

So it's just over 4 months since I took part and completed Challenge Cairns iron distance race. I have to say, the past few months have been rather dull and quiet but at the same time great to catch up with some friends and family that were neglected leading up to the BIG race.

It's funny how I say BIG race as if I had sacrificed a lot to achieve it. Those that know well enough will know what I mean. I am a fairly relaxed sort of individual and that is how I approached the 'journey' to my first iron distance event.

I will not elaborate on the race event itself as I am sure I have told most of who will be reading this by now how the day went. I will however try to entertain/bore you with my own journey and how this little Samoan came into wearing lycra and drinking coffees around Brisbane.

It all started at the end of 2006 when I found out that my own little country, Samoa will be hosting the South Pacific Games in September 2007. I was super excited as I had previously represented Samoa at Touch in 2003. A quick phone call to my previous Touch Coach in Samoa and my hopes were dashed as he had already had a training squad all based in Samoa. Out of curiosity, I asked about other sports that were available. He laughed and mentioned that TRIATHLON was one the sports in the Games and I quickly agreed to try out for it.

After the phone conversation, I asked my partner Jacqui what a triathlon was. As helpful as she always is, she explained to me about this new sport and what was needed to complete it. Swim, Bike and Run, how hard could it be? Well, very hard as I later found out.

First I needed to buy a bike. Never had owned one before so it was interesting to have clip in shoes and all as my first one. I have to admit that my first 6 weeks of doing Robson's beginner course, my right knee was constantly bleeding from the repeated stacks I had. Not to mention my first swim session with Super Coach Bronny. I say swim but I am sure Bron would see it otherwise. Ok it was more of a survival session. I had to stop twice every 50mtrs for the whole session. Thanks for your patience Bronny. Anyways to cut a long boring story short, I persisted with training and Mark's guidance and got to represent Samoa twice now in triathlon. As Charlie Sheen would say "WINNING"

It was I think the start of last year that people started asking me about doing an Ironman. And some that had just joined the squad would ask about how many I'd already done which I found quite funny as I DO NOT look anything like a seasoned IM triathlete. Thanks for the boost anyways guys. As if it was a sign from above, Challenge Cairns came up and Jacqui and I thought it was the right time and right race to do as our first iron distance. And it just so happened that the race was exactly one week before the 2 year anniversary of my dear mother's passing.

And so the "journey" began. I know it sounds cliché but the actual race itself is just the icing on the cake to the work you do leading up to it. Speaking to and from the experiences of fellow BTS members, the usual IM campaign is about 20 weeks. I am no Einstein but that is almost half a year of dedication. I have to say it almost put me off before the journey even begun. I had to break it up to more manageable sections. I

will focus on M'Laba first and then worry about the long distance stuff after that. After M'Laba, I had a week off and then 11 weeks till race day.

I tried my best to not to count down the weeks but it was near impossible as I was constantly reminded by fellow training partners at almost every session. It was great to have a few other BTS'ers doing the same race to train together with. I was fortunate to have Andrew Callow and Shane Carlon as my constant riding buddies and Jacqui and Belinda every now and then as great company. The more long rides, longer swim sets and longer runs we did, the more I got to enjoy them. Why? Many of you may ask. Well it's simply a case of making things easier for yourself. You can either learn to enjoy it and time will go quickly by or dread it and it will seem like an eternity. I made the decision earlier in the campaign that I was going to enjoy every minute of this "journey" no matter what surprises it may throw at me and boy was I glad for that decision.

The first few weeks all went according to Mark's plan and then I think my body had gotten on to what we were doing and decided it was dead set against it. I had a few detours along the 'journey'. First, my right shoulder which I had 2 reconstructions on started to flare up. Then when that settled down the ITB on my right leg decided it was its turn to take the limelight. A lot of catch ups with my physio and some fun water running sessions kept me entertained for another 3 or 4 weeks. Below is a short extract from some notes I made another week of the 'journey'

WK ENDING 10/04

This week was a bit off, physio said to be off swimming for a whole week so we substituted with some kicking sets which were really fun ☺☺. Anyways, ITB has also started to play up so now have a new friend in the roller and the band for my shoulder exercises. Running was coming along pretty steady but now have to do water running instead. Long rides are not feeling as long now which helps with the mental side a bit. The new bike is awesome and just feels great ☺. Well 8 more wks to go and all the fun will end ☺.

Byron Bay was the last hit out 4 wks from the main event. It was going to be interesting as I'd only been doing a bit of swimming, most of the bike sessions and just water running for 3 wks leading into it. Head coach said to push the swim and bike and see how I felt in the run. Well it was all going to plan, in fact it was one of my better races until just over 4kms into the run....BANG.....Mr Hamstring felt neglected and wanted some extra attention. Pulled out of the race and limped back to the tent and started icing it straight away. Turned out I had a small tear on the upper part of my left hamstring so it was back to the physio we go. And yep as luck would have it, more water running....YAY

Our final hard session was the famous 200km ride up to Caloundra and back the next day. Was a great ride with an awesome group until I missed a turn and ended up in WITTA. = NOT WINNING. Quickly made the U-turn and 15mins later was back on track. I even managed a 20min run off the bike which gave me a whole bucket of confidence. Support crew were awesome and very patient with us all.

Well the race itself went pretty much according to plan, well if you call what I had, a plan. It was pretty simple = Don't drown in the swim, don't fall off the bike and don't trip over yourself in the run. And I think I nailed them all.

Looking back now, I have to say that it was a great experience and I hope it is one I can go through and experience again. Sounds weird but I loved every minute of the whole 'Journey'. It has made me realize that and to quote Nelson Mandela "**It always seems impossible until it's done.**"

I truly believe that IM is a lot easier than the shorter distances if you have the following:

1 Will to commit your time.

Very important to make sure you have that time to spend on the training required. About 18-25hrs per wk was my time and that suited ME.

2. Patience

Very important to have, actually it's a MUST HAVE. You need to be patient, whether it's with results or fellow training partners. You need to be able to wait for improvements to happen. With long distances, there's no need to rush things 😊.

3. Flexible

With patience comes flexibility in your training. No matter how thorough and detailed you wanna be, there will be surprises along the way and you need to allow and adjust to these as they arise.

And I think the last one is MENTAL strength. Some people say "Oh I don't think I have the mental strength to do that." That to me is a cop out excuse. Everyone has mental strength and like any muscle in your body, in order for it to get stronger you need to train it.

For me, I found that the longer the sessions went, the more I let my mind go walkabouts. I have been to the TDF a few times, I have raced Kona and have also ran the NY marathon, all during my 5+hrs rides. This is how I mentally got through some of my long sessions but everyone is different.

All you need is a great imagination and great memories of your past/present or future. I have my own special collection of events/photos/parties and special people in my life that I always think about when the going gets tough whether in training or during a race. And trust me it instantly takes away the pain and always brings a smile to my face. It hasn't NOT worked yet so I will continue to use this special formula.

Someone asked me after Cairns how I felt. I think I responded with something like "I feel ok" "So it didn't hurt" was the follow up question. Well, of course it hurt, but that hurt will go away in a few days or so, but when you lose someone close to you, in my case – my mum. Well that's real pain and that will always be there. It's funny as this is the same pain that drives me in this crazy sport which is all about pushing yourself out of your comfort zone. I had never as a kid growing up thought I would be doing triathlons. Bloody hell I only found out that such sport existed 5 yrs ago. All I wanted was to play rugby for my country like every other kid in my village.

Life sometimes throws us curve balls every now and then. For me, triathlon is my curve ball. And hopefully I have hit one out of the park.

PS: Ever noticed how Guys **play** rugby
Girls **play** netball etc etc
We **DO** triathlons

Just something to ponder 😊

