



May 7, 2006 was my third time racing at the ST. Croix Half Ironman. I didn't really think that I'd ever be back to this race (was there in '01 and '02), but with IM Coeur d'Alene scheduled for the end of June, I wanted to have one prep race, and St. Croix doubled as an additional opportunity to try to qualify for IM Hawaii.

I arrived on Thursday, sans bike, although this was to be true for many athletes who flew through San Juan to St. Croix. Luckily, being without bike meant that there was enough room for me to hitch a ride into town with Deb and Dan Moore. My roomie – Karen Bonham - also hadn't received her bike, so we stressed together.

Friday morning I went out early to do a run and re-acquainted myself with the town of Christiansted – there were a few locals out walking and all of them were carrying sticks – humm...this might have been a good idea as my friend Tara had been attacked by a dog the week before while she was out for a run – she escaped with a huge chunk taken out of her upper arm! At 11:00 there was an 'athlete swim' scheduled in the harbour –necessary as this is a working harbour. The taste of salt water was a good reminder that this race was to be all business! Happily, I got word that my bike had arrived, and Tara took me out to the airport to collect it. Unhappily, the bike didn't fit into Tara's car, although I was convinced it would – sorry T!!! But, as luck would have it, a jeep full of guys pulled up, and offered to take my bike into town with them (hummm...could it have been something to do with two blondes, and 'T's killer arms???)...long story short, everything finally worked out, and Karen also got her bike later that day. Karen and I decided that we were both too tired to ride after that fiasco, so instead of riding after the bike assembly, we went out for a nice dinner with Tara, and a few friends she had made on the island.

Saturday consisted of checking out the bike, resting, pre-race meeting, lunch, more rest, getting stuff together for race day, rest, dinner and bed. What a great way to spend a day in the Caribbean!

Race day arrived quite overcast – great conditions for racing, not so great for getting a tan (one of my race day objectives). The race starts on a small island about 600m from the transition area. The swim over was uneventful, but as we were required to be there by 6am Karen, Tara, Dan, Dave Derry and Steve Harrigan and I spent the next 40 minutes huddled under the one heat source – a spotlight for the dance floor of the bar on the island.

My wave was at 6:53 – I got in a pre-start warm-up and kept warm by doing arm swings. I think that this really helped, as I was able to get into the lead with two other girls right after the first quick left turn on the swim course (I had 'fast arms', Dave). The overcast conditions had brought a wind however, that made the swim quite choppy. I found the conditions difficult, but I love adversity and I stuck with the two other girls and quickly I started catching people from the wave starts before mine.

The swim course is a large open-ended rectangle, and by the time I was on the last leg of the swim I found my mind wondering. I really had to focus and stay determined, as I

didn't want my good positioning to float away from me. Swim time – 33:57 – good enough for 4th in my AG.



I had a great transition and headed out onto the bike ahead of another girl in my AG. So now its time to mention how much I LOVE my new bike – my ARGON 18. I also have to thank my wheel sponsor for this race – Gerry Lashley!!! As the bike was new, and has 700c wheels, I didn't have any race wheels yet (but I do now – lovely HED ALPS!), so Gerry lent me his ZIPP 404s. WOW – were they ever nice and I'm sure they helped me a lot. I placed 2nd in my AG on the bike with a time of 2:57:32.

As many of you know, the St. Croix race is famous for the one huge climb we have on the bike called The Beast. It was helpful that this year the hill was marked off in 7th – so you could gauge distance remaining. Also marked was the % grade you were on...and while most writing about The Beast notes that it has a max % grade of 18-20%, on the side of the road was spray-painted 25%!! I didn't feel like I was riding that well, but a guy I was with asked where I was from...I choked out Toronto, to which he replied, 'I guess you have a lot of hills there'! That was a bit of a boost.

Another thing of note – in St. Croix you have to ride on the left side of the road. I wasted A LOT of time yelling – get over to the left!! I would guess that about 80% of the people were riding in the centre of the road – partially due to the bad road conditions, but also because they couldn't get their head around riding to the left. That was VERY frustrating, and so for any of you planning on doing this race, take note.



I felt pretty good coming off the bike, and saw the lead girl in my AG heading out onto the run. I was hoping that I would run through the competition and catch her, but I was not able to really get into any kind of groove on the run - I heard a lot of people talking about this. The run course is made up of a lot of different types of terrain – road, grass, gravel, and golf cart path – luckily my new Pearl Izumi Syncro Pace shoes were the perfect choice for stability on this various terrain course.

Leaving town was a lot of fun – music blaring, great kids at the aid stations, and the momentum of being around a lot of people on the two-loop course. It didn't take long for Lisa Bentley to pass me, finishing her first loop. And then she caught me again RIGHT AWAY ...wow. It was very cool to see that Tara (racing pro) was following Karen Smyers!! Again, I put a lot of energy – positive this time – into screaming accolades at Tara. People around me were afraid....



I had a low point on the first loop of the run while making my way through the golf-course on the grounds of the Buccaneer hotel – mental note, next loop take an extra boost of Amino Vital before turning into the hotel property. I saw my ‘biking partner’ shown above, as I was coming in to start the second loop – this gave me a target to run for. While I felt mentally stronger on the second loop, results show that I was slower ... oh wells. My run time was: 1:48:02 – the 3rd fastest run in my AG.



Finishing was a lot of run. The road to the finish line is slightly down hill, so it is easy to get up a bit of (Pure) Momentum. My finishing time was 5:19:29 – a full 8 minutes behind the first place finisher (yes, that little drafter), but 10 minutes in front of third place. Being at the top-end of my AG I didn’t feel too bad about being beaten by a 35 yr old – a sting that was even less when I found out that there were TWO Hawaii spots for my AG!!!

Yes, it’s off to Hawaii again, my fifth time at the World Champs, but my first in a new AG! Bring it on!!!

Thanks to my sponsors, Pearl Izumi www.pearlizumi.com, Amino Vital www.amino-vital.com, and Argon 18 www.argon18bike.com for the product support that helped me put together a great race, and of course the great coaching of Christian Camden of Cadence Triathlon www.cadencemultisport.com

To my training friends: ‘the boys’ - Dave, Adam, Doug and domestique Chris, ‘hard-core Kim’, ‘Supa-Star T’ – and my ‘kick in the ass’ support of Ellen and Maureen – thanks for pulling me through another one!

IM Coeur d’Alene is next – June 25th.

Thanks - Linnea