

## Welland Rose City Long Course - Race Report

Well, here goes my first ever race report. I was never (and still am not) much of a writer, so I thank whoever may end up reading this for taking the time and I hopefully have not bored you to death.

Brief introduction – my name is Matt Straatman, I am part of the 2017 MultiSport Canada Ambassador team. I have a strong passion for the sport of triathlon and everything that it stands for. After 4 years of competing I've decided that it is time to start giving back to the sport in order to get more people involved, and what a great way to accomplish this is to act as an ambassador for the sport.

### Saturday

What a great weekend! I cannot remember the last time I had *that* kind of experience at a racing venue – there was something for everybody. Lots of accommodations close by to choose from, the ideal venue at the Welland Flatwater Centre, great weather, and not to mention that you're 25 minutes away from Niagara Falls.

My girlfriend, Geordana, and I arrived in Welland on Friday evening. We had decided that we'd volunteer on Saturday with the Sprint Races and Give-it-a-Trys. We were coming from far out of town so this got the long drive out of the way ahead of time. After learning that I hadn't yet seen Niagara Falls up close, Geordana insisted on dropping our stuff at the hotel and promptly hitting the road, once again, this time to Niagara. Absolutely breathtaking. When in Welland – go to Niagara Falls!



On Saturday morning I was up bright and early so that I could get out for an easy run before we had to get to the race site. I'll always do some form of activity the day before a race just to stay loose – I'm not sure if this is recommended or not, but it has always worked for me and I'd probably feel under-prepared if I didn't do this. Call me superstitious.

We arrived at the race site at 8AM to assist with the water aid station on the run course. Having applied no form of sunscreen whatsoever, we wandered out to the aid station and filled cups with water and F2C for the runners for when they eventually come by. Now I will go ahead and say that this is probably one of the most rewarding experiences you can have in triathlon (next to crossing the finish line, of course). It's the last few kilometers of the race, athletes from all fitness levels and walks of life are giving it every ounce of what's left inside of them to get to that finish line up the road and finish the race. You cheer them on as they grimace, laugh and sometimes even cry offering any support you can. Being just a small part of their triathlon experience is very rewarding and will most definitely keep me coming back. This is just the boost I needed ahead of my race the next morning.

## **Sunday**

Race day! I had woken up even earlier than the day before to ensure that I could eat breakfast 3 hours before gun time – race starts at 8:25 so I was up shortly after 5AM. May sound early, but this gives you enough time to digest so that you don't feel bloated while racing, which is something nobody wants to experience. This is also something that I will never be able to convince Geordana is necessary.

We arrived at the Welland Flatwater Centre about an hour and fifteen minutes before gun time. Geordana, once again, voiced her skepticism about my punctuality. There's just a bunch of things that you need to take care of before the race such as registration, body marking, setting up transition, warm-up, etc. It's not something that you want to be doing while rushed – you will forget things. I am an advocate of arriving early, getting everything set up, formulate a plan and get all the thinking out of the way before the race. Once I completed all of this, I struggled my way into my wetsuit, applied 0 sunscreen and headed down to the water. Geordana wished me luck and I hopped in for a warm up.

### **Swim 2km (34:47 - T1: 1:04)**

Knowing my strength in the water, I lined up towards the back of the blue swim caps as I really wasn't anticipating a heroic swim performance. I was aiming to swim the 2km in 35 minutes which would put me at a 1:45/100m swim pace. I have improved my swim a lot over the winter just with consistency. We have a small pool in our apartment building and I would swim 5-6 times a week for 20–30 mins on average at a time.

The gun went and soon I found myself swimming comfortably in the second group of blue swim caps. I saw some people going off the front of the group, so I decided that after a few guinea pigs went that I would follow some feet and swim ahead as well. This worked out brilliantly at first, I was sitting on some feet and slowly moving towards a group of swimmers about 50 meters ahead. This was all until we got to the turnaround – the guy I was following didn't actually turn at the turn around so I was then on my own. Here I was stuck ahead of the group I just lost and behind the group that I'm unable to catch up to. The second kilometer of the swim was very lonely, but I did feel great. I just kept my rhythm, followed the guide rope underwater, and didn't try anything heroic. I really did have to pee though...

I exited the water in 46<sup>th</sup> place at 34:47 which put me right on the pace I had set for myself – I was off to a good start. One thing I didn't do before the race was walk from the swim exit to my bike so I was a little flustered once I got to the top of the steps. Found my bike in the end and threw together a pretty speedy T1, so all is good.



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### **Bike 56km (1:21:22 – T2: 0:55)**

This bike course was tailor made for me – windy and flat. People say that in Welland you can watch your dog run away for days, it's just that flat. Normally I loathe biking in the wind, but I knew that the headwind we rode into going out of town would play into my advantage; I'm a heavier athlete so I wouldn't get blown around too much and I have my bike set up such that I can get into a very aerodynamic position. My BLADE disc wheel and aero helmet completed the package.

Once I got my shoes on and dropped down into my aerobars, I quickly found my rhythm. I could see dozens of riders up the road and began picking them off one by one. However, I could not shake the feeling that I really had to pee. I knew I had to drink water and that just made the feeling worse. After 20km, we turned left and I stopped avoiding the inevitable; I pulled off to the side of the road and emptied my bladder.

After being passed by a rider I hopped back on my bike and resumed the chase. I made sure I didn't let the tailwind we had go to my head – I still had to work. I have my bike fitted with Garmin power meter pedals so that I could measure my effort throughout the whole ride, not just relying on speed. I felt somewhat comfortable into the headwind at ~370W so I tried my best to keep it around there even with the tailwind. As I worked my way to the head of the race I was disappointed to see the amount of

drafting going on. I knew there was nothing I could do about it except ensure that the drafters would not be able to hold my wheel as I passed them – I succeeded.

I finished the bike leg sitting in 3<sup>rd</sup> overall, putting up the best bike split of the day, averaging 41.6km/h which includes my unplanned bathroom stop. I also threw down a personal best average power of 379W and normalized power of 384W. Buy a power meter, folks!



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### **Run 15km (1:00:24)**

I came off of the bike feeling surprisingly strong. I settled into a comfortable, yet ambitious pace at 3:45–3:50min/km. My goal for the run course was to finish in under an hour and if I could hold this pace, I would come out far ahead of my expectations. With the lapped run course you get to run by the grandstand 3 times which a huge motivation! Seeing Geordana and my Dad multiple times while running was also a nice treat. There were a total of 4 aid stations step up around the 5km loop, all equipped with water, F2C, Hammer Gels and cold sponges. All of which were very welcomed over 15km in 25 degree heat! I thanked each aid station profusely at least once throughout the course of the run as at the point, they were a triathlete's best friend.

The second lap, I found someone to run with coming strong off of the bike. We had agreed to work together which definitely helped me a lot as I was starting to suffer. I made the mistake of looking down at my heart rate which read 195BPM at one point. This quickly frazzled me and I lost my rhythm along with my running buddy. I finished the first two 5km laps in ~38 minutes.



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The third lap is where things get very dark for me. I was paying for the effort I threw down on the bike and for going too far into the red on my second lap on the run. I had one of the biggest blow-ups I've ever experienced. After hitting the wall the last 5km were like a death march – I watched my third place slip away as Billy passed me, then Chris, then Duncan, then Ryan. I ended up finishing the race 7<sup>th</sup> OA and 1<sup>st</sup> in my age group. Despite the blow up and wicked sunburn, in the end I am extremely happy with my effort knowing that I could not give one more ounce of energy. I was happy with my time exceeding the expectation I had originally set for myself.



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After the race I thanked John Salt and every volunteer that I physically could for yet another outstanding race. Could not have asked for a better venue and race day weather for that matter. The Welland Rose City Long Course triathlon is on my calendar for next year.

Geordana and I then packed up our stuff at the hotel, proceeded promptly to IHOP, threw back a whole mess of pancakes and went back to our apartment in Toronto. Life is good.