Jessey The Elf – July 18th, 2017 – Gravenhurst Olympic Race Recap

Multisport Canada Triathlon Series - GRAVENHURST - Race Recap 🏊🚴🏃🎅😀

I am an Elf, and prefer older methods of communication such as letters to Santa, telephone calls, or messenger owl... Although I now have Facebook, Instagram & Twitter - I have yet to get a "blog" or one of those fancy "websites" up and going - so this will be a long Facebook post... trying to keep it short, but you know how enthusiastic elves are!!! 😀😀😀🎅❄️❄️❄️❄️❄ *keep scrolling or read on* and I apologize for grammatical errors- the wifi on the Polar Express gets a little glitchy in spots!

Let me start off by saying, if you are interested in triathlon or duathlon, are a beginner or a seasoned pro (such as this elf over here) this course is not for the faint of heart. Gravenhurst is challenging course right from the get go – a potentially choppy open water swim to shore, the bike course is full of rolling hills, and the run has some nasty climbs in it – but it is also a fantastic course to test your fitness on, and definitely work on some mental racing strategies!

Getting to Gravenhurst from the GTA was as easy as - putting a Christmas present in a gift bag with tissue paper and choosing not to wrap it - by printing off the race directions from MSC's website. I usually am the first one in transition (the parking lot so-to-speak where you park your bike and leave all of your race equipment you will need for the race)... but on Saturday morning I was 4th into transition! Crazy!

Even at 6am the atmosphere was set - all of the volunteers and Race crew were eager to help, greeting you with a smile (just like home for me at the North Pole). The first item you receive is a numbered bracelet for your wrist and a matching one for your bicycle. This is the only race series I have seen that does this and is a huge comfort and peace of mind (post race when leaving with your bike the race crew checks to see that your wrist number matches your bike number so only you can leave with your bike). Last summer at a triathlon training camp my bike was stolen from me and I've been very paranoid since, but this added bike security is very reassuring!!!

The check in process at Multisport Canada (MSC) is smooth and concise:

- ✓ You check the nice list (or naughty list for some of you cheeky duathletes) for your name and race number.
- ✓ Then you rack your bike on the appropriate rack and all of your competitors smile at you while they eye-up your entire bike (this happens at all races, but MSC athletes smile more)
- ✓ Next you head to BIB number pickup where all of the race volunteer "elves" are in bright yellow and ready to help you.
- ✓ You get your stocking (race kit) filled with goodies and trinkets like none other! Still with 5.5 months til' Christmas - it gets better!
- ✓ If you registered early enough you get a flashy race t-shirt that smells of fresh cotton and is now your new favourite shirt for the summer! 👕😁😎
- ✓ Then one of my favourite parts!!!- You are given a very special piece of coloured latex - your swim cap! And shown your wave start time. 🏊
- ✓ Finally, your timing chip for you ankle, and then a volunteer draws your number, age, and even a little smiley face on your body. 😊

Just like registration, the rest of the event is always smooth and very well run!

The swim course at Gravenhurst is really unique, like all MSC swim locations are, as you do not start near the finish and swim a loop back to shore – but rather a boat/Steamship brings you all the way out to the middle of the lake and then you swim back to shore! I have always been a big believer in being prepared to swim back to shore if your boat sinks… so that was definitely the motto from the Lifeguard in me heading into Gravenhurst… ***"Swim like the boat sunk".*** Before every race I like to go through my pre-race walk-thru, walking and scanning the swim exit and checking out the dock for the first time. At MSC Gravenhurst the swim exit was up a set of stairs/latters and onto a long dock to the mainland – which acted as a great spectator viewing area come the end of the swim! The Swim exit had a big blow up arch and lots of direction markers so it was easy for you to find your way to your bike!

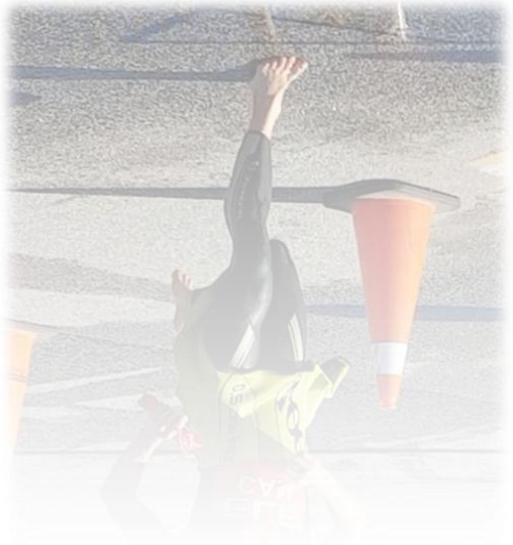
Posing with my puppy “son” Hunter in front of the famous bear on the dock before heading to the boats race morning. Smiling/squinting into the sun, to avoid yourself from overheating I recommend keeping your wetsuit halfway on, and putting it on fully once aboard the boat! Timing chip on, cap and goggles in hand!

Hunter is a trained lifeguard Dog, and the current 5k-run-with-a-dog World Record Holder… he was watching daddy board the boat and wishes he could join! Notice the Steamships above Hunter’s nose ☺ He loves coming to races to watch all of the fast athletes chasing their dreams!

This year is my first year racing Gravenhurst, and although I was very excited to “JUMP” off of the Steamships into Muskoka Bay, John Salt had a private Pontoon Boat set up for his PRO/Elite Athletes. You can see the ELF in centre, above the word “BOAT” relaxing before the secluded PRO’s were brought out ahead of the Steamships for safety.

Any regular pre-race nerves are quite minimized in the MSC series with genius Announcer Steve Fleck cracking jokes to put you at ease, while also providing lots of valuable course information before the event gets underway. Another fantastic morning with sun and low winds!

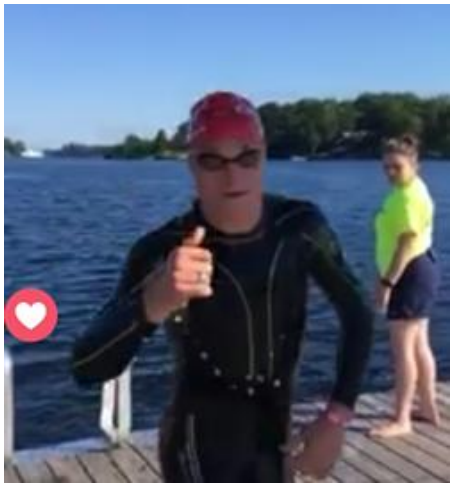
A few finals words from race director John Salt, and the stage is set for a great, FUN, safe and fast race. The Steamships and pontoon set sail!



SWIM: 1500m 🏊🏊🏊🏊🏊

The swim in Lake Muskoka is wonderful! Unique to any other race in Ontario, or even in Canada for what I know of, you get to start on a Muskoka Steamship! Early in the morning after you set up your transition you head down to the waterfront where two massive Steamships await you for boarding. Once on, they do a head count at 8:00am and at the sound of the mighty horn you set sail! It was actually pretty cool from the PRO's perspective, riding alongside these great ships in a little pontoon boat!

The steamships stop just shy of the start line, and they let you JUMP off the ship into the water to warm up. Then the officials call up the waves to the start buoys, and again the sound of the mighty horn starts each wave! Just like all other swims, it is wetsuit legal, and pretty simple as it is only 1 left hand turn at 500m, following little orange buoys (into the sun) and into shore the last kilometer. Light chop at the start, but once you pass the island into the bay the swim is relatively calm. Beautiful swim course venue for sure! Once you are out of the water with lots of lifeguards and kayaks along the course for safety, you run along the dock in front of literally hundreds of cheering fans to your bike located in transition! The dock is like a gauntlet – as you near the main shore the crowds get larger and louder, aiding in the energy of this race! (Personal swim - 1st out of the water, fastest 1500m swim to the dock in 18:20, ~260m run to T1 to the swim timing mat in 19:29, over 3 minutes ahead of the chasing trio containing eventual race winner Daniel)



Transition 1: As you can see in the screenshots above, of Multisport Canada's Live Video, captured at the SWIM EXIT by Race Director John Salt - I was as happy as an ELF on Christmas Day leading the race by ~250m and just over 3 minutes! I knew I had a lead, but a smile from John Salt and cheering from the roaring crowds had me literally sprinting for my bike, after treating the swim just "like the boat sunk!" trying to extend the gap as far as I could knowing that there were some crazy fast cyclists coming including Daniel Clarke.

Transition Tips from a PRO! Another cool MSC feature is the in-transition-video courtesy of Multisport Canada's Facebook Feed:

Below, you can see more screenshots from one of the Multisport Canada Transition Videos, when I run to my bike and quickly strip off my wetsuit. As the race always begins at the start of the swim, and does not end until you cross the finish line – transitions are PART OF THE RACE! This isn't "free time" to lollygag, but rather "free time" to make up on your competitors. You should always practice transitions, just like you train yourself in swimming, cycling, and running – you need to train transitions too. As a coach, and a PRO triathlete I cannot stress practicing transitions enough. Practice, Practice, Practice! Practice doesn't necessarily make perfect, but practice makes it much smoother come race day. Multisport Races are so exciting with lots of cheering spectators and volunteers, but you need to remember to take it smooth and relaxed in transition. Every move is planned and practiced, and your transition should be as SIMPLISTIC as possible.

Running through transition, rather than walking or crawling, is much faster and can save a lot of wasted time! Once you exit the water, lift your goggles up so you can see, then unzip your wetsuit and pull your arms out of your wetsuit. Push your wetsuit down to your hips and then remove your cap and goggles – running with them in one hand. Once into transition, locate your bike (sometimes after an exhausting swim it is as hard to find your bike as it is to find your car in a shopping mall parking lot at Christmas time after shopping for 5 hours!) Drop your cap and goggles at your bike and begin to put on your bike helmet. *You must do up your helmet and make sure it is clipped before you touch your bike*

Yes my hair is green, pictured above, but it does certainly go well with red! In the series of photos above ^ you can also see how my eyes are closed while clipping up my helmet. This is because I practice clipping my helmet up almost daily – that is has become “second nature” and I can quite often complete this simple task with my eyes closed! Remember what I said about practice not making it perfect, but making it smooth!

In the past I use to leave my helmet on the ground, and then pull my wetsuit down first - and while bent down grab my helmet to put it on… but I have had my helmet “kicked” or moved out of the way after another athlete who ‘accidentally’ bumped it or moved it in transition… this is why I recommend leaving your helmet on your handlebars somehow, then clipping it up before you go to pull your wetsuit down. This is also a surefire way to make it clear to any triathlon officials that you have clipped your helmet up well before any intent to remove your bike… Helmet first, wetsuit second, bike third. *do not forget the NEW rule being enforced at all Ontario Races this summer, you MUST wear your **BIB ON THE BIKE!** Back in the good old day’s body marking would suffice, and then you could just put your bib on at the start of the run… but now we need to have it on for the cycling portion of the race.

As you can see above, you want to pull your wetsuit down in one swift motion as far down your legs as possible! Once down as far as you could go, start doing your Christmas HAPPY DANCE / Elf Shuffle, using high knees and really exaggerated arm movements

Three options I recommend for wearing your bib on the bike (using a number belt) are described after the next set of screenshots:

Option 1) you can wear your bib and number belt for the entire race, by wearing your number belt under your wetsuit! I have done this option in the past, and it tends to be a little uncomfortable with your tight wetsuit pushing the number belt into you… the bonus is that in transition you can just pull your wetsuit down and leave your bib already on you for the bike. PRACTICE to see if you like wearing your bib under your wetsuit.

Option 2) you can leave your bib in transition – on your number belt and left open/unclipped – and when you take off your wetsuit you can reach for it and then clip it up before you leave for the bike. This is the option that the majority of athletes choose to do – avoiding the uncomfortable sensation of wearing your number belt under your wetsuit for the swim, and being able to clip it on before heading out for the ride. There is a high chance though of taking quite some time to clip your bib up, especially when you start to panic and try to rush it, that's why there is option 3:

Option 3) similar to option 2, you leave your bib in transition on your number belt, but this time you leave your number belt clipped up! Once your wetsuit is off, you then step into the "loop" of the number belt and pull it up really quick over your hips and off you go! That's the elf way!

Having a smooth transition is key to staying calm, cool and collected heading onto the cycling leg of the race. By setting yourself up for success with a neat and tidy transition area, you have a much better chance of nothing going wrong or causing you to panic… wasting valuable energy and focus. On the left are photos of me doing the *elf shuffle* to get my number belt on, before grabbing my bike and heading out for the cycling leg. On the right and bottom left, are photos of my transition area; notice no bananas, no sunglasses on the ground, no fancy foot wash stations, no water bottles, cycling shoes, pairs of socks, ice cream, etc… my cycling shoes are already on my bike pedals for a speedy mount, my bib is closest to me for easy access, my sunglasses are in my helmet, and of course my elf hat is poised for the run. The less clutter the better, keep it neat and clean!

BIKE: 40km 🚲🚲🚲🚲🚲🚲🚲🚲

The bike course in Gravenhurst was changed within 36 hours of the race start due to construction and police cancelations, and the new map wasn't online or announced until race morning. This is why it is always **critically important** to listen to Steve Fleck, John Salt, Triathlon Ontario Officials and anyone else giving *IMPORTANT RACE INFORMATION* at the Pre-race Briefing, usually in transition about 30-45 minutes before the race. The Olympic bike course ended up being a standard 20km out and 20km back, with gentle rolling hills – no serious Tour de France Category climbs! The rolling hills had a few false flats, and on race day there was a slight headwind on the way out and a tail wind on the way back. Racing this course for the first time I wasn't worried, the bike course was extremely well marked and tons of volunteers to guide you. Lots of signage, and every 5km were marked so you could check your own splits. A very scenic course, we went out along the lake and through some winding country roads through some of the Canadian Shield. Great 40km course to test your bike fitness on, it had flats, rolling hills, and a few small climbs – which made it easy to take a break from aero and take in some fluids.

Personal Bike: I cycled a 1:00:27, to average a hair under 40km/h – pretty good for that course that day… a little disappointed having not reached my goal of a ~58 minute bike. Daniel Clarke caught up to me just after 38km on my Specialized Tarmac road bike with his speedy Cervelo P4 TT bike and disc – clocking a blistering 57:03! We rode into transition about 100m apart after a very scenic and fun ride. The crowds again were strong and you could hear Steve Fleck cheering us on loud and clear!

Back into transition Daniel and I were racked side by side and as he was putting his socks on when I “made my move” according to announcer Steve Fleck, as I racked my bike, took my helmet off, and put my shoes on *WITHOUT SOCKS* which helped me make up 20 seconds on Daniel and lead onto the run – but only temporarily. I have always raced without socks and have acquired some pretty bad blisters in the past… but this was a whole new level of blister! Above you can see the awesome race course lined with pylons, timing mats, and incredible race volunteer support point us in the right direction! Below, my blisters from the fateful decision to race the Olympic Distance 10km run sockless…

RUN: 10km 🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃🏃

Leaving transition your name is announced and it gives you a boost as you start the hilly run course of Gravenhurst! The photo above is what the run course **feels like** although not the toughest run, after a hard swim and bike it is a beast! Lots of water stations, volunteers, kilometer markers, and fellow competitors cheer you on throughout the mountainous climbs in the heat of the morning. The aid stations have water and F2C electrolytes handed to you by excited volunteers that yet again give you a boost! Sure enough the first 5km passes as you hit the turn around, and as I like to say *"The **good news** is that you are **halfway**, the **bad news** is that you are **halfway**"*. By this point at least for me, the hills were taking their toll on me and the blisters were really starting to hurt. Through the first 5km in just under 19:30, Daniel and the lead cyclist were only 30 seconds up on me but it felt like a lot more. (Wearing my famous elf hat I got lots of crowd support and cheering – giving me the support necessary to run the final 5km back to the roaring transition zone.) A very scenic run course I must admit, it was definitely tough! Running through the huge finish chute and big arched gate is a big key to this series feeling like a big world class race, in a supportive local setting.

The run course use to be my arch-enemy. I use to try and build up a big lead on the swim and bike and hold on for dear life. Now my run has improved and I can enjoy the race from start to finish. Sure the hills were tough, but it felt so good to be out there on such a sunny morning doing what I love to do – **TRIATHLON!**

Once into that final home stretch I had many teammates, fellow athletes racing the next day, and spectators cheering me right to the finish! I felt like a local celebrity! Then I heard Steve Fleck again, calling out "*He lead out of the water with an 18-minute swim, he rode the 40km bike in an hour, and had a good battle on the run – here is your second place in the Olympic Triathlon, **Jessey The Elf***!" Race director John Salt is always at the finish to greet you with a handshake and smile - and this year every racer got a BIG SHINY finisher medal 🥇 to celebrate a race well done 💪👏 a unique Canadian 🍁 design to show proudly to your friends and family after the race, a true memento from an awesome race!

Thanking John Salt for an awesome race yet again!

A really cool thing that MSC does prior to each race, they choose finishing places for sponsorship giveaway prizes... for example: "the 100th person across the line recieves a NEW Wetsuit!" Or #185 gets new Skechers Performance running shoes!!! A really cool random way to give away awesome sponsor prizes fairly! It is fun to see who will get the Racer of the Day award and duke it out on the home stretch once Steve Fleck announces that the next finisher gets the goodies!

I can go on and on about how much fun Gravenhurst was, but with Kingston on the horizon - it's time for you to stop reading about the elf recap and sign up NOW to get your Swim CAP!

Thank you all so very much for reading all 12 pages about #gravenhurst today, and I look forward to seeing you out training, and at MSC events all summer long!!!

Your favourite tri-ELF-lete,

~ JESSEY THE ELF ~

p.s. pictured is the epic finish arch, the happiest and friendliest MSC ambassador team members you will come to know on the podium, an elf on the podium, the Gravenhurst Race t-shirt and finisher medal along with Silver PRO medal, and finally with the awesome BLADE Wheels Robert Milligan holding onto my puppy son Hunter The Runner! Cheers and happy training!