

I wrote this report to remember my first Ironman. Also, I want to use this report to make any improvements to future races - long and short. I hope you enjoy reading it and maybe can use some of it to your benefit. You may wish to skip the crap and start and reading at race day right away!

Wednesday, August 22

My flight left at 8.30 a.m. and my father in law gave me a ride to the airport. I choose a direct flight to Kelowna to avoid problems with legs and bags. My shuttle was waiting for me upon arrival and off I went to Penticton. The ride was breathtaking, especially for a guy like me who has never really seen any serious hills. After about half an hour we came to a full stop on the highway: a logging truck had lost its load and the road was completely blocked. It was clear this was going to take hours.

I got out of the car and started walking along Okanagan Lake towards the nearest fruit stand and got the usual: Gatorade, water, nuts, buttertards and fresh fruits. I was not in a rush, and being away from my busy life made me feel relaxed the minute I got off the plane. Time to enjoy British Columbia.

When arriving at the Swiss Bed & Breakfast I noticed a note on the door: back at 4.30. That was over three hours and I decided to walk into town to find the race venue. I figured it would be app. 8k. I crossed through a scruffy business area and felt being in the middle of nowhere, when all of a sudden a taxi pulled up. Lucky me, I thought, and got a ride straight to the race venue. I walked around the expo a bit and ran into Allan Chud and Cindy Lewis. Allan and Cindy are teammates from the North York Aquatic Club Tri Swim (NYAC) and are both in the same lane as I am. They invited me over for a bite to eat later on at their place, which was very nice of them. I also called Christine Gardner to let her know I was in town. Christine was coordinating the whole thing with Team Diabetes, and I was one of the 24 participants in the team. She invited me to come over to the Days Inn where most of the TD members were staying. I spend the rest of the afternoon hanging out at the motel drinking Hank's (Christine's main man) stash of Heineken and meeting other TD athletes. Later on, I met with Allan and Cindy for dinner and cold beer (my favorite beverage) and chatted about the upcoming race. It was good to talk to them since Allan is an experienced Ironman – and a fast one – from who I could always learn a thing or two. Cindy seemed a bit nervous about the race – after all, she wanted to qualify for Kona on her first Ironman.

Thursday, August 23

I got up early, at around 5.00 a.m., and since I was still on 'Toronto time' I decided to go for a short run. I have been having a calf injury for a while and my running has been sub standard for a few months (I just ran 629k in 59 hours in 2007). A short run before the race would fix all problems, my brain was telling me. Yeah, right! It was warm, humid and hilly and I was starving. The B&B does not serve breakfast until 8.30 a.m. and I had to eat now. I ran to the nearest gas station and got some food. This gas station was right across from the Carmi Motel where Aubrey Brice was staying. This is the guy that transported my bike – among 64 other bikes – to Penticton. He was up early as well and already putting bikes together at 6 a.m. We chatted a bit about tires

and how much pressure they really need (at least a 120 psi – no matter what the side wall states) and he promised to get my bike next –perfect! I ran back to the B&B and has an enormous breakfast: you name it, I ate it. After breakfast, I got a ride back to Aubrey and picked-up my bike. It rode like it always did: perfect without a single rattle. Cervelo sure knows how to put a quality bike together: I got my Dual for two years now and never had to adjust a single screw. I was planning to have the bike overhauled but Sid Cadell talked me out of it: “Why fix something that isn’t broken” he pointed out, especially since I would have had no time to take the bike for a descent ride before the race.

I rode to the Days Inn and with some others we headed to the race venue to register for the big day. All went exceptionally smooth and Christine and I also got sucked in to buying photo's and a DVD. I'm glad I did – the pictures came out perfect!

The plan was to take a ride with some folks along the run course in the afternoon, but no one showed up. I rode alone to the race site and up Main Street when a guy came up from behind asking me if I was going to ride the run course. It turned out to be Anthony from TD and together we had a good time riding the course and chitchatting about all kinds of stuff. After the ride I went back to the motel, took a dip in the pool and drank some more of Hank's stash. After some dinner I headed home and stopped by a liquor store to buy some more beer. On the way back, I stopped by Aubrey – who was still putting bikes together – and handed him a cold beer. You have to keep a guy like him happy right? It was just about dark when I did the 3k climb back from Main to the B&B.

Friday, August 24

The day started early with a group swim in Okanagan Lake at 7 a.m. I had to cycle down to the Days Inn first to meet the group and we actually took the car to the race site, which is only 2k away. There must have been a few hundred other athletes who had the same plan, as all I could see was freaks in wetsuits at 7.30 a.m. on the beach. My swim was horrible – I couldn't even do 100 meters without a break and felt the water moving up and down. I am very sensitive to motion sickness and felt sick the minute I put my head in the water. On the other hand, maybe it was Hank's refreshments that made me feel nauseous. Anyway, I got out of the water and told myself that I never have a bad swim twice in a row and that Sunday's first act was going to be a blast. The rest of the day we spend lounging at he Days Inn and taking it easy as much as possible. I thought it was about time I should get nervous – but nothing yet. What was wrong with me?

Those who know me know that I usually don't take myself or the races too serious, and that I believe that there should always be room for a joke or some last minute change. That way you never get hung up when something goes wrong in the race. The other point is that I nearly don't train as much as my training buddies (I trained only 209 hours in 2007: 70 swimming, 80 cycling and 59 running), and although this is often a source of insecurity for me, it's also a motivator to show that I can still do things my way (if I would have not finished this race, the story would have gone in a slightly different direction here!). Two people (both great triathletes by the way) told

me recently that sometimes less training is the best way to prepare for these big events. I guess it's whatever you like to hear with these things.

We had dinner that evening at Salty's on the waterfront with some TD people and Christine's family. Dinner was lousy (don't put Parmesan on my food without asking – that stuff makes me gag!) and the beer was flat. At least the beer was easy to replace by a fresh one. We went for ice cream after and it was time to go home and get a good night of sleep. Tomorrow was going to be a big day with bringing the bike and all that race gear to the race site.

Saturday, August 25

I slept in until 7.30 a.m. and felt well rested. Apparently, it is important to sleep well the night before the race night, so to speak. Again, I enjoyed an extensive breakfast and ate so much, that lunch wasn't needed that day. Roman from the B&B drove me down to the Days Inn with my bike and my gear where I met some others who were all ready to drop off their gear.

At the race site it was a coming and going of athletes, and again the organization was absolutely flawless. It's quite impressive to see over 7000 plastic bags, all numbered, all in perfect order, and all lined up within the transition area (which is called 'parc ferme' in Europe – just in case you decide to race there one day). I decided not to pack any special needs bags – if it's that special, shouldn't you bring it in the first place? Besides, I figured, I could pass a few folks on the way – more of that later!

After racking our bike – don't forget to let the air out by the way -, we headed back to the Days Inn and called the day. I walked back to Main Street alone in order to grab a taxi, but ended up in a restaurant on Main Street where I ate a huge salad and drank a few glasses of water (for a change). The timing was good as the 'parade of the athletes' was just about to come by. I chatted with a few locals and visitors from the States about this race, and others.

Sunday, August 26 – RACE DAY!

I woke up at 3.30 a.m., refreshed and calm, wondering what this day was going to be. Roman, the B&B host, had made me a special Swiss breakfast the night before consisting of a mud of oatmeal, strawberries, blueberries, nuts, milk and whip cream. It has to sit overnight in the fridge so the whip cream can settle and give it the right texture. As some of you know, I am always game for something new on race day! I washed it down with lots of orange juice, some bread and a yogurt. I felt I was ready for IMC 2007!

(Note from Wikipedia about this breakfast:

"Birchermüesli" was invented around 1900 by Dr. Bircher, a pioneer of the biological health medicine and an early promoter of unprocessed food that retains its full nutritional value (*"Vollwertkost"*).

We left the house at 4.30 a.m. as planned and headed for the race venue. It took us

some driving around to get there as all the main streets were completely blocked off. We ended up parking nearby the start and walked to Main Street where the body marking took place. We were early there and avoided a line up, which gave us plenty of time to drop off more gear at the transition area (still no special needs bags...). After pumping the tires I went looking for TD members and found Christine almost right away. She looked happy and ready for the race as well.

I went to check both bags and was unable to find my heart rate monitor strap. Oops, forgot to put it on this morning. Ah well, I was not going to let this get me off track and decided it might be a good thing when climbing the Richer Pass and Yellow Lake later in the day. At 6.30 a.m. I headed down in my wetsuit (actually, Greg Collett's wetsuit – he was so nice to lend me his full sleeve since I do not have one!) to the beach and found a nice spot on some steps to relax. Relaxed I was all right and I was again wondering why I still wasn't getting nervous. This would be a good thing you would think, but no. I watched the enormous crowd standing 10 deep behind the fence and the helicopters flying overhead. I got to chat with a lady from Mississauga who told me this was her last Ironman due to injuries she was unable to shake off. She was also standing beside me in Toronto later that week when retrieving her bags at the airport - I recognized her face but without the wetsuit it took me a while to remember her. When the pro's went off at 6.45 I headed into the water and asked around me what people thought their swim time would be. "Around an hour" was the general answer.

In the days leading to this event we often talked about seating ourselves for the swim and we agreed on hanging on the left side of the beach in order to avoid the mob. However, it looked rather cramped on the left side and I said to myself 'fuck it, I'm going down smack in the middle'. And so I did. Maranatha was lit and with an enormous explosion, Ironman Canada 2007 had started. It turned out to be an excellent call to start in the middle, and up the front lines. I had nothing but clear water ahead of me with the occasional moron that was already of course. The first stretch was 1650 meters and I was able to find a good draft after a few hundred meters. Then the first turn around was coming up and suddenly swimmers from the left and the right started converging in the same area. I managed to keep swimming but took some guys goggles and swim cap off after we became arm locked. Sorry buddy, but I have a race to finish. The cross section was about 500 meters after which the second turn around was fairly easy and we headed back to the beach. Again, I found a good draft and stuck behind this guy until I thought he was going of course a bit. I went out of his slipstream and needed quite some time to find another good draft for the end sprint. It was hard to keep up with the swimmers and when I came out of the water I noticed why: 1.01.18. After the race I found out that I beat some of the pros on the swim! What a surprise and what a good feeling about a perfect swim that took not much out of me. I wasn't tired, shaky, dizzy or disorientated. I have to give Adam Johnston credit for my swim time, and the fact that I knew how to draft in the swim - we have trained it a few times. Great, time for T1.

I decided weeks before the race that I was not going to hurry through T1 and T2. I was going to give myself time to recompose, to drink a lot, and to chat with the volunteers. These volunteers were rather surprised that someone out of the water in just over an hour was not in a hurry to get on his bike. I stood by the Gatorade stand and talked to the guys there, had another Gatorade, and another one and finally headed to the change tent. I got dressed, walked to my bike (everyone was just flying around me), grabbed the Cervelo Dual and walked slowly to the mounting area. Time for the second part of this fantastic event.

The first stretch of the bike segment was the most memorable part of the race for me: thousands lined both sides of Main Street and were screaming, yelling and making noise and cheering every single athlete on (and it was only just after 8 a.m.). The first hour on the bike went by quickly, with one minor climb, and I clocked a 33 km/hr average speed. Cindy was nearby and I couldn't resist passing her a few times to chat with her. I told her I was going too fast and that I had to slow down in order to avoid an early bonk. Paul from TD was also just ahead of me and I could just keep pace with him in this stage of the race. Aubrey Brice had given me a detailed account of the entire course and I remembered almost every detail of it. He mentioned to use the first 15k to get into your rhythm, and after the climb you could start eating. That was particularly helpful, as my approach was to keep the tank topped up instead of waiting for signs that it was running low. So I started eating after half an hour – after that short but nasty climb - and was the only athlete doing so.

I suddenly remembered Bernadette Thomas' e-mail in which she told me to take it EASY, don't KILL yourself and to BEHAVE! After 60k in just over 1 hour 45 minutes my average read 35 km/hr! I knew Richter Pass was coming up any time (you don't see it coming Aubrey had mentioned) and decided to take a pee break on the flats instead of on the climb. I got back on the bike, turned a corner, and there it was: Richter Pass. And suddenly it hit me that we weren't going downhill for the last two hours, but that we had a strong tail wind. Great, now we had a climb and a head wind.

To make matters worse, I got a rear flat tire, probably some thorns got in when I took the pee break two minutes earlier. I panicked for about 5 seconds, and then remembered that I trained myself too in fixing flat tires – at home, in the office while having a beer and listening to some music. It took a good 15 minutes to get a new tube in and after emptying the CO2 cartridge I was holding my breath...yes, it was holding. I also figured a good 500 riders must have passed me since I suddenly was cycling amidst a whole different crowd: not the gung-ho thirty something olds, but the "take it easy I have all day athlete". The climb was long (11k), followed by app. 25k of hard rollers, but not a single soul passed me on this stretch. That was a great feeling and I got quickly back into my rhythm. The wind was picking up, and my legs were starting to hurt. Again, I thought of Bernie's e-mail and wondered if I went too fast too soon. I still had a marathon to run on an injured calf, but more on that later. Time to slow down a bit and to look for some illegal drafting while keeping an eye on the motorbikes with the officials (come on, we all do it when we get away with it, right?). And time to eat and drink some more. I didn't watch my cadence – just went by feel the entire ride – but watched for the aid stations being 10 miles apart. I wanted to take one bottle of Gatorade and one bottle of water if needed, without taking too

much weight with me on the bike. Two extra bottles behind the saddle means 3 extra pounds of weight to carry around all day. I made sure I finished a bottle just before the stations and the whole thing worked out nicely. Several people told me that the dry air dehydrates you quickly in the Okanagan Valley, without you noticing it.

I headed to the 'out and back' section where you could pick-up your special needs bag. I of course had all my special needs stuff with me and flew by this chaos of riders looking for bags, or looking for stuff in their bags, or looking in the wrong bag. I must have passed 50 riders in one minute here – great, just the way I planned it!

The last stretch was a gradual climb up Yellow Lake and what a gradual climb it was. You'd think you were going downhill, but were actually going uphill – that's how deceiving the terrain is. The summit of Yellow Lake felt like climbing Alpe d'Huez: tons of people leaving a 3 foot gap for you to climb the last stretch, with guys running with you and cheering you on. I remember Paul White from NYAC telling me that the last 30k were all downhill. My legs were killing me and at 154k I was wondering if he pulled a fast one on me (he's a great athlete – very strong on the bike). The wind was getting stronger and I got rained on a bit, with a temperature of just 13 degrees Celsius. Suddenly the downhill appeared, and the last 25 went by in 20 minutes. I was just barreling downhill with 75 km/hr when a left bent came up...and it took some light braking to just make without going in the ravine. Finally, back in Penticton I thought, time to stretch the legs. Almost, however, since another short rainstorm with hard winds hit me only 4k before the end of the bike course. My computer read 5 hours 52 minutes, but I spend 18 minutes fixing the bike and taking a pee break, so the official time was 6 hours 10 minutes and I was very pleased with that.

The most dreaded part of the race was now coming up: the marathon. I have been wondering and worrying for months how to run 42.2 km on an injured calf and a longest run of 22k back in July somewhere? So I took my time again, had to tear off my bike shirt since the zipper gave out early on the ride, and put my Team Diabetes tri-suit on, which is recognizable from miles away!

The first thing I remember doing on the run course was starting my chronograph on the watch, and calculating how much time I had until 7 p.m. (for a sub 12 hour finish). It turned out to be 4 hours and 22 minutes and I quickly figured a 6-minute kilometer or 10 km/hr pace (6 miles an hour: I told you I like to do the number thing) would be sufficient for that. Before the race I was hoping to be in shape for that pace for at least the first half of the marathon. The first few kilometers went by fast and easy and no protest from my legs. After 5k the Subaru Male Lead Car was coming up and I stopped on the road to cheer on the race leader – some kid from New Zealand. Lisa Bentley followed not much later and I did the same thing again.

Dehydration is always just around the corner, and drinking fluids regularly was my number one priority. I always trained with e-Load, but up until this time in the race I only had Gatorade and water. The plan was to walk through every aid station, taking in whatever I could. The stations were 1 mile apart and that corresponded with a 9-1 run schedule (run 9 minutes, walk 1 minute). I took one cup of Gatorade and one cup of water, mixed them and drank both and kept doing this at every single station, except the last one before the finish. Furthermore, I ate red grapes that were offered

and took some of those e-Load capsules that we got in our goody bag – as I said before, I'm always game for something new on race day. Dutch liquorice ("droppies") was the other thing I kept on eating throughout the day as they contain very high levels of salt.

The run went fairly steady, although I had to walk every single hill – my legs were just not capable of doing the uphill thing. On the other side of the hill I was usually flying down and passing the same folks that passed me on the uphill. The 10k was done in just over an hour, and I knew I was right on schedule. The next few kilometers were quite boring, as we ran along the beautiful Skaha Lake towards Okanagan Falls. I was still on track at 15k when the hilly part came up – I had to walk most of it, but again, was able to fly on the downhill. The turnaround came up and I clocked 2.06.53 which is exactly my calculated pace of 10 km/hr. It felt really good to be right on schedule but I also knew that the last downhill section into Okanagan Falls was now an uphill section that I would have to walk. No problem, I thought, since I will have 10 minutes to spare on the second half of the marathon. This number game is what I always do, on every single run, and in every single race. It keeps my mind from wandering and gives me a reason to ignore the legs and any other distractions. But what about my right calf: why wasn't it protesting yet?

The second half of the run was definitely harder, since I did not run more than 22k in my training runs for this Ironman and for that matter in the last few years. I tackled my lack of kilometers by finding someone with the same pace, and hung right behind him or her to stay out of the strong headwind. This made it possible for me to stick with my self imposed "you are only allowed to walk at the aid station" regimen. I noticed my pace was dropping a bit due to the longer walks at the aid stations and I was looking forward to coming back into town. I figured the crowds would carry me to the finish for the last 7k. There was a long, gradual climb right before Main Street of app. 1500 meters. I was hurting, burning, and swearing (in Dutch usually, so people think I'm delirious...) and was finally able to ditch my sunglasses. I make a point of buying safety glasses for \$ 11.95 instead of Raybans or Oakleys for 500 dollars. Mine are just as comfy, and I can use new ones for every race and toss them when not needed!

After the last climb I entered Main Street and knew a sub 12-hour finish was going to be reality. What a blast – I was still running after 39k although had signs of cramping when slowing to a walk through the aid stations. I therefore ignored the last aid station, picked-up the pace and headed to the last stretch on the waterfront. In Penticton you get to run right by the finish, only to make a left turn for another 2k. The crowds were huge and cheering on athletes by their name and of course the Team Diabetes outfit was recognized by lots of people. The last turnaround was coming up and I just had to walk for a minute, grabbing another Gatorade just before the finish. Greg Collett had told me to make sure that no one is close behind you so your finish photo will be uncluttered. This guy had it really all figured out (check out his website: www.gregcollett.com - it's a blast!) and gave me a ton of tips before the race (and his wetsuit). Anyway, I ran up the finish, noticed I cracked the 12-hour mark, and finished in 11 hours 52 minutes. I did not vomit, pass out or spoke in tongues, but with the help of two volunteers (who don't leave your site for 10 minutes) went

straight to the finish photo shoot and the food tent. I was hungry as a horse and started eating donuts and fruit washing it down with four cartons of that Powerbar drink (that tastes like chocolate milk). Christy Cook made her way to Penticton to cheer on Allan and Cindy, and she was the first person I talked to right after getting all that food. It was good to see a familiar face and she helped me keeping the heat blanket on since the wind was quite cold and I started to shiver.

It was getting really cold, and I decided to get dressed right after the race. I headed back to the transition area, got my bags right away and headed to the change tent. The warm clothing was a great feeling, and I put all my gear bags back with my bicycle. I hung around the finishing area for a while, but figured it would be while before I got to find the other TD members. Instead, I headed to the massage tent and got my calves straightened out. The massage pretty much sucked, but then again, I guess my legs were too tender to get a real workout on the massage table. Funny thing was that the girl on the table beside me was the same that sat beside me on the plane from Toronto to Kelowna – what are the chances!

The rest of the evening was spent walking back to the Days Inn (2k), drinking beer, walking back to the finish line (another 2k), and drink some more beer (Hank brought a back pack with Heineken). We watched athletes coming in until midnight, and one of them was Sister Madonna Buder. After that the TD gang went back to the Days Inn and I walked over to the race hotel to watch the fire works at 12 p.m. and grab a taxi back home. Just before the cab showed up, I saw Lisa Bentley hobbling back into the hotel. It seemed a fitting end to my first Ironman.

Monday, August 27

The day after race day was going to turn out just as exiting as race day itself. I just didn't know this yet when I got up at 7.30. Breakfast was fantastic, although sitting down for extended periods of time was not exactly the best thing to do. My quads were tight, but I did not feel as drained as I do after a shorter race. I guess the intensity on a shorter race is just much higher, and I usually have to take a nap right after one of these Subaru races back in Ontario.

When I got to the expo to check out some of the finishers' stuff and to retrieve my photos, finishers' certificate and results booklet, I ran into Cindy and Allan. Cindy was still hoping to get a spot for Kona, although she finished 6th in her age group (can you actually believe that – it was her first Ironman!). We sat down on the lawn and waited for the Hawaii roll-down. The two spots in her age group were taken and Cindy was of course disappointed. However, I was able to persuade her to stick around since a spot might roll-down to her age group. Especially after we noticed that the ladies in the older age groups had no intentions of going to Kona. It took a while and I decided to head back when I heard Cindy's name over the PA system. I ran back (no pain in my legs here) and was absolutely thrilled to see her taking the spot for Kona. I was able to enter the registration tent and took a ton of photos of Cindy putting down her credit card and signing the required documentation. How cool is it to actually know someone who is going to Kona in seven weeks! We ended by celebrating the fact with lunch and a few buckets of Corona – did that ever tasted good!

Tuesday, August 28

Time to go home. Finally, I was dying to see the twins who called me everyday in Penticton and kept on telling me how much they missed me. They both made some watercolours that I took with me and had pinned up the wall in the B&B where I was staying. Allan and Cindy picked me up and off we went to Kelowna. Their flight was an hour after mine, but they didn't mind going a bit earlier to accommodate me (nice guys, aren't they?). When I sat in the departure lounge, Lisa Bentley came sitting right across from me and I congratulated her on her win in Penticton. I asked her if I could make a photo of her to which she had no objection. How fitting that my last photo of this trip was one of her! The flight back was uneventful but interesting. The passenger beside me, I believe her name is Joanne Sisco, just did her fourth Ironman.. Then she told me that she DNF-ed in all four of them! I was quite impressed that she even signed up again after the third one and she pointed out that she was just to slow on the swim or the bike, or both, and got taken of the course again. I gave her some information about Adam Johnston, my swim coach and the personal coach for most of my training buddies, and told her that swimming with him will make an enormous difference and that she should contact him. I saw her thinking about it and I am convinced we will see her next season at NYAC. The trip ended picture perfect when I stood right beside Lisa Bentley – again – on the walkway to the luggage claim. She is a real winner and I truly felt like one!