

Ironman World Championships, Kona, Hawaii - October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2002

Writing an article to recap an Ironman is a difficult task. "Ironman Day" is long and one where a multitude of things can happen. Recapping the Hawaii Ironman might be even a more difficult task – where to begin?? The pros, the course, the weather??? As the majority of people reading this magazine are triathletes I'll tell you about the differences I experienced between being a first time and second time finisher at the Ironman World Championships.

I'm lucky to have been able to compete in the Hawaiian Ironman twice, my first race being last year, which I refer to as the Year of the Wind; and again for the 2002 competition, now known as the Year of the Rain! Yup, that's right, RAIN and lots of it. The weather played a major role in the differences between the two years, both affecting the race in significant ways.

To being, going into this race for the second time I knew what to expect for race week. In 2001 I was actually disappointed with the race atmosphere. So much is made of this race that my expectations were huge. In reality, when you get down to the basics, it is just another Ironman – you go to the pre race meeting, check your transition bags, special needs bags, bike, get body marked and then the rest of the day is really up to you! However, knowing that race week is a busy due to the check-in procedures in Kona I was better able to schedule my time to ensure I got all my pre-race prep in as well as enough rest.

At last year's race we worked against a strong current coming into the swim finish, so I was mentally prepared to have a slower swim time than what I might usually expect. While the current wasn't there this year, the rainstorm created wave conditions that pushed us off course on the return leg of the swim. I was happy that it was not raining as I exited the water, and made my way through transition to my bike. This was soon to change, as it started to drizzle almost immediately as I left the transition area, and then it really started to come down – lasting almost a full hour.

In 2001 we battled the wind on the bike, and while there was comparatively no wind this year, the rain played havoc with my race. My bike computer stopped working as soon as I hit the Queen K. Last year it had also malfunctioned due to a misdirected spray of water. These two incidences have taught me that you need to know 'in your body' what particular speeds feel like – you can't always depend on a bike computer to tell you if your race is on track.

Needless to say, the bike was a lot easier this year, and I came into T2 feeling fresh. Again, this wasn't to last long as a wall of heat hit me as I headed out onto the run course. One thing I learned last year about the Kona run course is that pacing is really important. There aren't too many places where you feel like you can 'rest' (if that is possible) on the run course – there is no shade and no significant down hills to stretch out the legs on. As with any race, focus is also important on the run in Kona as the course is not all that visually stimulating.

The bonus of working your way through the swim, bike and run is coming down Alii Dr – there is nothing quite like being on the 'scared ground' of Ironman Triathlon. If your plan is to compete in Hawaii, make sure you leave enough energy for the end to enjoy Alii Dr.