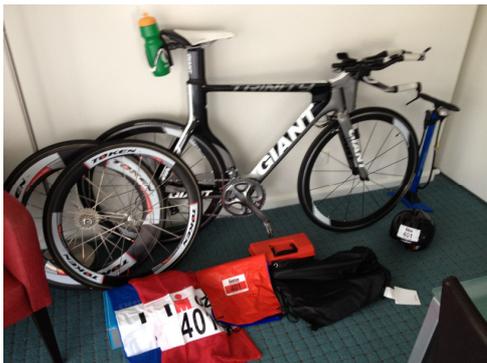




Preparation

The family and I arrived in Port Macquarie at around lunch time on the Friday afternoon. We took our time getting there and took a detour via Laurieton and Dunbogan so that I could check out the southern sections of the bike course. Previously, I had raced the Port Macquarie Half Ironman in 2010, but the bike course only went as far south as Lake Cathie, so I thought it was important to at least drive the other parts of the course. I was very happy to see that the course around Laurieton, Dunbogan, the Quarry and North Haven was actually quite flat and fast. Bonny Hills lived up to its name though with quite a long climb and a few lumps and bumps! Of course, the re-entry to Port Macquarie around Matthew Flinders Dr and Flynn's Beach presented some more significant hilly sections.

Upon arrival in Port, we were able to check into our accommodation (at Port Pacific Resort) straight away. We unpacked all the luggage (and more importantly - the "Trinity") and I immediately proceeded down to the Glasshouse for race check in.



I received all my bits and pieces including blue bags, red bags, swim cap, race numbers etc... It was a bit of challenge initially remembering which bag was which, but after some serious thinking, it dawned on me that "B" was for "Blue" and was also for "Bike". "R" was for "Red" and was also for "Run". Einstein!

After lunch, I took the family for a walk to see the finish line, start line and a few of the things in between. It was a beautiful sunny day, so things were looking good going into race day!

As evening fell, a few guys from the Newcastle Triathlon Club met at the pub on the town green for a few lemonades and we greeted Ricky Jeffs (the CEO of



Urban Hotel Group). He was pleased to receive one of our new cycling kits as a gift from the club for providing sponsorship. We then moved onto the Function Tent in Westport Park for the Welcome/Carb Dinner and Race Briefing. There was Pasta and Salad galore! At the dinner, it is tradition for all Ironman first timers to stand up. Out of the 1,493 entrants this year, there were 461 of us making our Ironman debut. Speakers during the dinner included Mitch Anderson and that guy off "Dancing with the Stars" – Dan McPherson. It was amusing when Mitch asked the female pro Hilary Bisque a question about her bike and she had no idea! Someone else must take care of her bike for her...

Following the race briefing, I returned to my apartment to spend some time with Matt and Mel Roberts who had arrived from Newcastle to spectate and cheer us on. It was great to continue to carb loading with a coffee and couple of blocks of chocolate!

Following a day of complete rest on the Friday, Saturday was time to do a few short sessions to re-fire those well tapered and rested muscles... Matt picked me up early and we went down to the race start line, threw on the wetties and jumped off the jetty for a 15 min swim. Although the air temperature was quite cool (around 12 degrees C), the water was surprisingly warm. My intention for these sessions was to do 5mins easy, 5mins hard, 5mins easy in each discipline.

We then drove back to my apartment and got changed into some bike gear. Every man and their dog was out for a ride it would seem! Matt (on his mountain bike) and I went for a spin around to Settlement Point. In the middle of the ride, I threw in my 5mins of effort and it was funny seeing Matt attempting to keep up on his mountain bike! "Like this, or Like this??" Matt will tell you it is quite challenging staying "aero" on a mountain bike... He actually kept up for a few hundred metres until I gave him a "you've got to be joking" look.

Finally, I went out for a 15min run session. I felt really light on my feet and this was the point where I knew I was ready for race day.

During the remainder of the day, after getting my Red and Blue bags sorted out and re-checking my checklist a dozen times, I rolled the Trinity down to bike check-in. It was a really painless process and I was quite amazed at how organized everything was. I racked my bike and Blue bag in T1 and placed my Red bag in a truck which the organizers were later transporting to T2 for racking.

Then back to my apartment for more Carb loading, plenty of fluids and relaxation. I was determined to stay relaxed and avoid other competitors as much as possible. Through the afternoon, it was great to have mum and dad arrive from Newcastle and we enjoyed a BBQ and salad dinner and I even indulged in a couple of light beers to help put me to sleep! That worked well.



Race Day – 6th May, 2012

After managing to get around 7 hours sleep, I was all set for the big day. I awoke at 4:10am, had a warm shower, got dressed and fiddled around (like I normally do) for about 30mins. After ticking all the boxes on my check list, I turned up the music on my iPhone (with some motivational tunes) and walked down to T1 in the morning darkness.

Everything was going my way. Bike tyres were still full of air and I had not forgotten a thing! After handing in my Blue and Red special needs bags, it was time to head down to the start line. Thanks to Nathan McKelligot for being my dedicated personal assistant for getting on my wetsuit. Nath had made the trip up to Ironman to volunteer in T1. On the way to the start line, it was great to catch up with Sasha, the kids and mum and dad one last time.

After a final farewell and some photos with the family, I shuffled into the starting chute and down the boat ramp, under the M dot arch and into the water. It was a balmy 20.9 degrees C in the Hastings River. I executed my race plan of positioning myself about 2 or 3 rows back from the start line, just right of centre. There I saw Troy Lowrey and we gave each other a few final words of encouragement. I think it really does help to see people you know at times like that!

After about 3 or 4 minutes of treading water and being told to “move back” behind the start line, the gun was fired!

There was a quick thought along the lines of “this is it”, I put the head down, bum up and powered away. I tried to focus on good form and long strokes, rather than the thought of 1,492 other competitors swimming right up behind me! I knew I would get struck a few times, which I did, but it was nothing too bad and much better than I thought it would be. My intention was to get passed by some stronger swimmers and pick one to draft behind. With the murky waters it was hard to pick an individual swimmer and stay on them, but as soon as we got free of the masses, I noticed that some little packs formed, so I simply tried to tag along on those. That worked for me and it was reasonably effortless to get towed along in these packs. The only exception was the turn around buoys where there were plenty of radicals who wanted to swim across the packs and bash everyone on their way through! But hey, what’s new??

After the first lap of the swim (out of 2 laps), I checked my watch and noticed it was reading 29:44. I thought to myself, “that’s ok, I’m on track for my intended 1 hour target”. But a few minutes later, it dawned on me that I actually started my timer about 90 secs before the race start. That got me excited as I knew I was on target for a sub 1 hour swim and a big PB. So, I focused on the pace of



my swim pack and kept good form to ensure I was not wasting any excess energy.

During the last leg of the swim, I found that I had to move up the pack a little as many of them were tiring and dropping off.

Around the final buoy, I got bashed in the goggles one more time and after de-suction cupping them from my eye, had one last look at the swim finish chute ahead and put my head down. I swam until my arms touched the carpet on the boat ramp and stood up to see the clock saying "58:15". I was blown away and full of excitement at this point. It was such a fabulous result to launch my day...



The run into T1 was a blur, but I do remember a clench of the fist and letting out a "yeah!" as I ran past Matty who was standing with some woman on top of a wiz bin! After going down the wrong aisle, I finally found my T1 "Blue" bag and shot straight into the change tent where I had a couple of volunteers to help me get my changeover happening (unfortunately, it wasn't Nath). I quickly thanked them in advance for helping me and instructed them to tip my bag contents onto the floor whilst I got the wetsuit off. I had a nibble on some Ironman Bar that I had made (thanks to Ethan and Shannon for the recipe ☺) and I was out to get my bike.

The Trinity was there ready and waiting and without delay I threw on my helmet and rolled my bike out of T1 to the start line and had a nice smooth mount. I pedaled for a few hundred metres before sliding my feet into my shoes and doing up the Velcro tabs. I felt good.

The bike course presents some fairly serious hills immediately going out of town, but these didn't phase me at all with the amount of hills training that I had completed. It didn't seem like an effort at all and I was quickly able to settle my heart rate at my aerobic threshold.

Over the hill we went and down Matthew Flinders Dr and just a little further along (about 9km into the bike leg), I heard a "clang clank" noise ahead of me. Some poor guy (#864 and also on a Trinity) come off his bike (about 30 metres



ahead). He would've been doing about 45km/h. I thought of stopping for a moment, but could see plenty of help around, so decided to continue. It was a sickening sight and made me feel horrible. As it turned out, this guy actually got fixed up by medical personnel and completed the race in around 11.5 hours. Good on him!

As I made my way out of Port Macquarie and past the golf club, I could see there were some groups starting to form. In the back of my mind, I remember Nathan McKelligot telling me to search out the pace lines and jump on! So I did. When we hit the long straights between Port Macquarie and Lake Cathie, I could see the pace line stretching single file, far ahead. It was a real spectacle and although our spacing was somewhere around 10 – 12 metres, cruising at 40km/h seemed effortless.

The pace line I joined was perfect for me, as my heart rate stayed fairly constant at my aerobic threshold, so I decided just to take it easy and stay put. As we negotiated the undulations through Bonny Hills, the pace line bunched up a little, but the amount of output effort seemed to remain constant and no-one was doing anything silly.



At the 45km mark, I was overjoyed to see my average speed sitting at 36.3km/h and I felt as fresh as a daisy. After the southern turnaround, I started speaking with another rider "Dominic - #958" and we pepped each other up a little every time we swapped positions and made a pass. He actually went on to win his age group in the 45-49's. Nevertheless, it's great to have some company out there!

On the first lap returning north through Lake Cathie, I struck a little obstacle... I had caught up with the leading female and her entourage. It was Hilary Bisque from the USA and she had her own technical official on a motor bike, the motor bike with the 1W red flag and a camera man, also on the back of yet another motor bike. It was a maze trying to get past! But gee it felt good knowing I was not getting "chicked" at this stage of the game...

Everything continued nicely back into Port Macquarie to the turn around and the commencement of lap 2. However, at the bike aid stations, water was being handed out in those commercial pump bottles and it was difficult to find one that was already open. It's almost impossible to try and open a bottle of water whilst riding a TT bike, especially when the safety foil has not been removed! I picked



up a few un-open bottles from volunteers at drink stations and had no choice but to throw them away immediately. I called for an "open" bottle at successive aid stations and managed to get the right hydration on board. Phew!

As I continued in the pace line to Lake Cathie, I spotted a technical official on a motor bike who looked a bit menacing. I wasn't worried as I knew I was doing the right thing and the gap between myself and the next rider was quite big. He pulled up beside me and said that I was not far enough away. I heeded the warning and pulled back a little further (he indicated the gap should be about 2 white centre lines apart). I could see he was hanging around, so I was on the brakes constantly and vigilant about keeping the correct distance. It's a real juggle in this situation, as you are trying to keep a distance from the rider ahead, but on the same token if you get too far behind, the riders behind you start overtaking as they think you are slowing down, and then you just spend all your time dropping back and losing ground. As bad-luck would have it, a little further down the road he decided to show me a yellow card for drafting. "Unbelievable" I thought to myself, especially when there were other riders out there who were up the clackers of other riders all day! I took it on the chin and convinced myself that a little rest might actually be a good thing. So, on the final return to Port Macquarie, I popped my head into the Penalty Box for a 4 min rest at Laurieton. I used the time to ensure my hydration was right and did some leg stretching. There were about 5 other riders in the box at the same time.

The time passed quickly and I was away again. I had obviously lost touch with my new found friend "Dominic" and found that all of the riders around me now were going much slower than the pace I had been riding previously, so I spent about 30 mins overtaking. I finally caught up with some of the riders who I had previously seen and managed to find a good slot. Towards the end of the 180km ride, the field had really broken up and separated and it felt like there was barely a soul on the course! I negotiated Matthew Flinders Dr for the final time with 3 or 4 other riders and we then flew down the descent back into Port Macquarie for T2.



At the top of the approach hill, I removed my feet from my cycle shoes. I turned into the bike finish chute, threw my right leg over my bike and had a smooth dismount before handing the Trinity over to my catcher. I had a quick run to my Red bag (but again fell foul to going down the wrong aisle).



My T2 changeover involved getting on some sunscreen, running shoes and visor on and my volunteer helper cleaned my sunnies. I grabbed my bottle of "Rock Star" and was away...

After all of the excitement of T2, I took some time to stabilise my heart rate, find my pace and assess where I was (in terms of heading towards my goal time). I could see that I had to complete the marathon in around 3:41 to hit my goal of sub 10 hours. The legs felt good, so off I went! During the first lap, I felt like I had the run course all to myself. It was great! It took me quite some time to reduce my heart rate and find my aerobic pace and this shows in my first 4km as I was averaging 4:12/km pace. I regularly took on salt tablets, water and my electrolyte.



A highlight of the run came during lap 2 when I was passed by pro triathlete Jason Shortis. It felt great to be out there with a guy of this calibre (even if he was a lap ahead) and see him smashing it out. It surprised me how much he was huffing and puffing. I continued feeling good through the run until about 25km. I was getting a bit bloated from the fluids and I could tell that a T3 (aka toilet stop) would be imminent. At the end of lap 3, I was forced to walk for a couple of hundred metres and then into a T3 stop and this cost me a few minutes.

Like Superman out of the phone booth, I emerged from the portaloos, ready to smash out the final lap. During the last lap, the legs were feeling very tired and I struggled to keep my heart rate up to my aerobic threshold level, but I pushed every step of the way. By this stage, the run course was choc-a-bloc with slower runners on their initial laps and they were always in the way! I think I wasted a tonne of energy yelling out "passing on right". As I made my way out to Settlement Point for the final time, I seized the opportunity to suck up the atmosphere and enjoyed the time of day. It was invigorating running in the late afternoon and seeing the sun sinking in the sky. It was also great to see Steve Quick and Peter Vaughan out there as well, especially since it was their idea for me to sign up for Ironman in the first place!



As I negotiated the town hill for the final time, I saw the 40km distance marker and knew it was all down hill from here. I assessed my running form one last time and just thought about the finish chute. I collected my 4th Ironman wrist band and it was a real buzz to get a cheer from the spectators when I reached the fork in the course where you take a different path if you're on your last lap.

Soon enough, I had reached the carpet of the finish chute. It was just me, no need for any "sprint" finish. The crowd was electric; everyone was banging on the side of the chute and cheering. As I ran up the centre, I heard my name called on the P.A. and threw my arms up in the air and then got to work on spotting my family and friends. After a hug for my family and biggest supporters, Matt and Mel, I looked up at the finish line and saw the clock "9:47". Relief!...I had smashed my 10 hour goal, so I ran up the ramp to seal the deal... What a moment!

As I was guided by a couple of nice volunteer ladies, I received my medal and finisher's shirt and towel. The medal was a beauty!



After visiting the drinks tent for some hydration, I then enjoyed a 20 minute massage on my quads, hammies and calves. The massage was good, but I then had to have a quick visit to the medical tent as I got really cold and had a case of the shivers. After getting out of my wet shirt and getting a space blanket and a cup of tea, the nurse said I was right to go. I had a warm cup of soup, some coffee and Anzac biscuits in the food tent, before making my way back to my apartment for a hot tub.

Once I recuperated and warmed up again, I returned to the finish line to cheer more athletes across the finish line.

You can see a YouTube video of my race highlights here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mPqSET5cID4>



Lessons Learned

Having never experienced an Ironman distance race before, there were a handful of elements that I was unsure about. The top 3 were:

1. Whether I would go "stale" during taper and then feel lacking on race fitness.
2. Whether I would be able to maintain pace throughout the bike and particularly the run.
3. How much advantage I would gain in the swim by being towed along in other swimmer's drafts.

Now I am an Ironman, I have some answers to all these questions!

I based my taper volumes on an email article that I received from Richard Palmer. It basically indicated reducing volumes from week 5 in a straight line to zero (finishing two days out from the event). The only exception to this was my swimming which I continued normal training right up to the beginning of race week. Although I can't really say that I was jumping out of my skin with energy in the final two weeks of taper (like the article said would happen), I did feel pretty fresh. I was also being very cautious of not getting sick, as the weather was changing and there were many people around coughing and sniffing with Autumn bugs. I became a bit of a hermit at home and was never too far from a pump pack of hand sanitizer.

The taper really proved itself on race day. At the start line, I felt great. Then at no point in the race did I ever feel like I was under-done. I felt strong and well positioned to handle every part of the race. My summary is that tapers work and are a vital part of preparation for a race of this distance.

The bike leg of Ironman was a big unknown for me. In my last race at the Huskisson Long Course, I pushed myself very hard on the bike and ended up with leg cramping issues as soon as I reached the run. Although it may've also been due to poor bike positioning (which I have since remedied), I was determined to keep my heart rate at aerobic threshold, so that I would leave plenty of pennies in the bank for the run.

Once I got out onto the bike course and found my place in the pace lines, I quickly realized that my bike preparation with aerobic heart rate training was perfect. I was well prepared for the hilly sections and I had no trouble staying with the pace lines. Despite a bit of bad luck with a trigger happy technical official, I feel like my bike preparation was just right and I don't need to change a thing.





It was a slightly different story on the run though. If you examine my run splits during the race, you can see that my pace faded from 4:12/km at the start to 5:03/km at the end. Although I am over the moon with a sub 3:30 marathon, I would like to see a more even pace next time. In my training, I really focused on running off the bike (particularly the long rides), so I have high expectations for a good run. At this stage, I don't know what the answer is to improve this aspect, but I will be searching for answers in the coming weeks.

Finally, in my swimming training, I recall doing a 3.8km time trial at Lambton Pool about 8 weeks before the race. I gave it a good dig and came out with a time of 1:03:45. There was no wetsuit and no drafting. In contrast, at Ironman, I achieved a time of 58:19 for the swim leg (more than 5 mins better). Of course there is race day adrenalin, but I think it speaks for itself that drafting stronger swimmers to get towed along really does work!

Thanks!

To become an Ironman, you need to be selfish.

From the peak of training when you're going to bed with Big Dog every night so that you can get up and train at 4am to taper time when you go into hibernation and avoid all the usual indulgences of life, it has an impact on all those around you. Then of course there's your training buddies who must comply with your program on your terms!

First and foremost, I would like to thank my wife Sasha and children Britney and Noah for allowing me to chase my goals. It takes time and money to do this sport and my family are my biggest supporters. I love you all dearly!

Next, I would like to thank Richard Palmer (aka "Coach") and Matthew Roberts (aka "Assistant Coach"). Together we have trained literally hundreds of hours and I couldn't think of two better mates to have! RP is a champion himself in this sport and I feel honoured to have him as my mentor and buddy! MR#4 has provided support to me in so many ways.

Then, there's all my other training partners. From those who run at lunchtime at Number 1 oval to the Prawnies who come out for the occasional hills or midweek



session on the bike. Also, not forgetting the close knit bunch at Swimfit (at the Forum), in particular coaches Michale and Matt.

Finally, a quick thank you to all those who have sent messages of support and shown an interest in my racing at Ironman. I really appreciate your friendship and hope to catch up with you soon!

