I met Scott in 2000 while training for Ironman USA which was in Lake Placid, NY. (my 4th Ironman) We have stayed in touch over the years and each time he visits the states we end up finding a way to get together. Once we skied for a weekend and another weekend even climbed Mt. Hood in Oregon. This time he was doing work in San Francisco and ended up flying down to LA for a weekend. He was brave enough to hop on one of my bikes and managed to hang onto my wheel up a couple climbs for over 60 miles in the San Gabriel's. We both flatted on the way back down the mountain which inspired me to replace my tubes and tires before race day with a fresh set of rubber.



Scott was also training for a marathon, so the following day we headed down to the “strand” back in Hermosa beach and did the 13 mile route I had ran a couple weeks prior with Jason. It’s pretty much out at back, so I tacked on an extra mile out to give us about 15 miles and my longest training run for Kona. After some lunch on the pier, we finished the day by trying to surf. Homeyra, Scott and I gave our shot at conquering the waves but we have a long way to go to master this water sport!



Next came getting both me and my bike to an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. I had only flown with my bike two other times. Once in 1994 when I raced the Great Floridian and again in 1997 when I flew to Australia for Ironman Australia. Both times I flew out of Ohio and borrowed friend's bike boxes. This time I didn't have a good avenue to find a bike box so reached out to the local triathlon club and found a member that had actually won a box and never used it in hopes to get rid of it to make some space in his apartment. I took advantage of the opportunity and took it off his hands.

Traveling with a bike in the past was never easy because bike boxes while they are safe for the bike are a pain to transport from place to place. This bike box was a solo design so just big enough for a single bike and a few other things nestled within. Below is everything packed up and ready to go!



On our honeymoon Homeyra tore her hamstring trying to water ski and we spent the first day of our honeymoon in the emergency room. I think we even ended up coming home a day or two early. I think Homeyra and I looked at Hawaii as a chance for a 2nd honeymoon. Parisa now being 3 ½ years old had been with us every day since she was born. It was a tough sell to talk Homeyra into leaving her home, but when we were able to have my parents gratefully volunteer fly to California to watch her the plan was set in motion for our little get-a-way. We would leave a week before the race and spend the week on the big island exploring and relaxing. (relax...yeah, right!)



Ok, so we arrive on the big island late Saturday night 1 week before the Ironman. I don't think we got settled into bed until after midnight. A few weeks earlier I discovered there was a 5k that is historically Sunday morning a week before the Ironman. Homeyra has been talking about running her first race, so what could be a better experience than your first race in Hawaii? We got up early, I think she was even up before the alarm, filled with excitement, she registered, and completed the scenic race along the coast, her first 5k, with a time of 32:49!



There were many athletes already in town and everywhere you looked you would see fit athletes running and biking. The rest of the day Sunday we spent walking along Alii drive and exploring our new surroundings. I reassembled my bike and went for a my first bike ride on the big island.



I was in full taper mode now so no need to work out too long or hard. I only rode three times on the island, each for only about an hour. All over the Queen-K Highway there were signs to watch out for cyclist. It wasn't far after leaving the town north on the Queen-K that you ride through the lava fields. There is white graffiti all across the black lava, not writing with paint, however, white shells or rocks make up the messages all along the bike route. I think you could jump out anywhere you wanted and rearrange the rocks to transcribe your own messages; however the Kona gods gave me a feeling not to disturb the stones that had already been placed.



In addition to biking, several afternoons I strolled out for a 30 minute runs. While California was great to get used to the heat of Kona, we don't have much humidity. I don't sweat much, but in only 10 minutes on the road here in Hawaii I was drenched from head to toe. I could tell that running 26.2 miles in these conditions would be tough.

Monday we decided we would make a circle around the island. There are 266 miles of coast line around Kona and the Hawai'i Belt Road pretty much makes a loop around the whole coast. Each part of the island has completely different climates. We had rented a Jeep Wrangler so the top was taken off on day 1 and did not put back on until the vehicle was returned to the airport a week later. Along the way we drove through mostly black lava flows which are so young there is hardly any vegetation that has grown. The land looked really barren and we hoped there would be more to this island than what we first experienced. Our first stop, after all we were in Hawaii, was the beach. Much of Kona's coastal access are lava cliffs, so when you find a beach it's a real treat. The lava rocks make for interesting beaches, we saw white sand, black sand and green sand. Our first beach was white sand, we swam and tested out our snorkel gear, but not many fish here.



We continued north around the island and next stop was Walpi'o Valley Overlook. This was a gorgeous view of the valley below. Only 4x4 access was allowed to drive down to the beach. We drove down the steepest and narrowest road I'd ever seen. The beach below was worth the drive and a few surfers braved the strong currents.



Our next stops were a couple water falls on the east side of the island.



Final stop of the day was a tour of Volcanoes National Park. Yes, that's Homeyra all the way on the left side of the picture on the outcropping of lava that flowed into the ocean!





Tuesday morning was my first chance for a real practice swim. As you make your way down Alii drive the location is very recognizable because the start of the swim is nearly the exact location as the finish line of the Ironman.

Orange buoys that will line the race course on Saturday were already in place a week early and all day long you would see athletes swimming. What's great is that between 7-9 am every morning there is actually organized swim practice on the course in that athletes are able to check in a bag at the swim start with all equipment/valuables etc.

I had purchased a swim skin after I returned from Idaho this spring, but didn't practice in it for fear that chlorine would destroy it before race day. If you noticed, most Olympic athletes wore them in Beijing this year and since wet suits are not allowed in Kona's swim, it's the only other edge I could have besides hard work training I'd already done to help shave a few minutes off my swim leg.

Everyone always asked, "are you nervous," but little things like experiencing the course make all the difference on race day. Settling into the water the first thing I noticed is that the salt water really does add a lot of buoyancy. I could float nearly effortlessly on top of the water. I slowing made my way towards the first buoy and couldn't help to notice how clear the water was and that I could see everything around me including the bottom of the ocean. The variety of fish was also spectacular and would give me a brief glimpse of what I will see later in the morning when Homeyra and I were to go snorkeling nearby.



The swim course in Kona is 1.2 miles straight out and then turn around and head back. As far as I could swim I still could see the bottom of the ocean. I thought that was pretty amazing. As for commercial, even then swim is commercialized. There were underwater signs held down under the swim course with arrows directing you to a boat out in the swim area that had fresh brewed coffee. I know a couple of my friends that would have been all about that, but not being a coffee drinker I simply turned around and swam back to the start area where I was greeted by a couple of sea turtles!



Homeyra picked me up from swim practice and we headed a couple miles up Alii drive to Kahalu'u Beach Park for our first real snorkeling adventure. We were lucky in that our condo came equipped with several sets of snorkeling gear.

In the days of the Hawaiian kings, with many of the islands' beaches having dangerous surf and riptides, King Kamehameha wanted a safe place for his family to enjoy the ocean. He had his workers construct a seawall in the surf to protect a small cove on the sunny side of the Big Island. This cove today is known as Kahalu'u Beach Park - one of the most popular swimming and best snorkeling sites in the Kona district. The beach is salt-and-pepper colored sand with lots of shady trees surrounding it. There is a sandy entrance to the water for snorkelers on the north side of the beach. Often, you can see turtles swimming the shallow waters right from the beach or while you walk on the sea wall!



I've had the opportunity throughout my life to snorkel in the ocean on a couple separate occasions, but this was a first for Homeyra. Monday she put on the gear and learned the fundamentals but that beach was nice sand and not many fish. This beach on the other hand was a mecca for fish. From the first instance you put your feet in the water you see colorful fish swimming all around you. We had already seen a couple sea turtles at the swim practice, but here there were dozens of them swimming all about. We saw puffer fishes and many varieties and colors of fish all about. I was impressed, but Homeyra I think was amazed. I didn't figure I'd have any problem convincing her to go on a more "adventurous" ocean excursion later in the week!

Recently we've had a couple opportunities to preview time share investments. Probably not for us, but it seems like they can easily reel us in if they offer a good enough incentive. Walking along Alii drive we stumbled upon another opportunity and the gifts were good so we thought we'd spend 90 minutes to see what they had to offer. We were in and out in about the time they projected and took only our prizes and ran.

Tuesday early evening I had an opportunity to test ride some Kona Weaponry. Kona seems to be a great place for vendors to launch new products and demo current products. A vendor area was set up with many bike manufactures including brands like Cervelo, Trek, Specialized, Kestrel, Argon 18, Zipp, and many more. I was able to test ride the E-114 by Argon 18. It was equipped with all the top end components including SRAM Red and Zipp deep dish aero wheels.



Additionally Tuesday evening was the Parade of Nations. They shut down Alii drive and all athletes were able to parade down the street paired by the country they represented. I think there were rumored to be over 1,800 athletes from 47 different countries represented as well as 48 out of 50 states represented. It was a treat to meet so many people throughout the week from all over the world.

Wednesday was already here, the week in my mind was flying by, but for Homeyra being away from Parisa was bitter sweet. I know she was having a good time but she couldn't stop thinking about her. Each day she timed her calls to home so that she would get a chance to talk to her. Grandma did a great job e-mailing us every day. The e-mails were special and we couldn't wait for the next day to see what she had to write. They were always written as if from Parisa's point of view which was too cute! Thanks mom!



I had a couple things on my agenda for Wednesday. For some reason I was selected by Timex a few weeks prior to arriving in Hawaii to take part in a focus group to deliver feedback of some new state-of-the-art equipment they are developing. There were 4 sessions and only 11 people participated per session. We began by going around the table and introducing ourselves and our athletic accomplishments. One guy was racing in Kona doing his 43rd Ironman! One woman was doing her 11th Ironman at the world championship. I was surrounded by champions!

Ends up Timex is developing a new GPS wrist watch and wanted our feedback about our experience with competitive products we've used and also asked for feedback to prototypes they had which were passed around the room. As a token of their appreciation each of us got a choice of either a man or woman's Timex Ironman running watch. I tried to build some brownie points and picked up a women's watch for Homeyra!

After the focus group which was held in the King Kamehameha Kona Beach Hotel next stop was athlete registration, also at the same location. This is it, one step closer to the start line! The registration was very organized and I was in and out in a flash. I was given an orange bracelet that would have to be worn until the day after the race which would get me into the welcome banquet, the transition area, and the awards banquet. Best of all wearing the bracelet was a clear indication that you were there to compete on Saturday. All of a sudden walking around with the bracelet everyone around town recognized you as an athlete; also I could size up my competition!





The week really felt like a dream that never ended and each day continued where it left off the day before. Back at the vendor expo we walked around to see what other “perks” we could discover. I found that Timex had a booth and they were giving away cook tech shirts with the purchase of any of their watches. I showed them the brand newly packaged watch I had just received from the focus group and that I didn’t get a shirt, of course they were grateful for my business and compted me a tee.

For anyone that has followed triathlon, especially as long as I have there are celebrities of the sport. There probably are too many faces more recognizable than Mark Allen, who won 6 times at Kona, and Paula Newby Frasier, who won a record 7 times at Kona. The two of them were standing side by side in a booth for Mark Allen Training Programs. I couldn’t give up the opportunity to get a photo with the two of them. For me it would be like Parisa meeting two of her favorite Princesses and getting her picture taken with them.

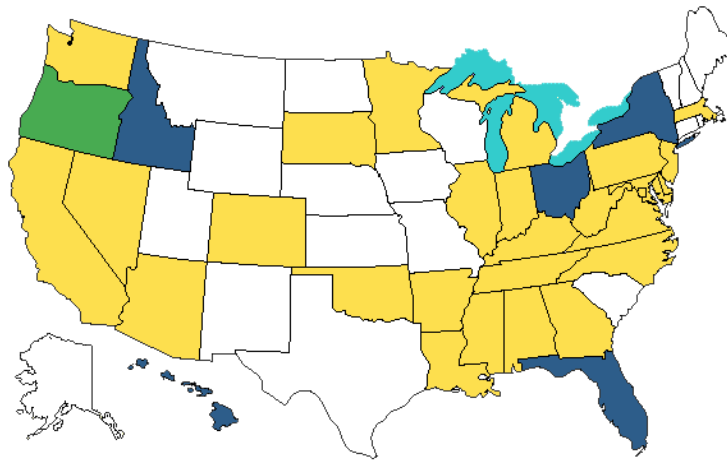


No Hawaiian vacation would be complete without experiencing a luau. We booked a Wednesday night performance at The Royal Luau at the Waikoloa Beach Marriott which is the Big Island's most authentic luau and show. The sound of a conch shell welcomes you to an evening of delights, on a beautiful oceanfront setting at sunset. Witness the *imu* ceremony, where a steaming roast suckling pig is removed from its underground oven. This, and an array of delicious traditional dishes are offered at the lavish buffet. Dining is outdoors under a starlit Hawaiian sky while the exciting luau show takes you on a journey of music and dance through the islands of Polynesia.



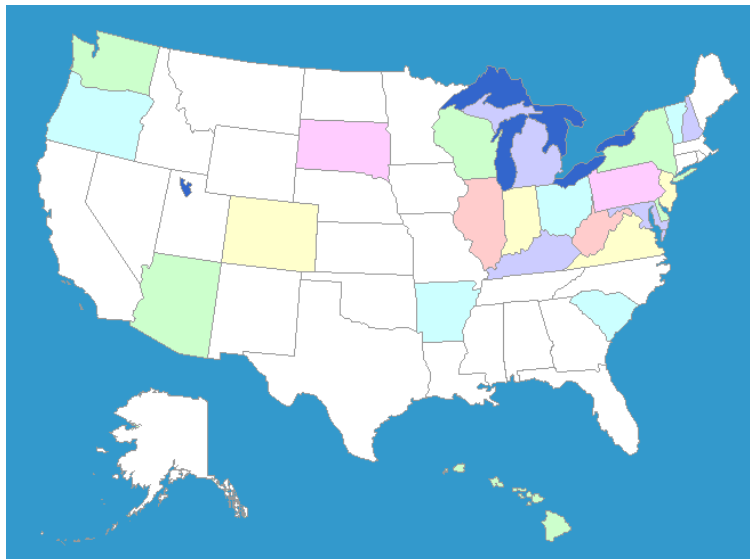
Now Thursday, only two days to go! As many of you know I have some crazy goals in my life. I came up with a notion in the mid 90's after completing marathons in 3 different states that "wow, wouldn't it be great to travel and run a marathon in all 50 States". I'd heard before that there was a club for others that at one time had a similar notion, so now a few years later Hawaii will make 32 different state marathons for me. See my complete history at www.marathongeeks.com

http://www.marathongeeks.com/div_index.php?history=1&Mem=37



Yellow = One Marathon
Green = Ultra-Marathon
Blue = Ironman Triathlon

In addition to running a marathon in all 50 states I had an even more ridiculous notion to visit the high point of all 50 states. For some states like Indiana's Hoosier Highpoint (1,257) it's as simple as jumping a fence in a corn field. As for other states such as Washington, it's two days of technical mountain climbing to summit via glaciers Mt. Rainier at (14,311 ft). I've now visited or summited 22 state highpoints.



Thursday morning was an event that prior to coming to Kona I'd never head of before, but apparently it's grown in popularity over the years. Dozens of triathletes and their friends and family fought back against the "evil garment" -- swim briefs to you and me. Not that there's anything wrong with Speedos (or butt-huggers, as the underwear-run organizers refer to them); however, it all comes down to where and when you choose to wear them. Kind of like good and bad naked.

To deter what they consider to be irresponsible Speedo use, every year in Kona (and, indeed, at several of the other Ironman races in North America), Huddle and Frey organize the Underwear Run, which leaves from Pacific Vibrations, near the Kailua Pier and winds through town and along Ali'i before culminating in an invigorating aerobics session on the pier. And while the tongue-in-cheek event is meant to poke fun at those who don't know when to draw the line vis-à-vis Speedo use, it also has a serious aspect to raise money for charity.

Like the sport of triathlon, the Underwear Run attracts a diverse range of male and female athletes and supporters, from folks racing on Saturday to kids to physically challenged athletes. (Although, I'd argue, by encouraging attractive, athletic women to run through the street in their underwear, the Underwear Run largely undermines its deterrent effect.) And the standards of dress range as widely as do the event's participants, from modestly attired runners to those willing - and able -- to leave almost nothing to the imagination.

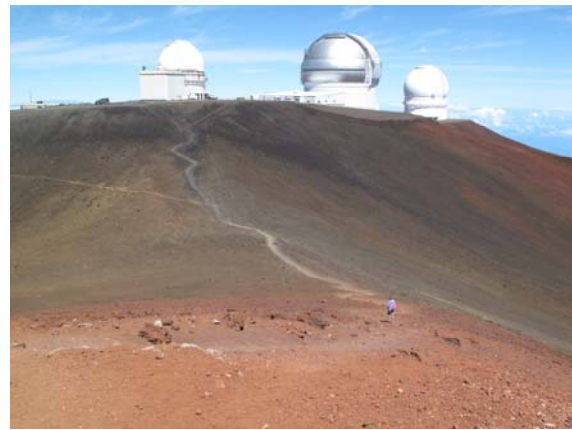
Just before the athletes leave for their short run through town, the crowd is lead through the recitation of the Underwear Run Pledge. After placing their hands over the "offending body part," as directed by Huddle, the runners then repeat: "I will resist the temptation to wear the evil garment . . ." as Huddle rattles off a list of euphemisms for the Speedo, from banana hammock to butt floss.

My friends will be happy to know I was only a spectator for this event and did not participate!



Thursday morning after the underwear run, we packed our Jeep and once again headed out to explore. Mouna Kea, on the Big Island of Kona is Hawaii's highest mountain. Rather than a single peak, Mauna Kea is undefined; it is a series of volcanic cinder cones, some red, some black, pasted onto a gargantuan massif. Although very high, 13,796 ft, getting to the summit from the roads end requires a mere 5-15 minute walk and 100 feet of elevation gain. Driving up the road the altitude kicks in, especially being at sea level only a hour earlier.

The summit region is home to a great many large telescopes and other space observation instruments. Apparently the atmosphere above Mauna Kea is world-renowned for its lack of atmospheric "wind shear", which causes distortion in visible images. One of the many telescopes has a visitor center where you can look at the telescope from underneath.



The view from the summit is spectacular you can see for miles in all directions and the ocean on all sides of you. There is an active volcano that is polluting the air in Kailua-Kona where the Ironman is held. The scientific term is call Vog in which the gases being released 24/7 from the volcano pollute the air. The Volcano has been polluting heavily since this spring 2008, so many of the lovely views or sunsets you would hope to see are tainted by the dense clouds that lurk throughout the sky. For more information on the volcano and webcams visit: <http://www.konaweb.com/vog/index.shtml>



Thursday night was the much anticipated welcome banquet. All the athletes are invited to an evening of food and entertainment. I've been to many of these pre-race dinners and I would have to say without a doubt next to the opening Olympic Ceremonies we all watched on TV this summer, this was the most spectacular entertainment and production I'd ever seen for any athletic event.

Three large screens composed the backdrop then add the top notch sound system the audience's attention was in captivated first by some authentic Hawaiian dances, costumes, followed by the legendary fire dancers. The whole evening you were seated with peers from around the world where we ended up sitting with a large group that had traveled from Australia and their first visit to the Kona as well.

Sometimes a person and their job are a perfect match. Such is surely the case with Mike Reilly, known to many as "The Voice of Ironman." The popular race announcer has been the main announcer at the Ironman World Championships in Kona since 1989. He knows the history of all the top athletes and the history of Ironman like no other. He is the voice you hear when each athlete crossed the finish line when he proclaims, "You ARE an Ironman!"

Some highlights from the evening that there will be two 18 year old athletes from Kailua-Kona would be running and were featured on stage, 3 U.S. Marines would parachute from a airplane into the water before the race, swim to shore, and suit up to compete in this year's race, and featured physically challenged athlete Ricky James, a hot shot young motocross star that was paralyzed after a collision in a race who would be racing his first Ironman.

What does one do in a tropical paradise a day before an Ironman? The answer to that question extends far beyond just basking in glorious temperate weather and gazing at palm speckled sunsets. Hawaii's Big Island also exudes fun and excitement for those with an appetite for diverse adventures. Friday morning took us to Cook's Cove for our second snorkeling opportunity.

Cook's Cove was highly recommended by both friends that had been to the big island before and by all the locals. The cove was again a protected area, both by laws and by an outcroppings of rocks that protected the reef from the pounding of waves and only is accessible by kayak. Perhaps not the best pre-ironman exercise because I recall from past kayaking being sore for the next three days from using muscles in new way. I figured we didn't have to kayak that far, only a couple miles, and if we took it easy and just went through the motions I could prevent any unneeded aches or pains!

What a relief after we rented our gear and were at the boat launch that there was another athlete, easily recognizable with their orange bracelet, good to know that it just wasn't me that's crazy to be doing this the day before Ironman! To save some trouble (and energy) you could tip local boys to unload your boat and gear and help you get started, of course they would be there when we returned to help us pack up when we ready to leave.

Dolphins are frequently found in the cove, but in our couple hour adventure unfortunately we did not get to see any. The currents were amazingly strong and although we tried to keep our heading in the direction we could clearly see we ended up zig zagging all the way there across the cove. There was a recommended boat landing to the left side of a monument and the currents seem to guide us in and we surfed nearly all the way up to shore.

As promised the waters were clear and full of fish. We saw all the same types of fish we'd seen from the coast a few days earlier plus many more including two types of eels. The water close to the shore was shallow and full of coral. Not far from the shore was a sharp drop off to deeper waters. I enjoyed diving along the drop off and looking for sea life hiding in the protective rock cropings. We had packed lunch and tried to secure it so the mongooses didn't raid our kayak on the shore, had a great leisurely paddle back to the car.



Returning to Kailua-Kona there was only one last pre-race day activity remaining which was checking in my bike. I had done all my last checks before leaving our condo so I wasn't missing anything. There was a bag for everything, but most importantly the red and blue bags were what I needed to check in with all my gear for when I exit the swim to get on my bike and for all my running gear for when I get off the bike.



I was greeted by friendly volunteers who checked only that I had my orange bracelet, bike, and helmet before entering the transition area. The next step through the gate was verifying that I had placed my race number on my bike and helmet properly. The instructions were clear in the package, place the bike helmet sticker on the front of your bike helmet, however all the vents for proper airflow on my helmet would be blocked if I did, so I tried to get away with putting in on the side. I was instantly red flagged and had to move it. I negotiated I need proper airflow on the bike so I didn't overheat and worked out a compromise!

There are only a couple of souvenirs that only an Ironman participant gets to take home with them, that's the official sticker that your bike has been checked into transition area and has the Ironman World Championship insignia and race number. This is one sticker that is coveted and will never be removed from the bike. Each and every time you ride with friends they are sure to notice the sticker and be in awe of my accomplishment! The sticker was a new design this year similar to the foil like registration sticker you put on your auto's license plate, once stuck, it doesn't come off.





Once inside the transition area it's a "safe" zone. No one enters without a race number and an escort. Imagine the logistics of getting all 1800 athletes through here in a day. My escort was again very friendly and showed me where I would be entering the transition area out of the swim, where I had to go to find my bags, and how I exit the transition area. First was depositing my bike and getting familiar where it was so I wouldn't have any problem finding it coming out of the water.

Next was hanging my transition bags, each hook was individually numbered so there was no mistaking where to find it the next day. Finally when my tour was complete I paused, took a deep breath and soaked in the moment. These very grounds are where every Ironman has stood. There were men's and women's transition tents to change into your gear. The outside of the tents were lined with flags with all the winners of the race and the year they one.



The remaining afternoon I relaxed at the condo and Homeyra made a fabulous pre-race carbo dinner. Lights were out early for our pre 5 a.m. wake up call the next morning.



Buzzzzzz. That was the alarm going off at 4:45. Time to wake, eat breakfast, and prepare for the day ahead. Rumors were it was going to be hot and windy all day long, no surprise right? Homeyra dropped me off very close to the athlete check in area directly behind the transition area. I was only equipped with my iPod, bike pump, swim gear. Most races I've done throughout my life it seems like early morning is away chilly, but not here. I was comfortable in shorts and a tee shirt.

First stop was body marking where I would be branded with my race numbers on each arm and my age on my right calf. They used great big numbers and stamped each number separately. If there were any places that weren't fully inked they filled them in with black permanent markers. I had feeling I would be wearing my numbers around for many days after the race no matter how hard I scrubbed!



From body marking Homeyra was able to intercept me before heading into transition area giving me one last good luck kiss. She had giving me great support not only all week while we were busy going from one athletic activity to the next, but the whole summer while I was training.

Next stop was to make another check of the bike to make sure it had survived the night outside, pumped up the tires, and again escorted to my bike to run swim bag to deposit my heart rate monitor I would use on the marathon.

I have to give it up to the organizers because not only race day morning but all week every event went so smoothly. I was body marked and ready to swim with plenty of time to spare. Again I paused to reflect on the moment that I've waited for 15 years to happen. The sun was rising over the mountains and my excitement began to rise.

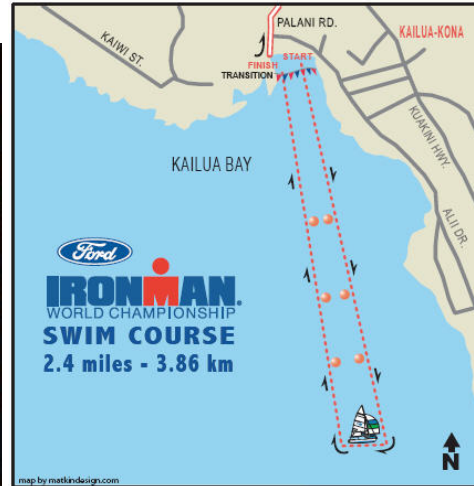
Over the ocean all at once a large airplane could be seen circling which was the Marine transport plane that would drop three athletes that would be participating. Still calm and trying to stay relaxed I sat down next to a couple athletes and thought about the day and how it would play out. I could hear the pro race kickoff and knew that 15 minutes later my Ironman day would begin.

When you look at the athletes in Kailua Bay on race morning, the colors of the swim caps and the athletes themselves tend to blend together. But behind each athlete is a story with telling. We were instructed to start making our way into the water for the start of the 2008 Ford Ironman World Championship. How great did those words sound after all the hard work and preparation to get here?



I entered the water a little soon that I would have in a smaller race, but with 1800 swimmers all fighting for the same real estate I had ample time to get situated, warm up, and feel comfortable in the water. Having been in the water only a few days ago I was very aware of my surrounds and comfortable staging myself so that I wasn't too far forward I would be swam over nor too far back that I would have to swim over slower swimmers in front of me. Treading water in the salt water was pretty much effortless as again I got one last glimpse to paint into my memory of this glorious morning.

We learned that the start signal is a canon and that we would not be fooled by any other sound and that we would clearly know when the race begins. Well it was truly a canon and the loud sound was not mistaken. I started my watch with the sound and began swimming to the far reaches of the bay 1.2 miles ahead towards the turn around.



Having done this once or twice in my life (just kidding) I knew what to expect the whole swim. Unlike early triathlons where I panicked with the thrashing of bodies and water around me, I was cool, calm, and collective. The start line was very wide and where in many races athletes crowded the shortest route along the buoys we were spread out over a wide area. It didn't take long to starting from the far left to fall into a good rhythm and slowing make my way to follow a straight line to a boat that marked the turn around.

I made it most of the swim without incident. A couple times when I looked up to verify that I was heading in the right direction I got a mouthful of salt water and had to pause a second to spit it out and get back to my rhythm. Rounding the turn around seems to always be one of the most chaotic places on the swim route. I opted to take a wide turn adding a little more distance to the swim, but staying out of the congested turn around.

I glanced at my watch and was pleasantly surprised even without a wet suit I was on a pace to a near record swim. One of my coaches, Scott, preached not extending yourself early in the race, so instead of picking up the pace to possible swim an Ironman PR in the water of Kailua Bay, I fell behind a group of swimmers that was going about my same pace and drafted all the way back to the pier.



Both out and back there was no sun blindness in trying to scope the direction to travel and it wasn't long before you heard the noise of the crowd at the swim finish. I finished the swim in 1 hours and 14 minutes and 14 seconds. This time was 2 minutes off of my 2006 swim time in Idaho where I had worn a wet suit and on the fast side of what I had predicted.



While waiting for the swim to start I coated my body with baby 50 factor sun block that doesn't come off in the water. My plans were to have a fast transition to the bike, I peeled my swim skin and had my biking shorts underneath. All I had to do is throw on my cycling jersey and be off. When I entered the swim to bike transition area I had a hell of a time trying to pull my jersey over my coated skin which probably was also affected by the salt water. Once I was suited up I made my way toward my bike.



The bike course starts out and more or less does a parade route around Kailua-Kona before heading north towards the lava fields and then on to Hawi. The first 30 miles of the 112 mile bike course I was trying to keep in check my urge to go faster. I was averaging on a rolling hills course nearly 19 mph but kept in my mind my goal was to finish and not to have a blistering fast ride followed by a horrible run.

I'm glad I had ridden conservative as I passed the turn off to the Energy Lab that I would see later on the run, past the airport, through the lava fields, and then making the left hand turn that would lead me to Hawi. On the out and back course this is where I began to see the pro's that had started 15 minutes ahead flying back down the long decline that leads back from Hawi. As for me I was heading up the incline. Not only was it up hill, but this is the part of the bike route that gets hammered by trade winds.

The views along the coast were spectacular, however, the views came at a heavy price. There were heavy gusts of winds that felt like they could rip my bike out from under me. With the hill, the wind, and the heat, the last twenty miles to the turn around of the bike were torturous. The gusts were sometimes predictable by watching the bikers in front of you, when they were blown to one side you would know the same thing would happen to you momentarily. I think there was a stretch of more than 15 miles into the wind uphill that my average was barely double digits. One thing that kept me going were seeing all the bikes in front of me already on their way back to town that had the wind and the hill in their favor.



Boy what a relief to see the city limits signs and the speed limit signs decreasing. Ever since leaving the Queen-K Hwy the spectators were next to none on this part of the course. Seeing people lining the road again in Hawi were a sure sign the turn around was near.

Before the turn around I passed the bike special needs area where I'll have a chance to pick up my bag of goodies I'd packed to help me through the 2nd half of the bike. I rounded the cones and heard the timing matt beep which would record my proof that I made it all the way to the turn around. The timing mats area along the course were instantly synced to the website so friends & family watching from home could see that I was still making forward progress!

Now finally homeward bound I made my pickup from special needs and downed a Red Bull from my bag. The refreshment was a small reward for the hard work and labor I had exerted for the past hour and a half on the way to Hawi. Gauging my fatigue and the effort to the ride out had taken a lot more out of me than I thought.

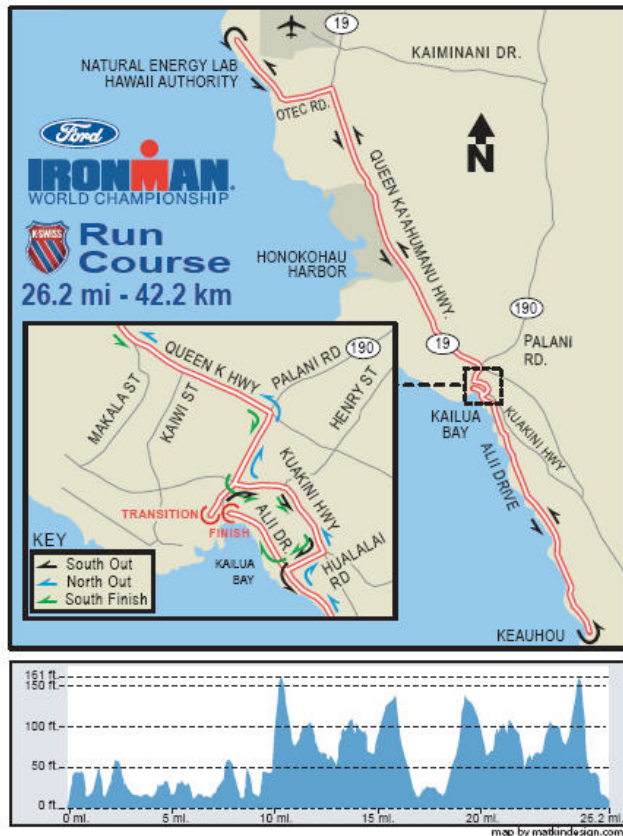
Nutrition throughout the day is key to surviving the day. I knew exactly how many calories and carbs that I needed each hour to keep my tank from running empty. I had bad cramps in the heat in my 2006 Ironman mostly pointing to salt deficiencies. I had prepared and throughout the day every 45 minutes would take at a specially formulated salt supplement.

My inclination downhill and down wind was to push real hard but I elected to hold back and conserve some energy. It's a good thing I hadn't hammered up to this point because this course wasn't going to surrender easily. The hot sun all day had heated up the lava fields, in the rare areas where there was no wind I could feel the heat radiating from the ground. Most all of the way back through the rolling hills to Kailua-Kona the wind did not let up and the long day continued to get longer.

Still I pushed on. I started to recognize the landmarks so I knew was within a half an hour back to the transition area. I noticed others were worn down and tired too and I started to pass more cyclists. There is only one turn off the Queen-K which leads directly to the finish. This last turn was downhill all the way so no matter how tired you looked or actually were you zoomed past all the crowds of people lining the course. I was happy that I had no cramps and felt like I might actually be able to run a decent marathon time.

Exiting the bike at an Ironman is great because it's the only triathlon where someone catches your bike and puts it back into your transition rack. I hobbled through the transition area making my first stop in the port-o-john for a quick pit stop. If you can pee that's a good sign I've been hydrating enough through the bike. For some reason my feet are always sore from the non-stop of 112 miles of pedaling and stiff bike shoes. I changed only my top to a running shirt and put on my running shoes, new sunglasses, hat and heart rate monitor.

My first steps in my running shoes were like walking on air and such a treat to my feet. I started the run and felt amazingly fresh. I knew the rest of the day would be long and hot, but I had a feeling of looking forward to bringing the marathon course down to its knees. The first part of the marathon is mostly through town along Alii drive which is nearly all ocean front and also the route which I spent my days training.



As I crossed each mile mark I would check my mile splits. Each mile of mine was very consistent. From here on out it was like running 26 separate 1 mile runs with a prize at the end of every mile. I would run each mile to the next aid station and walk for about a minute while I refreshed with cold sponges to stick in my hat, rehydrate, and a few snacks here and there.

1. 8:43	14. 10:24
2. 8:29	15. 10:27
3. 10:06	16. 10:40
4. 9:22	17. 10:39
5. Opps	18. 10:37
6. 19:03	19. Opps
7. 10:06	20. 23:27
8. 9:36	21. 11:29
9. 9:56	22. 11:10
10. 10:10	23. 10:51
11. 10:56	24. 11:31
12. 10:17	25. Opps
13. 10:20	26. 24:05





Watching this race from home every year the television coverage always made a big deal out of the “Natural Energy Lab” which marks the 2nd turn around somewhere between miles 18-19 on the run. The Energy Lab is supposed to have mysterious powers and often the deciding grounds for the Ironman. When the pro’s reached the Energy lab rumors were the lava rock and no wind created conditions in excess of 108 degrees. This is the one area of the course that is off limits during training.



By the time I had reached the Energy Lab the sun was in it’s final glory before setting. I was given a glow necklace so I would easily be seen when I exited the Energy Lab and headed back on the Queen-K Hwy. While entering the Energy Lab there were two thermometers, one on each side of the road. For me it’s now six o’clockish and the temperature was a cool 80 degrees. The 2nd thing I noticed is the native fire dancers were out in the dark entertaining. Since there hadn’t been any fans all the way to the Energy lab they were a welcomed site to see.

Again like the bike on the last turn around you pass your special needs bags so I knew that my last Red Bull for the day was only minutes away. I also had a dry pair of running shoes in my bag which I felt comfortable with the ones I had and had no strong urge to change them. I pushed on and one last cool part of the Energy Lab upon exiting

Ford had a message board that was synchronized to your chip so when passing another runner messages your friends wrote earlier in the week were displayed on a big lit screen. From start to finish I seemed to be mostly passing runners and in turn was passed by very few. I ran a couple miles somewhere between 14-18 miles markers that had a great bike finished an hour before me and now I'd caught him and eventually dropped him. Running a marathon usually miles 18-23 are where runners "hit the wall". I was still feeling great and still knocking down my mile splits fairly consistently.

If ever there was a time to throw in the towel this would be the place. For me it was dark, not a soul in sight except for the aid stations. I was watching the time and knew that I had a pretty good shot to break 13 hours if I didn't slow down.

I pushed on and soon began to hear the roar of the crowd at the finish line. It's a horrible trick because when you finally make the turn off of the Queen-K for the last time you head directly towards the finish line. Unlike the bike where you go directly to the finish area this time you take a big detour and run a parallel, one block from Alii Drive and head a mile in the opposite direction of the finish. Eventually you make the turn towards the ocean and make the turn on Alii drive for the last time.

Ok, this is it, this is what we came here to do. My final mile towards the finish the crowd was in full force lining both sides of the streets. When I got to the finish corral I zigzagged from left to right trying to give "five" to everyone I could. When I saw the finish line in sight I prepared for my final mark to leave on the island which is my summersault across the finish line. I think I actually stopped a few feet in front of the finish line with my hands raised and fist clinched with excitement! Yes! I did it! I felt good all day while doing it! Boy was I stoked to hear the words from Mike Reilly, "Brian Schweinhagen, You ARE an Ironman!"





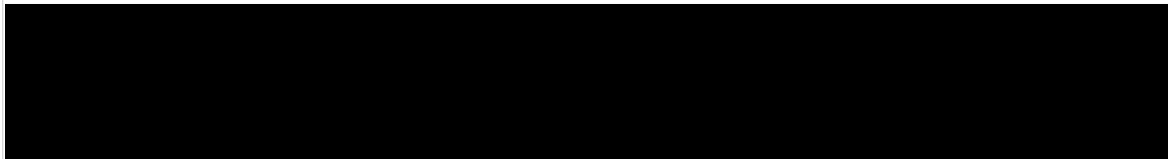
Matching Athletes: World Championship 2008

Brian Schweinhagen			
BIB	AGE	STATE/COUNTRY	PROFESSION
996	40	Diamond Bar CA USA	Salesperson

SWIM	BIKE	RUN	OVERALL	RANK	DIV.POS.
1:14:14	6:53:30	4:32:09	12:51:01	1280 of 1736	186 of 230

LEG	DISTANCE	PACE	RANK	DIV.POS.
TOTAL SWIM	2.4 mi. (1:14:14)	1:57/100m	1090	157
FIRST BIKE SEGMENT	5.5 mi. (1:37:36)	18.88 mph		
SECOND BIKE SEGMENT	28 mi. (2:52:20)	18.06 mph		
THIRD BIKE SEGMENT	59 mi. (4:52:14)	15.51 mph		
FOURTH BIKE SEGMENT	88 mi. (6:39:25)	16.23 mph		
FINAL BIKE SEGMENT	112 mi. (8:13:37)	15.29 mph		
TOTAL BIKE	112 mi. (6:53:30)	16.25 mph	1386	202
FIRST RUN SEGMENT	5.2 mi. (9:07:34)	9:21/mile		
SECOND RUN SEGMENT	10.3 mi. (9:57:06)	9:42/mile		
THIRD RUN SEGMENT	17.6 mi. (11:16:43)	10:54/mile		
FINAL RUN SEGMENT	26.2 mi. (12:51:01)	10:57/mile		
TOTAL RUN	26.2 mi. (4:32:09)	10:23/mile	1280	186

TRANSITION	TIME
T1: SWIM-TO-BIKE	5:53
T2: BIKE-TO-RUN	5:15





Ironman on Television:

This year's show airs on December 13 from 2:30 - 4 PM EST.



While highlights of the Ford Ironman World Championship first aired on television in 1980 as part of ABC's Wide World of Sports, it wasn't until 1991 when the broadcast was moved to NBC, that it became a stand-alone program. Since then the 90-minute show has earned more than 40 Emmy nominations, won 14 Emmy awards and received three prestigious CINE Golden Eagle Awards.

The television coverage of the Ford Ironman World Championship has long provided the most visible and inspiring images of the event to the world. Ironman's crowning moment came in 1982 when ABC's cameras captured a scene that would be etched in the minds of millions for years to come. The scene that would come to embody the spirit of Ironman showed a young woman named Julie Moss, physically and mentally spent, drawing on only heart and fortitude to crawl across the finish line. Those images of courage and determination launched Ironman into an international sensation and have kept television viewers riveted to their sets ever since.