

Blog #5 – June 28, 2010

You could not have asked for a more perfect morning on Sunday for the Welland Half Iron Distance Triathlon. When I arrived, the temperatures were mild and there wasn't a hint of wind in the air. What a relief after the rainy weather forecasts a few days earlier.

Being nice and early to the site, I had a great parking spot close to transition so I quickly gathered some gear and headed over to claim my spot on the rack. With signing up for the MSC Triple Race Challenge, a bunch of us age groupers were put in among several elites on the first rack. This was a busy section but it was interesting to see how they prepare for an event.

Once I was set up, I wished some of my friends good luck and finally headed down to the starting dock to throw on my wetsuit. I am not very skilled at this yet so I think I lost a few litres of sweat just getting the arms and shoulders into position. I could not wait to get zipped up and into the beautiful water so thank you Shanta for helping with the zipper!

When I entered the long, narrow waterway, I could not believe how far the markers seemed to be down the shoreline. Wow, this was a little intimidating to say the least. I knew this distance was going to require a calm effort so I just practiced my stroke up and down the starting area for a few minutes before getting into position, as close to the dock as possible. I figured it was far enough from the inside marker that I would be pretty much alone so I was surprised to see some of the top swimmers over this way.

As the horn sounded, I could not believe the jump Wolfgang Guembel got from a floating start out in the water. This was amazing to see from my vantage point right behind him and he seemed to be attacking this two kilometre swim in a speedy fashion right from the gate. I was in awe of the swimming speeds of the elites as they disappeared ahead of me. Hopefully, I can take my abilities close to their level in a few years.

As they set out, I let them clear before putting my face in the water to begin my journey. The rectangle course stayed comfortably close to the shore so I was able to use this landmark as my guide down the outside of the two long lengths of the route. As our wave had a thirty second head start on the next group so I knew it wouldn't be long before a new colour of swim cap would pick me off.

During my last race in Binbrook, the cloudy water was very tough to see through so I was not able to spot anything during that swim. In the Welland water, it was a totally different experience as I could easily see the other triathletes many feet away as they glided through the still waters. I watched several of the top swimmers pass from the White wave before making a move to jump on the feet of some of their followers. I may not have used this tactic to exact precision but I was able to pick up my pace on several occasions while drafting for a few minutes before they would get away.

For the most part I pushed with a bit more effort than my previous race but the talents of the experienced swimmers makes me fair game out there. In a few instances, I had to pull over a bit to allow some space as they were determined to claim my lane out on the open waters. Finally, with around five hundred metres to go, I decided to stick with a gentleman to my left that had just pulled up alongside of me. He was wearing a Yellow Cap so he had already made up a few waves on me but I thought I would try his pace to bring it home.

My decision seemed pay off as my increased tempo kept me right with this guide and I ended up exiting the water at the same time as he did. I had finished the 2k swim without stopping and I remained in freestyle form the entire time. Amazingly to me, there was not even a moment out on the water where I had thought about the breast stroke for a recovery break so I was very happy to complete this leg in a quicker split than I had predicted.

After passing a bunch of folks in my run up and transition, I was out to the 90k bike course and looking to improve my position in a big way. I kept things under control and could tell my heart rate and breathing were well within my range needed for a longer than usual (for me) ride but I was having issues getting comfortable on the saddle. I wiggled around trying to get set on the seat but nothing seemed to work so I just tried to ignore it and battle forward.

For the first 30k, everything was going as imagined and I was averaging around 39km/h and my legs felt pretty good. I was hoping to get to the midway turnaround at around this pace and then try to bring it back to transition in between 37 and 38 km/h. But as I approached the very small climb on the course, I started to feel my lower back tighten. I tried to use the short climb as a spot to sit up and stretch it out but it did not seem to help too much. Picking up speed on the other side of the slope, I could only cross my fingers that this would just run its course.

I continued in aero up to the turn where I could see that there were around thirty people ahead of me at this point. This was only a quick estimate as some people in the wave behind had some starting gaps to calculate for, but it was evidence of my progress up the field. As I made the turn, I once again tried to use this slow section to pop up and stretch things out which cost me a few spots.

When I got back up to speed, I could tell the stress was adding up and I was not able to stay in a tuck position. I was down and up in the bars nonstop for the next ten kilometres. It was now so bad that even sitting up was tough to cycle through so I waved through some riders that were catching up to me and slowly pulled over to the side to get some relief on the grass.

After close to ten minutes of rest and stretching, I tried to get back on and ride but my legs were now seized up and I was barely about to get my speed up to 30 km/h. Also, I still could not get into an aero position so I knew my day was over and I just cruised in the rest of the way to get myself back to the rack.

Once back, I knew I could not run and was not going to risk making things any worse so I wondered if I should hold tight for a few more hours to see everyone come in or head home to help out with a family birthday party my wife was holding. I thought it would be best to get home and give her a hand so I gathered my gear and packed up the car much earlier than expected.

Although, I was a little disappointed not to be able to post a time, I was still in good spirits as there were some positives from the half race I completed. I hope nobody thought I was being a bad sport by leaving!

Congrats to all those that raced in Welland and we will see you all on the course very soon. My next couple Multisport Canada races are at the Olympic distance so I am confident that my back will hold for those ones.

Happy Training,

Larry Bradley