

After some time out with an injury after the Canberra Marathon in April I decided on the Gold Coast Half Ironman as my next goal. Knowing nothing about training properly for a triathlon and failing so badly in both the swim and the ride at Mooloolaba, I decided it would be wise to join a squad and get a program done by someone who knew what they were doing. I had done some swimming with Brisbane Tri Squad so I contacted Mark Turner and organised for him to write up a program for me.

Although the training load was heavy, training was progressing well until about mid-July when I started having some pain in my knee which began to restrict my rides but, oddly, didn't affect my running. We never got to the root cause of the problem but I suspect a fall from the bike I'd had a month or so previously. To limit my downtime it was decided with the sports physician to have a cortisone injection and continue treatment with the physio. However, immediately before the injection, on a long training run, I began to have some pain in my left heel. I had the injection anyway but had to give the Noosa Half a miss. This turned out to be a wise decision as an MRI showed a stress fracture in my left heel.

So, nine weeks out from the triathlon, I was consigned to wearing a boot and unable to run for a minimum of four weeks. I guess I am lucky that the run is my strongest leg and, for the next month, I trained in the pool and on the bike four or five times a week each.

It was five or six weeks after the initial injury that I finally got the all clear from the sports physician to gradually get back into running and, by the World Champs on the Gold Coast, I had completed a sum total of one walk/run. I completed that race under strict instructions to run no more than 2km in total of the 5km run leg but I still managed to complete the run in 30-odd minutes and, more importantly, pain-free. It was great to be back running but the Half Ironman was only three weeks away and I hadn't run at all in the previous six weeks.

Needless to say, I arrived at the start line in Calypso Bay feeling somewhat underdone but still confident in my swim and bike form and hopeful that my running base would get me through having only run 50km in the previous two months. My confidence came from significant improvements in both the swim and the bike over the past couple of months as well as a clear race plan. As seems to be the case with all races I attempt there was also a fervent hope that various injury niggles would remain at bay.

After a short warm-up swim we were finally underway and I stuck to the plan from the outset by starting the swim at a slow and easy pace. There was a lot of congestion as we swam out of the marina and into the canal but by the time I was halfway down the canal I seemed to have a lot more space to myself. It was then that I looked around and saw that I was way off line near the far side of the canal away from the other swimmers. I gradually corrected my course but it still seemed to take forever to reach the turnaround point. One thing that I have discovered with endurance events is that there is plenty of time to spend immersed in your own thoughts and, on the swim especially so as there is not a real lot to look at either.

But I finally reached the turnaround point and, after what seemed an eternity, swam back into the marina. Then, before I knew it I was almost at the ramp, having to make one last correction and I again swam wide and then I was running up the ramp. To my surprise, I wasn't even out of breath - a big turnaround from the World Champs three weeks earlier when I could barely run after a 750m swim. A glance at the watch showed that I was on target for my expectations, running over the timing mat in just over 35 minutes.

The investment in Bodyglide and shaving my legs paid off in transition as the wetsuit just slid right off my calves and, after a quick lap of the car park, I was out on the bike and heading down the street chomping on a banana. It was then that I had my first

mishap of the day, when I noticed that I had forgotten to remove the Garmin from my wrist and mount it on the bike. I can now say that you should never attempt to do this at 30km/hr as, after a few moments of fiddling it fell from my fingers and went clattering onto the road behind me. Some things I would just leave behind but not a \$500 watch so I had to turn back and collect it. I got back up to speed before returning my attention back to the Garmin. It had reset but somehow ended up on the bike leg so I just restarted it and kept going.

Within the first 10km my left quad had begun to play up. This has been an ongoing problem and was my undoing at Mooloolaba but I have been able to manage it in training by focussing on my technique and ensuring that I pulled up on the pedals for give the quads a break and let the hammies do some of the work. However, today it didn't seem to be working. Far from going away, the quad was beginning to ache more and then, on the way back from the turnaround my right quad began to ache as well which it had never done before. Thoughts began to go through my head that my race was over. I was thinking that I may be able to finish the bike but my quad would be stuffed for the run. And then, miraculously, the pain disappeared, as it always seems to do somehow.

I was making good time on the way out but struggling on the way back and tried not to push too hard. I was still averaging well above my goal of 30km/hr so I was happy not to push it as the run was the big unknown. I was drinking Endura every 15 minutes and having some Clif Shot Bloks every hour. My legs seemed to be behaving themselves and I was actually able to enjoy some sections of the course where the headwind wasn't too bad.

On the second lap, I decided to try a bottle change. As I approached the drink station I hurled the empty at the target and hit it almost dead on but the lid came off and the kid standing next to it got a spray of Endura which made me smile to myself. However, the smile didn't last long as I missed the first couple of bottles before luckily catching one at the last opportunity. I guess I need to get Lisa to stand on the street holding bottles for me as I fly past before the next one. I tried to get another bottle on the third lap but ran out of opportunities.

My bum was sore for most of the ride and, on the second or third lap my back began to ache so I decided to pop a couple of Nurofen which seemed to help. But I was quite uncomfortable especially towards the end of the ride and was just looking forward to getting off the bike. Unfortunately, I didn't have anything good to look forward to after than as I realised that I had forgotten to put band-aids on my feet prior to the race and wracked my brains trying to think of what I could do to prevent the inevitable blisters.

Due to my Garmin mishap I wasn't really sure how long the bike leg had taken but I knew it was well under 3hrs and I had averaged well over 30km/hr so I was pretty happy going into transition for the second time. Another lap of the car park and another banana and I headed out on the run feeling good and strong. My energy levels were good and I knocked out the first couple of kms in just over 5 minutes each. At each drink station I slowed to a walk to pour a cup of water over my head and grab a drink of coke or water before picking up the pace again.

However, by about 5km the blisters were starting to become quite painful and I was trying to think of what I could do about it as I just couldn't see myself being able to finish the run without doing something. I kept an eye out for medics who might have band-aids but didn't see any as I completed the first lap and headed out on the second. It was great to pass Lisa and the kids at the turnaround and get a big cheer which helped me along.

By the time I got to the 8km mark I really couldn't stand the pain of the blisters any longer and decided to take my shoes off and run barefoot. At first, this seemed to work

quite well - the pain from the blisters was gone and I was quite enjoying the freedom of not wearing shoes. However, I did feel that I was running slower than I had been with shoes. Although, my pace had been slowing since the start anyway because of the blisters so it was no great loss. After the turnaround I ran into a problem though as I noticed that the soles of my feet had begun to blister from the heat of the bitumen. I realised that I would have to find another solution.

The problems with my feet were really frustrating as I had plenty of energy and felt like I could belt out a really quick run. I must have been tired though because my form slipped, I stumbled and stubbed my big toe on the bitumen which hurt like hell. I immediately stopped and put my shoes back on. But it was no good. The pain was too great to run and I walked for a bit but I couldn't walk past the BTS tent so I tried tightening the laces so that my feet wouldn't slide around so much and this did enable me to run although slowly.

Around 10km, I spotted a medic and asked for band-aids and he pulled out some bandaging to wrap around my feet, I took my shoes off and I think he was a bit horrified. The stubbed toe was more or less bleeding freely and the toe of my shoe was soaked in blood. I wasn't worried about that though and got him to bandage up the blisters so that I could continue. Although my feet were still a bit sore they were infinitely better and I tried to make up for lost time.

I caught up to Bec on her first lap and Tim on his third lap from BTS and had a bit of a chat before leaving them behind. I was now well behind my target of sub-2hrs and wanted to finish strongly. I headed out on the third and final lap needing a small miracle to get that sub-2hrs but was still hopeful of keeping under 6min/km. However, my legs were beginning to ache and my pace was slowing. Bec passed me again around 17km and this time I couldn't stick with her but I had about 24 minutes to do the final 4km.

I still had plenty of energy left and was feeling good mentally but it was now the lack of kms in my legs in the lead-up that was letting me down so I just pushed as hard as I could to maintain a decent pace and counted down the kms as I passed each marker. When I got to the 20km marker I found an extra gear helped by the announcer saying I was on my way to the finish and then by Mark with an encouraging word as I hit the boardwalk.

I narrowed in on two guys in front of me and flew past them as the finish line came in sight. I was focussed on that finish line and wanted the best time I could get. As I crossed the finish line I raised my arms in jubilation as I have never been so happy with a race before. Aside from the blister issues my race went entirely according to plan and I felt really good throughout right up to the finish. Although I had said that I would be happy just to finish I had an A goal of sub-5:45 and a B goal of sub-6hrs. I also had a sekrit goal that I hadn't told anyone about which was sub-5:30 which I really believed I could achieve.

My final time was 5:33:06 and if I had just remembered to put band-aids on before the race I could have easily knocked at least 5 minutes off that as I spent at least that long sitting on my butt having bandages applied during the race. So I am completely over the moon and could barely ask for a better result.

I am so grateful to Mark for the great program and all of the fantastic support and advice over the past three months. I know I must have frustrated him at times with my constant injuries and niggles. I am also majorly indebted to my wife Lisa who put up with my heavy training load at the expense of family time and helping out with the kids. Thanks also to all of my wonderful friends for their endless encouragement and support and especially to Joanne for coming all the way from Sydney to see me race.

Now, I am walking gingerly on my blistered feet and aching legs and trying to avoid

leaning on anything with my sunburnt shoulders while I consider Hell of the West and hopefully another exciting adventure.