

IRONMAN HAWAII – 2001

I'm writing this article while checking results from Ironman Florida. One year ago I was hoping that if I was strong and fast enough at IMFL, I might be lucky and get a roll-down spot for Ironman Hawaii. My 9th place finish in Florida however was not good enough as the 5 spots available went to the first 5 women in my age group.

That being the case, in early December I decided to go to St. Croix with the goal of getting a Hawaii spot, a 'first kick at the can' so to speak as I was also already registered to race at IM Canada. As good training and a little bit of luck would have it, I placed 2nd in my AG in St. Croix and earned the 2nd of 2 spots in my AG for Ironman Hawaii – goodbye Ironman Canada!

Cut to race day, Oct 6th 2001, as that is really what this article is about. It was early to rise after a really good sleep. The days leading up to the race had been busy, but I was able to sleep well each night and felt rested and ready for my big day. Aubrey, Eon and Bonnie picked me up and it was off the race site in the 'official bike support' van – Yahoo for Team D'Ornellas. After a long line up for body marking, I proceeded to the transition area to get my bike ready. Having 'bike side' assistance provided by Eon freed up my pre-race time, which I spent wandering around watching the pros set up for the day.

The swim at IMH was one of the most clam I have ever experienced – calm in the sense that I wasn't kicked, punched, pushed, shoved and/or just plain beat up. It was not so clam in the sense that there were large swells in the ocean. The swim started out well, and I was only distracted a bit by the guy behind me touching my toes. The turn around point was heavenly, it felt like there was a current pulling us through and I floated around the two boats marking the turns and started the swim towards the finish line. Switch into slow-mo... the swim back was going nowhere, slowly. Since race day I have learned that we were swimming against the current. While I was only a couple of minutes off where I had wanted to be in the swim, it was still disappointing.

T1 is a blur in my memory. I can remember running through the showers, into the change tent, and then out to my bike – as I jumped onto my bike and road out of transition (an anomaly at IMH – all other IM races you have to run with your bike out of transition) I was thinking that I forgot to put on sunscreen.... funny the things you remember – I didn't see the crowds, but I did hear my name being yelled and I held up my hand and waved as I road up Palani Rd.

Many of you will have heard of the winds in Kona and how bad they were last year, gusting at 50 miles p/hr and throwing people off their bikes. I was convinced that this year would be different, and by all reports it was, unfortunately not in our favour. Instead of the winds gusting and catching you off guard the winds were more constant forcing riders to lean into the wind in order to stay on the road and on your bike. A few days prior to the race Aubrey and I had gone on a 'recon' of the course and had road the hill into Hawi – the turn around on the bike course. At the time I was thinking – wow, this isn't bad at all! And it wasn't on race day either. In fact, the climb into Hawi was the easiest part of the bike as we were protected from the winds that had been driving us across the road. It was when we got to the top of the hill and had about another 10 kms to go to the turn around that things really got nasty. The wind was coming right into our faces and it was a struggle. In order to help pass the time I played a game of 'who will be the first pro to pass us' with those around me. It was also at this time that I found out I had been relatively lucky in the swim. As I swapped stories with people around me I found out that some were as much as 20 minutes down on their expected swim times.

It was really awesome to see the pro men scream past us. I was surprised that Steve Larsen wasn't in the lead; it had been speculated that he might have made up his swim deficit by the turn around, but I guess the winds affected the pros as much as they affected the rest of us! The pro women also looked great, Natascha Badmann was in the front as expected and I was happy to see Karen Smyers right up there, at this time ahead of Lori Bowden.

The ride back to town was harder than the ride-out. We had a bit of a reprieve on the flat section back from the turn around with a tail wind for about 5 kms or so. The ride down the hill was nice, but we had to

work, as the wind seemed to be coming up the side of the hill and swirling around. Eon was on the course and yelled out my placing as I went by, too bad it was so windy I could barely hear him! The force of the wind was really felt as we turned back onto the Queen K Hwy for the ride home. As I stood on the pedals I felt like I was riding uphill at Rattel Snake Point! People were walking on the side of the road faster than we could cycle. And to make matters worse the sand was being blasted at us and it really hurt! As I road along the last stretch of before the turn into T2, the pro men were running towards the Natural Energy Lab, the second turn around on the run course, this mean that they had about another 10 miles or so left on the run. It was interesting to calculate how far they were ahead of the rest of us mortals.

I had a bit of a surprise heading out onto the run. IMH 2001- T2 had moved location as the Kona Surf Resort had closed down, thus altering both the bike and run courses. This year T2 was situated at the old Kona airport, and as we left the transition the run headed out for a 2 mile out and back along the old airport run way. This section was not noted on any of the course maps. Luckily, by the early afternoon a slight cloud cover had formed and it wasn't too hot in this potentially unforgiving part of the run course. My legs felt great and I ran for a short (very short) time with my condo-mate Andrew (this boy can put an IM together. At IMUSA this year Andrew clocked a 5:20 bike split and a 3:33 run for a qualifying time of 10:05!).

It was awesome to see my 'Kona Girl' support crew made up of friends and family on the run. Heading towards the first turn around I saw the pro-women and were they ever working. The look on the faces of Lisa Bentley, Heather Fur, and Lori Bowden was a mixture of determination, pain and more determination, something I have never seen so close up. After the turn around I saw my training partner Tom, we high-fived and I encouraged him to catch me. The run was amazing – it was great to see those girls in my age-group who were ahead of me as I entered the Energy Lab, and towards the last turn around on the run. I was running well, and had a wonderful pick-up as I ran past Aubrey who was standing on the side of the road. There is nothing quite like the feeling of hearing your coach cheer for you when you are feeling great and picking off those ahead of you!

It was getting dark, and I was handed the infamous 'glow stick'. I dropped it once and didn't stop to pick it up. Then I was handed another, and as I ran down the pay-and-save hill the crowd yelled, 'You don't need that' so I threw it to a little girl on the sidewalk to her delight. The lights along Alii Dr. were blinding and I had to look down and shield my eyes – just on time to see my name written twice along the road to the finish line – COOL. Unfortunately, I don't remember much along the road to the finish line except a feeling of calmness. I had completed what I had set out to do. Although I was slower than I expected I was happy with my race and learned a few lessons along the way too! There is nothing quite like having a 10-month plan come together.

I want to thank everyone who trained with me this year for adding so much to my experience. Of course it was truly wonderful to have Aubrey and Eon in Hawaii. Aubrey has been instrumental in my training this year and can take a lot of credit for getting me to the line in Hawaii. I also thought of many of you and our training at DFF while I was there. I especially want to thank Maureen Brook, who has played a MAJOR role in my training and Hawaii experience. Our daily telephone calls encouraged me, give me fashion advise, and from time to time she even gave me a kick in the pants when I needed it.

Thanks again everyone - What a year.
Linnea