

LEAD UP

It was a year ago to the day that I started on my journey towards the Noosa triathlon. After having done the swim leg about 20 years ago, I had always wanted to do the full distance and finally the time seemed right. I registered in the ballot never believing that I would actually get drawn out. When the confirmation email came through I was faced with a decision. It all sounded good saying I'd love to do the whole thing but now I had a spot, actually doing the whole thing was a different matter altogether. So I made the decision to give it a crack and tick it off the bucket list.

The reason I had never attempted an Olympic distance triathlon is because I have never been able to run 10km. So after spending the last 18 months turning myself into some form of a runner, I thought I was ready to tackle the full distance. The swim has never been a problem for me. Although I wouldn't consider myself fast, I am comfortable swimming long distances. So this now left me just the bike leg to tackle. To say I'm not a natural cyclist, is an understatement. I am fearful of being on a bike, I'm fearful of going fast and I'm fearful of riding in traffic. So I started slowly with just small rides around the beautiful 'Currumbin loop' and worked up to rides from Burleigh to the Spit and back.

My next step was to actually do some practice triathlons but this was harder than it seemed as Noosa was one of the first triathlons of the season. Having done some research, I came across the Twin Towns tri club starting their season in September. Unfortunately my first tri with the club was on that dark, cold, windy morning where my feet were numb for the whole race. I was nervous before that race but I finished it and that was all that mattered to me. Over the next month I did some more races culminating in the double distance two weeks out from Noosa. This was a perfect lead up and I felt fit and ready to go.

The week leading up to Noosa I started tapering and thankfully got some good tips off Twinnies as to how to achieve this. I tried all I could to fight off a cold that everyone around me seemed to have but thankfully made it to the weekend without incident.

NOOSA TRIATHLON WEEKEND

SATURDAY

Finally the weekend had arrived. Leaving the kids behind we drove to Noosa early Saturday morning to get amongst the atmosphere. We were lucky enough to be staying with friends who have a beautiful house overlooking Noosa headlands at the top of Upper Hastings St. So with this as our base, we rode our bikes down to check in and standing amongst 100's of other competitors, the pre-race nerves started. I had found out a few days before that my wave was to be the absolute last individual wave leaving at 9.03! I was so gutted about this and couldn't get my head around the fact that I would be running in the hottest part of the day. It was really playing with my head so I tried to get into an earlier wave. Thankfully there were still some spaces available in a mates wave which left 25 minutes earlier and although I would still be running in the middle of the day, the fact that I was no longer in the last wave did everything for my confidence. I still wasn't happy that I would have to wait around for hours, but I was happy that I would no longer have the possibility of coming dead last!



The transition area and racking my bike

The afternoon prior to the race was spent catching up with a friend of ours, the very talented, inspirational and one-legged Michael Milton who was participating in the celebrity triathlon. We then headed to a friend's boat to have a few quiet drinks (no need to change the routine) whilst watching the sunset. I was in bed by a very respectable 8.30pm, with nerves washing over me.



Checking out the course on Saturday

SUNDAY

Remarkably, I had a great night's sleep and woke full of excitement and anticipation. I had enough time to eat a small breakfast, wander down to the event and casually prepare my transition area, returning to the house to eat a little more. In fact, we had so much time waiting around, that I started to get a little sleepy. We wandered back down to the race to wait out my wave start on the beach. I had tried to keep my nerves in check but seeing the waves of athletes rolling through; I couldn't hold my pre-race nerves back any longer. Although I knew I had done lots of training, had I done the right sort of training? Doubt started seeping in and I tried telling myself that I had done lots of things more nerve-racking than this but the fear of the unknown still had the butterflies fluttering. I simply wanted my race to start so I could stop analyzing and start doing!



About to start the race, I happened to start talking to Kylie (the girl to my right) who just so happens to belong to Twin Towns tri club....what a small world!

SWIM – 00:29:29

I drifted on the start line along with a 100 or so of my "mates" waiting for the hooter. Once it sounded, the civilized line turned into a swimming frenzy. Kicks to the heads and grabs to the legs lasted until the first buoy about 200m away. It was only after this that the wave settled into a rhythm and we generally followed each other to the next buoy. By about 750m I was having a grand old time, checking out the magnificent houses with each breath and making my way around the buoys. I passed the turnaround point and was excited to be on the home stretch. Little did I know that home stretch felt almost as long as the whole course but finally my feet touched the ground and the next phase began.

BIKE – 01:21:47

Running out of the water I tried to take in all the cheering but actually keeping my balance seemed to take all my concentration. I found my bike easily enough but putting on socks and bike shoes didn't seem as easy as it had on Saturday mornings at Banora! Finally, popping a "gu" lolly in my mouth, I click clacked out to the mount point and I was away on what is definitely my weakest leg.

A few weeks earlier I had been to Noosa and ridden the bike course so I was familiar with the route. This helped my confidence a lot and as I picked up speed along Gympie Tce I was feeling good. My main concern at this point was if I would actually know if I was drafting or not. I certainly didn't want to get penalized for something that I didn't even know how to do so I was very precise about taking a really wide berth every time I passed someone.

Knowing the course I was actually looking forward to Garmin Hill and it didn't disappoint. It is a beautiful, serene, peaceful road winding upwards for 3kms only spoiled occasionally by the sound of a disc wheel passing me.

The top of the hill is actually the worst part of the ride. The road out to the turnaround point and back is the longest, hardest part of the bike leg. It feels like it goes forever and when I finally made the turnaround I was feeling a little fatigued. Although I had some Gu lollies in my belt I am not confident enough to rustle around trying to find them. I can barely get my water bottle out without falling off my bike, so the lollies stayed in the belt and I had to be content to sip on my Endura.

The next worst part of the ride took about 30 seconds to get down, or at least that's what it felt like to me. I was proud to hit a top speed of 55km/hr (I know all you speed freaks will be rolling your eyes) but I was white knuckling my brakes the whole way! Those bloody disc wheels sound like fighter jets when they fly past you at double your speed and thankfully I wasn't the one that got a flat tire. The rider who had just whizzed past me was unlucky enough to win this lotto but he held onto his death wobbles very well and managed to make it to the bottom without crashing!

The last 5km of the bike leg, although very scenic felt very long. A combination of tired legs and thinking ahead made it seem like another 40km! At the dismount point I gingerly hopped off the bike and shuffled to the rack.

RUN – 00:51:41

As I put my shoes on and popped another lolly I was excited to be 2/3 into my race but knew the mental game would start now.

The long path out to the start of the run told me that it was going to be the longest 10kms I had even run. Unfortunately, it wasn't wrong. Usually cheering crowds is enough to pick me up but not this time. I envied those runners returning as I shuffled along the road with 100's of other weary bodies. I used every cliché in the book...one step in front of the other...just until the next pole...don't stop or you won't start again...pain is fleeting, glory is forever...repeating a song...yada yada yada...and before I knew it I was passing the turnaround. I quickened my pace for a few kms and made sure to thank all the wonderful neighbors out on their lawns with the hoses and sprinklers. Finally, after what seemed like a week, I saw the bridge and the corporate tents and although this should've spurred me on, it was all I could do to stumble over the line! I had hit my limit. I was fatigued, vague, faint and inaudible. But one way or another I had made it!

I had no expectations of times except as a culmination of individual legs. Based on that, I thought I might go round in about 2hrs 45mins. So I was more than pleased to find out later that I had crossed the line in 02:42:59!



Proud as punch at finishing my first Olympic Distance tri!

So finally the time had come for what I was most looking forward to! The drinks and food afterwards! We settled into my friend's house with a view to die for and didn't move until we creaked to bed at about 9pm.

What a fantastic weekend and what a great event the Noosa triathlon is. Well run, lots of fun, great atmosphere and a tough race in between. I can honestly say this is one of the hardest things I have done. I have competed for Australia at the pinnacle of sport in the Olympic Games but mentally and physically this was harder. I played a team sport and you can hide in a team but this is truly an individual mental and physical challenge!

It's still too early to decide if I'll compete again next year. I'd love to say that I will however, the muscles are still too sore and the exertion is still too fresh in my memory to make a rational decision! So as I sit here almost a year to the day from my original decision I am stoked with my effort, extremely proud of myself and could almost consider calling myself a triathlete!