

Ironman Hawaii 2009



Over a week has passed since my 7th "kick-at-the-can" in Kona. Since then I've been thinking a lot about the race, what happened on Alii Dr., and what 2010 will bring. Here are some of those thoughts.

This year I approached the race differently; specifically, I had no predetermined race goals other than to have fun. I said more than once before leaving for Hawaii that I wanted to enjoy Kona, the sun, the pool, the mai tais... a lot more than I have allowed myself in the past. The plan was simple; kick back, relax and just have fun on race day.

The inaugural 'have fun' event on the Kona calendar was to participate in the Path 10K and 5K run. This annual event is held on the Sunday before the race and is a fund raiser for the development of walking and riding paths in the Kona area, as well as providing cycling safety education to kids. While Heather Furh easily won the 10K event, Glenn and a few other guys battled it out for the honours on the 5K run. I hung back, taking it easy and helping along a young girl from London, ON who was struggling with the heat and her asthma. I'm pleased to say that our run netted a 'best ever' time for my running partner, and a second place AG finish for me (by 5seconds). Sadly, the field was to be a lot deeper the following Saturday (p.s. – Glenn crushed me on the 5K placing 3rd overall – contact Glenn for the full race report!).

During the week leading up to the race Glenn focused his on training for IMFlorida while I did all those things that you do before an IM – visit with friends, attend the NRG pre-race party, train (a little), and rescue Glenn from the heat of the lava fields when his day in the saddle turned out to be just a little too long. Glenn and I also participated in the annual Underpants Run, and once again Glenn got some great media attention for his coconut bra (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D8hUHmiEFA8&feature=sub>). This great event raises money for charities in Kona with this year's proceeds going to the Kona Special Olympics. The week was made all that much more enjoyable by having Adam stay with us – he was the perfect 'roomie' and also my yoga partner and personal ART provider! It doesn't get much better than that.

Time flew by and before I knew it I was pumping up my tires on the Kona pier. I was feeling pretty relaxed and looking forward to a 'fun day'. The swim start this year was more 'open' than in the past as we were not forced to corral between the Body Glove boat and the pier. This more open start perhaps helped with a relatively less aggressive swim start, but I prefer to believe it was the 'non-clobbering' vibes that Jackie was sending to me. Despite the wider swim start I still couldn't find any open water and I thought to myself how funny it would be to have GPS tracking on the swim, especially while I navigated my way around and over people. Since the race I've learned that the ocean swells were quite large that morning, and I did note during the swim that sometimes I was really close to the buoy, and then I was almost 20feet away from it – nothing like being tossed around.

I exited the water and didn't even check my watch, focusing instead on having a super fast transition (3mins 13seconds)...I was so focused in fact that as I left the T1 tent I realized that I hadn't taken off my Zoot speed suit – opps! Luckily for me there was a volunteer handy and I gave it to her. I also noticed that I was running right behind Vinu Malik – owner of Fuel Belt and xtri.com – towards my bike, so I knew I'd had a decent swim. Swim time: 1:06:46 which is pretty normal for me – of my 7 races, I've been faster once and slower once, all the rest were in the 1:06:++ range.

I felt comfortable and relaxed starting the bike and as I ascended the Kuakini Hwy to the first turn-around Vinu passed me and yelled, "Ride like you have to run a marathon". Wise words. I was surprised how soon I found myself on the climb to Hawi, not sure what happened out there on the Queen K but I guess things went well, however reality soon struck. The last 7miles to the turn-around in Hawi were brutal – the wind was pushing us all over the place and it was really hot. No problem, I thought, we get a break on the way down. And that we did! No gusts of wind blowing across the road so I was able to ride what felt to be fairly solidly all the way back to Kawaihae. Once back onto the Queen K the wind started. I think that we rode into a head wind for about 20miles. My avg. speed dropped and dropped as I tried to keep my watts steady. Bike time: 5:47. Again, about normal for me.

Same focus through T2, but this time I got it right and I was out onto the run course in 3mins 11seconds. I felt relatively "alright" as I ascended up the short hill up to Kuakini where I saw Rick, Sue and Becca – I

think I told them I was hot. Then I saw Coach Nigel, he told me I was in 8th place and I told him that I was hot, tired and that the bike was hard.

I will save paper by not describing all the gory details, but things were starting to unravel less than 1 mile into the run. First I saw Michelle Jones lying on the side of the road. Then as I neared our condo I was looking forward to seeing Glenn. Unfortunately, my arrival at Sea Village coincided with Glenn's beer-break and so he wasn't there. I think he got an ear-full about missing me run by from the other spectators once he got back, so it was a quick transition for him to get his bike and race down Alii Dr. to cheer me on. Upon seeing Glenn I had my first melt down of the day...not sure what caused it, but I was very unhappy. I stopped at the side of the road, put my head on his handlebars and cried for about 5 minutes. Somehow I decided to start running again. The next event was seeing Natasha Badmann waiting for someone to take her off the course. What in the world, I thought, was happening? And, if I felt like I did at mile 2.5 and they were dropping out at mile 5 and 6, what was going to happen to me?

What did happen to me was a lot of walking, a lot of crying and very little running. Anyone who has looked at my race results will know that I really struggled through the first half of the marathon. The spectators were amazing though, providing positive cheers. Unfortunately, my ability to turn off my brain didn't help me, as the encouraging words didn't resonate with me. I stopped and talked with Rick, Sue and Becca just before Palani Rd., they told me I was in 9th place – again, something that might have inspired me on any other day just didn't have any meaning to me. I walked up Palani Rd., accompanied by a spectator who rubbed my back and told me everything would be OK. At the top of Palani I saw Peter Reid – he also was also not very helpful. I asked him if he could take my race number. His response: "I can't even walk as fast as you". I let him know that this wasn't what I wanted to hear. In retrospect, I think that this little exchange was actually the beginning of my entrance back into myself. After this I was able to run a little more, walk a little less and the tears were gone. Glenn provided me with the courage to keep going, giving me small goals to focus on as I made my way out to the Natural Energy Lab (NEL). He also reminded me that I was there to have fun, which I thought I'd only be able to achieve if I walked, but the running was starting to feel good, even though I was still being passed by a lot of people that I knew had been far behind me on Alii Dr.

My epiphany occurred at mile 12. Ok, I thought, only 10 miles to go...I can do this, it's the Good Friday 10 miler!!...and off I went...running and not walking. As I entered the energy lab I was more mentally alert than ever and I realized that I actually didn't know how many miles there are in a marathon; was it 22, 24 or 26?? So I asked. This kind of question gets you some interesting looks, but anyway the answer confirmed that my math was off and I still had another 10+ miles to go...no problem, I was FEELING GOOD!! Finally! What a nice change. I noted on the way out of the NEL a girl on the other side of the road – crying!!!

Further motivated by the text message that Tara had sent to "Inspiration Station" in the NEL, I was quickly back onto the Queen K and passing the folks who had passed me only a few miles before. As I ran up the long climb along the hwy to the top of Palani Rd I approached Glenn – "Holy S*#T Linnea. You've found another gear!" Yahoo!!! I was also quickly approaching the Hannes Tour tent. They had the best music playing...it was great to go through the German Disco, although the dancing and running really took a bit out of me...it didn't matter though, I WAS RUNNING!!

The last 10K of the marathon course in Kona has always felt absolutely too long to me – this year it was absolutely too short...I loved every step from the NEL back to Alii Dr. Under the banyan tree and around the corner - I was in the finishing chute! I ran passed Glenn with a thumbs up, and then passed Rick, Sue and Becca, this time I said something like "I'm Back!" As I crossed the finish line I lay down and did the Blazeman Roll and was greeted by John's Mom and Dad – some tears there. Soon after that I saw Lars, son of my friend Lisbeth and found out that his Mom and won our division – that made me cry again. Run time: a miserable 4:07 – my slowest ever. Finishing time 11:08, 13th place in my AG – second slowest finishing time.

So, in a race where anything is possible, anything was. I had an experience that I'd never had before and was not prepared for. In reading a few pro race reports I've learning that the "running on mental empty" was not unique to me, small consolation, but at least I'm not alone in experiencing this strange and not-so-nice feeling.

So, what's up to for 2010?? It's off to IMBrazil, my favourite race ever!

Big thanks to Ads for the great ART and many laughs, to Nigel and Fiona for the great training and on-site support. To Rick, Sue and Becca for being the most enthusiastic cheering crew, and knowing exactly the right thing to say ("It's OK to puke and cry") and to Glenn who was absolutely the best support on race day. It's a long day for anyone spectating, and when you have a high-needs athlete like me, it's even more taxing...he deserved that beer, and many, many more.