



2016 Ironman World Championship – Kona, Hawaii

It is hard to find the words that describes the depth of passion and talent of the athletes that come to the Big Island to race in the Ironman World Championship. The International feel of this race makes it so exciting. The race stage was immediately set when I stepped off the plane and felt the trade winds taking over. The Hawaiian spirit is magical. The reverence for the sea and beauty of the island is all part of the allure to race in Kona. My mental focus leading in to this race was to take it all in, honor the race, stay conservative and race smart. There would be no advantage to taking risks. In many ways, it felt like my first Ironman; this was my seventh. I consider myself an average athlete that just keeps showing up. I have a passion for the sport and lifestyle. With a bit of luck and consistency to the process I made it here.



Race week –

We arrived on Monday and felt so lucky to have picked a Condo that was right on the beach. Every night we went to sleep listening to the waves. It was a convenient location ... mile 3 of the run on the famous Alii Drive.



As we were driving to Huggos, one of my favorite places for dinner, the parade of athletes running up and down Alii Drive was in full force. It is apparent that this is a skewed sample of the population. Not only were they extremely lean they were all were running at what seemed like race pace ... on race week! There were tables on Alii Drive with Gu Electrolytes and Gatorade at various points. The athletes are so well taken care of.

Tuesday morning was check in day. I was constantly impressed with attention to detail and red carpet service to the athletes. The volunteer that handled my check in was from Italy. I could just tell that she felt as privileged to be there as I was. It was official. I had my wrist band. I loved my number #360. It seemed like I had come full circle from when I lived in San Diego saying I would never do a triathlon to ending up at the World Championships.



The theme of this year's race was **KUPA'A**. It means steadfast, firm, and immovable. It was a theme brought up all week. The Hawaiians believe we need to be one with the environment. I thought about it more than once on race day! Oh yeah!

It was time to test my bike on the Queen K Highway. I wanted to ride where the winds were the heaviest, so Tom, Marissa and myself drove up to Hopuna Beach. This is where the Hawaii 70.3 swim is. Sena, teammate, wonder woman of support and enthusiasm, was so gracious to meet us there and ride with me. While Tom and Marissa snorkeled a bit, Sena and I took off towards Hawi. We rode about an hour. That day the winds were not that ferocious. I had been psyching myself out for weeks about the wind so maybe by expecting the worse I wasn't fazed. My friend Ron was so kind to let me use his Campagnolo wheels that were more suited for me in the wind.



Thursday – If you've never heard of the Underpants' run, just look it up. In short, it started 20 years ago in protest to wearing speedos in inappropriate places, stores, restaurants, etc. Now, it is a charity run that brings laughter and lightens the mood of the serious athletes. Tom said he would do it, then go swim to the coffee boat. After all the morning fun it was off to the airport to pick up Bryan!



Friday – check in day. I was very pleased that my number allowed for one of the early check ins. When the process started, I was caught off guard. What a blast! As I entered my name was announced and the type of bike I was racing on. Then comes a line of 20 people tallying, wheels helmets, shoes, aero drink system, you name it. Cervelo bikes had the most representation. I love my Cervelo! A personal volunteer is assigned to each athlete to walk them thru transition. More attention to detail. No room for error on race day. I left transition feeling confident that I had done all that I could to be ready. I had my fueling plan, bags were filled and I had become familiar with the course. Tom, Bryan, Marissa and myself went to the beach and snorkeled. There were other athletes hanging out as well. I kept asking myself “why am I so calm?” Tomorrow is the biggest race I’ve ever done and I’m sitting on the beach!

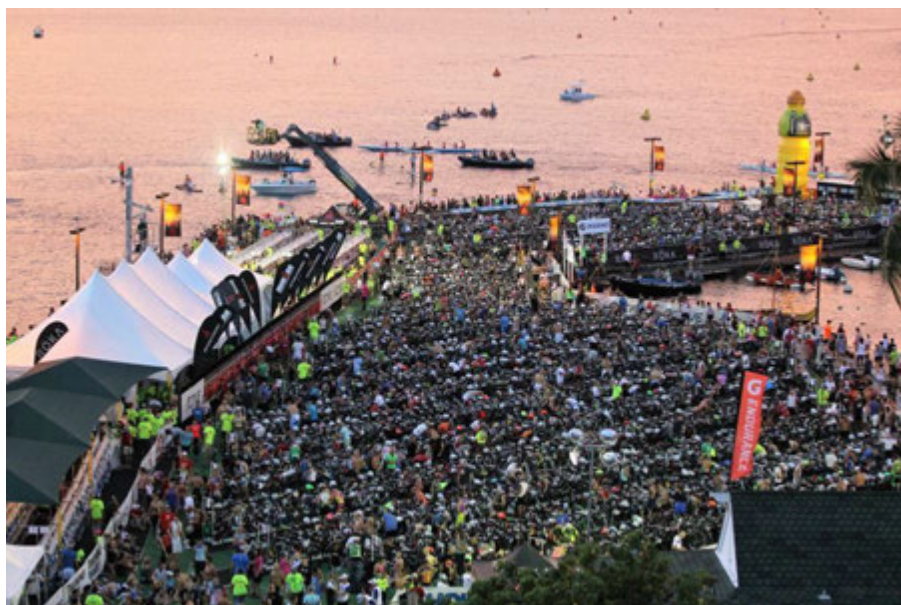




RACE DAY! - 4 am and I'm nervous. I choked down my hot cereal, protein, and coffee. Then out the door. As we were driving I get a text from Jen, fabulous teammate, It was so reassuring to hear from her. Everything is going to work out. It was a crowded scene so I gave my quick goodbyes to Tom and Bryan and walked to body marking. I was sad I didn't get to see them again prior to the race. Before a big race I'm an introvert. Being alone in line was good. I listened to all the foreign languages and took in the realization that this is big, really big.



SWIM - The helicopters were starting to hover. I could hear (but not see) the Hawaiian blessing of the ocean. A deep male voice sang the Star-Spangled Banner and then the first cannon went off for the male Pros. And just like that – the race had begun. Ten minutes later, a second cannon and the female Pros were off.

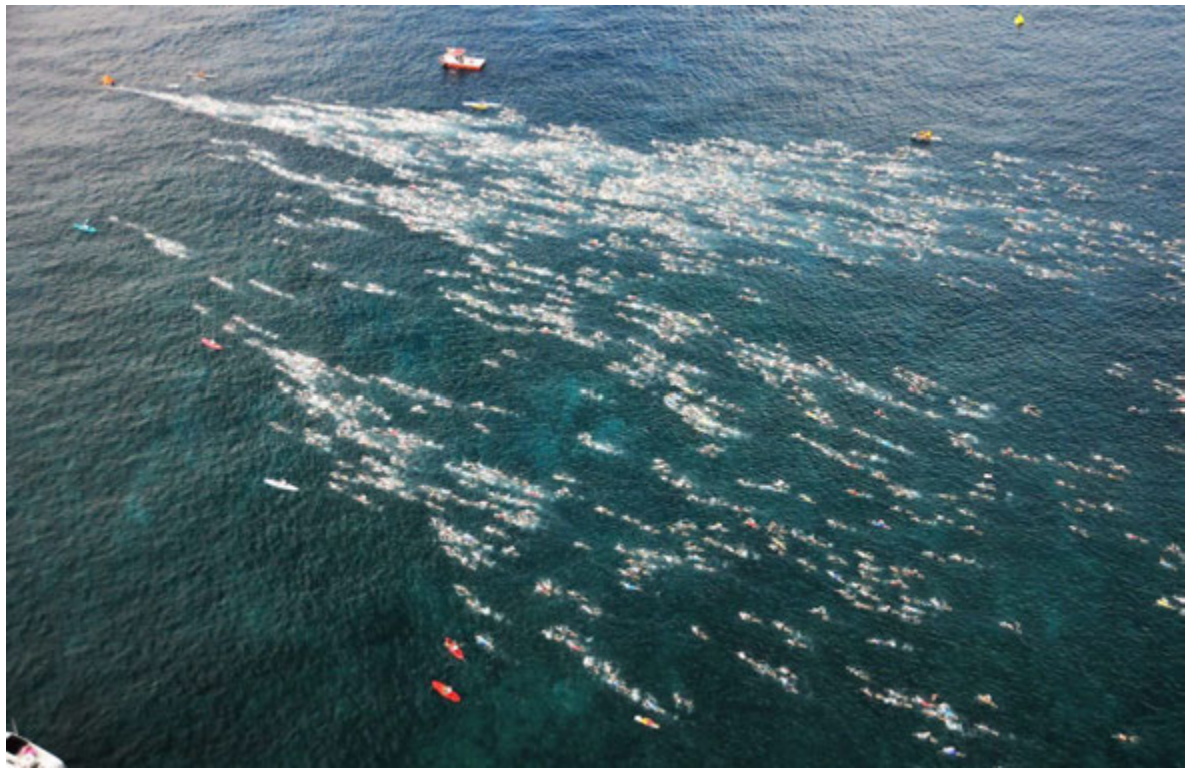




Now it was time to just wait 35 minutes for my wave to start. Lynn, Kona veteran and other fabulous teammate, had advised me to start on the left and swim the tangent in towards the buoys. As soon as the age group men took off the women quickly got in the bay and held their position. I swam at least 200 yards to get on the left side. We treaded water for a good 5 minutes. I looked to the shore thinking I might see Bryan and Tom. What was I thinking?!! I was just hoping.

There was a fellow next to me wearing a green cap. I said to him “are you a helper”? I felt so ignorant at asking him that because when we started swimming I realized he was a PC- Physically Challenge athlete. He had no feet.

My goal with the swim was stay steady and keep heart rate down. I felt good all the way to the turnaround boat. I had lots of company and wasn’t too concerned on time. There were iridescent fish everywhere. I could see a stream of bubbles coming up from under the boat. It was a camera and a diver taking pictures. As I made the turn I was relieved to head back. This is when I think things fell apart. The swells were more obvious and sighting was becoming a challenge. I was starting to feel alone. Just stay positive and swim. When I exited the water, I clocked my slowest swim time ever. I could hear the words of my fabulous Coach, Jon, in my ear. It’s over, move on, stay in the moment.



The showers felt great. I used the hose to quickly rinse out my mouth and spray off the saltwater.



Bike - the awesome volunteers in transition got me to my bike and I was off. On my bike I had two bottles of electrolytes. In hind sight, I wish I had a fresh cold bottle of water. In my morning pre-race fueling I drank a bottle of OSMO Pre-load which is a high sodium with electrolytes drink. In addition to the salt I must have taken in on the swim I was parched. I felt queasy and my legs felt heavy. I think the swim took more out of me than I had planned. Once I made the turn off Palani Road and on to the Queen K Highway I felt better. The wind was tolerable. The aid stations come every 7-10 miles! No problem getting water. I made myself eat. My mouth was so dry and in the hot wind it's easy to not eat. Three weeks prior to the race I had a metabolic test done at UC Davis Sports Medicine. I wanted to know what I was burning for my race pace watts. I'm glad I did because I knew what the minimum calories I could get away with and not bonk. As I approached the 40 mile mark I realized how far back I was. There were plenty of other athletes with me but I kept thinking 'where is the race?'. Humbling. Stay conservative, don't take risks, race your race.

Queen K Highway heading out to Hawi.



Around mile 45 the male Pros and the motorcade was approaching. Quite a sight! Those guys ride so tucked and fast. Then came the females, only it was just one, Daniella Ryf – who goes on to make a new course record. I finally got to Hawi for the turn around. I was glad to head back. The head wind had tested every fiber in my body. The constant pressure on the pedals had created hot spots on my feet. It was time to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. I had many thoughts running thru my head. I thought about Bryan, Marissa and Tom at the finish line, I thought about the magic of those little yellow plants growing out of the lava fields, the beautiful wild ocean, the hard training workouts and gratitude that I had made it to the start line of Kona. I could see my watts slipping. I told myself to not take risks and don't push it. I had to race smart if I was going to run a marathon. Keeping heart rate under control was never an issue. I stayed wet and drank as much water as I could.

Many times, during the ride a car with a camera was nearby. They were filming Turia Pitt the women who was burned over 65% of her body in a bushfire in Australia. She was told she would never walk again.

Heading back from Hawi. I'm on a mission now 😊. My feet are screaming.



Heading into transition was a welcome sight. The volunteer took my bike and I headed to get my sore feet out of those hard bike shoes.



Run – Many people advised me to not go hard in the first ten miles that's in town. If you don't have HR under control when you hit the Queen K you will blow up. I was looking forward seeing my family on Alii Drive. I carried with me a little red bag that I could fill with ice. The bag entertained me and kept me cool. The way to go in a hot race.

I remember this spot. Mile 2.

KUPA'A. I was mentally preparing for the next 24 miles.



And there they were! I saw Bryan first. My family had made signs for inspiration. It was their way of showing support since the officials make it very clear to not have outside assistance.

I felt fine. My legs were a bit tired from the riding in the wind. But, I rode so conservative that running a slow steady pace was doable. Ice was the operative word. There is one hill, Palani Rd., coming out of town. I saw Sena (teammate) at the hot corner. Awesome – though I didn't look cheery I was so happy to see Sena. The crowds were out of this world. So inspiring. I made it to the top of the hill and this one guy starts cheering and jumping up and down and saying 'you're on the Queen K – go get it!' This is where the demons started talking. It's long and it was getting dark. The main field finishes in daylight, but there are hundreds that don't. I needed a headlamp because at one point it was so dark I had to walk or risk a face plant. I worked my way out to the Energy Lab. It was lit up with aid stations and some of the best music. I knew that once I came out of the Energy Lab and back on to the Queen K it was about 6 miles to the finish. The last 10K. I walked the dark sections and ran the aid stations because of the light. I had a few guys on my heels pacing off me. It was motivating. Plus, it was an Italian man that I had met at bike check in. He didn't speak English so I just used my hands like an Italian. When I got to the top of Palani I was ecstatic. About 2 miles to go. I could hear and see the finish line.

Many athletes that had finished were out cheering us on. I remember an Australian group yelling go Mate – it's one more right turn! (they like the name Sheila). When I hit Alii drive I wanted to freeze frame the moment. **It was everything I could have dreamed of.** I was looking for my kids and out they popped! I should have let stay with me for a few yards but I was so concerned that the rules would DQ me. I was so stupid to tell them not to run with me. I'm so mad at myself for that.

My final Stats:

Swim – 1:40, 29th

Bike – 7:28, 20th

Run – 5:23, 11th

Age Group 11th Finished my first Kona! I will cherish it forever. There are countless people that helped get me here. Of course, my family, but my Coach, Jon Klingensmith has been my triathlon backbone. We've worked together for 6 years. His approach is patience and consistency. His intuitiveness and insightfulness was often my voice of reason. My journey is Jon's journey.

The pictures tell the rest of the story:





IRONMAN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

1699	Pablo MAZZOLETTI	14:59:14
590	John COOKE	14:59:08
219	Juan ARRASATE	14:59:14
190	Massimo CASOLI	14:57:41

TIMEX

ACTIVE

ENDURANCE

CLIF

EarthLink



HOKA

UHC
UnitedHealth



Tom hung in there all day!



My son, Bryan and daughter, Marissa celebrating the finish!



The coveted medal.

