

Kona Race Report

One of my BHAGS for 2023 was to qualify for the Ironman World Championships. Not necessarily to compete if I qualified, but to qualify. I had signed up for IM Lake Placid which was to be my last full Ironman, to see what I could do in a new age group. LP was my first in 2007 and this was to be my last. I knew if I had a good race, I'd have a chance of qualifying. I ended up doing well and accepted one of the slots in my Age Group. This was the first year where the Men and Women were split up for the World Championships. The Men competed in Nice France, while the Women had Kona to themselves. This was very alluring to me. Next year the Women will be in France and the Men in Kona. You knew Ironman would have to outdo themselves with a Women's only race, and they did not disappoint.

With less than 12 weeks till Kona, Chris' plan was for me to recover from Lake Placid, stay healthy and maintain fitness. My fitness level was high at this point so minimizing risk of injury was key. I worked the long rides and runs back in on the weekends, but no more intensity during the week. Lots of mobility, soft tissue, yoga and rest. Kona has a reputation of being grueling, not because of the course itself, but the unpredictable ocean conditions, the wind on the bike and the heat on the run. I did what I could to get my body prepared for the heat. Runs and rides were done in the middle of the day as opposed to early mornings. I joined a gym for a month so I could use the sauna after workouts. I picked up a pair of cooling sleeves, an ice hat and used Hammer's Liquid Endurance leading up to race day.

The logistics of getting to Hawaii are the main reason I wasn't so sure I'd go. I'm not crazy about flying, never mind a 12 + hour flight basically losing a day on the way out and 2 on the way back. I went with Tri Bike Transport again, and had to drop my bike and gear bag off at Fast Splits on Sept 9th.

My Daughter, her friend Jen and I flew out on Tuesday before the race. We stayed at a condo 35 minutes away from the Athlete Village. I did not want to be in downtown Kona with all the chaos. I opted out of several activities as they tend to be energy zappers. I went to the athlete village on the day of check in and that was enough for me. I had one easy run, a quick bike ride to make sure everything was working after the 5 week journey and a practice swim, which was one of the highlights of the trip, as there was a coffee boat you could swim up to, drink a cup of joe and swim back to shore.

Ironman is always well organized. You sign up for check in times, bike and gear bag drop off. The bike drop off was quite an experience. There actually was a red carpet and each athlete was paraded in single file. They called out your name and I happened to be right in front of Chelsea Sodaro, so that was cool. Rock star status all week. The number of volunteers was overwhelming. It felt like wherever I was there were 10 people ready to help, not just on race day, but the whole time I was there.

Bike and Transition bags were dropped off the day before the race and we were not allowed to go to our T1 and T2 bags on race morning. Any nutrition and hydration in those bags would be sitting in the sun all afternoon. I did leave a bottle of Maurtens 320 gel and water with LMNT in my T1 bag as that would give me a good boost of calories coming out of the water. I always use a hydration pack for Ironman distance, so I was able to bring that with me race morning to leave on my bike. All I had to do in the morning was check my tires and drop off my run special needs bag. I did not have a bike special

needs, as I was able to put everything in my pack. The only items in my run special needs were extra electrolytes, mustard packs, tums and pickle juice. You do not get your special needs bags back.

I slept really well the night before the race and after a 400 cal breakfast at 3:00 am, we made the 35 min drive to the start. We even got a great parking spot so we didn't need to take one of the many shuttles. I gave Hannah and Jen a hug and went into T1 to pump my tires. When it was time to get in the swim coral for the 60+ age group, I saw a friend and we hung out together till the race started. The atmosphere was unlike any other I've ever witnessed at an event. The media and helicopters overhead were surreal. The Kona course is the most spectator - friendly triathlon course I've ever raced. While in the swim coral you are surrounded by spectators, the bike and run course meander through town so you are passing certain viewpoints several times, before heading out on the infamous Queen K.

The 60+ swim wave was the 2nd AG to start the race, after the pros and PC. I prefer this over starting in the back. The practice swim I had done gave me confidence that I could have a decent swim without a wetsuit. You aren't allowed to wear a wetsuit in Kona. The water is too warm, but also so salty that you don't need one. The swim start is a bit unique. There is a 100-meter swim to the start line, then you are treading water for about 8 minutes. There are surfer dudes that paddle back and forth till it is time to line up. Then they assume a position with their boards, signaling a 10 second countdown. The swim is a cw out around a couple of boats and back to the pier. My strategy was to stay close to the buoys so as not to drift to the left with the current. I primarily breathe on the left, so I did find myself of course a bit on the way out but did not make that mistake twice. I had a mostly contact free swim till the last half mile or so when the faster swimmers started passing.

Swim Split - 1:21.

28th out of 101.

It is highly recommended that upon exiting the water you rinse the salt off so you don't spend the day chafed. Apparently, I spent too much time in the shower as I was shoed out by a volunteer. I grabbed my T1 bag and headed into the tent where a volunteer helped me sort and get my bike gear on. A big swig of maple syrup, the Maurtens drink, sun lotion slapped all over me, off to my bike, threw on the pack and helmet and out of T1.

T1 10:49

My goal for the bike leg was to be patient, stay well hydrated and as cool as possible. My fuel of choice was Hammer Sustained Energy. I had 60 oz in my bladder, along with 24 of Flow up front and packets of LMNT. It was recommended to stay on top of your nutrition early on, so when you turned at Hawi down the long descent, you could keep 2 hands on the bike, so the crosswinds didn't take you out. I had pre-loaded with Hammer Liquid Endurance to help my body perform better in the heat. At every AS which was approx. every 10 miles, I grabbed a cold water poured it over my head, down my shirt and kept the cooling sleeves wet. This all turned out to be a great plan, as I never felt hot on the bike. The winds were enough to help keep me cool on the descents, but not strong enough to knock you over. After a few miles in town, the course takes you out on the Queen K highway for 40 miles before taking a turn and climbing up the last 12 miles before the turnaround at Hawi. There are lava fields on both sides of the highway, with the ocean on one side and nothing but hills on the other side.

Goats are everywhere. My feet started hurting around mile 30. It's a crapshoot as to when this happens, but it is usually on the run. I was a little concerned that they would bother me on the run also, but I told myself that this is the World Championship, it's supposed to hurt. If you train your brain to accept there will be pain, it's not a shock when it comes along. During Ironman the pain cave is inevitable. Other than my feet, I had the most incredible bike leg. I felt so strong and wasn't even pushing. I stuck to my plan and ended up with my fastest IM bike split ever.

Bike Split – 6:25

26th in AG

Coming off the bike into T2 my legs felt pretty good. I racked the bike, took off my gear and pack and headed to T2, grabbing the run bag on the way into the tent. A volunteer helped me sort as I drank some more maple syrup, pickle juice, took some electrolytes, more suntan lotion, ice hat, bib and waist belt which had more electrolytes, maples syrup, tums, mustard packs and LMNT.

T2 7:55

This was the warmest part of the day. The only shade on the run course comes when the sun goes down. My plan was to run 9 minutes and walk the AS, as they were approx. every mile. I would take fluids in and put ice in my hat, down the front and back of my Tri suit and wet the cooling sleeves. It was warm, but I did a decent job of keeping my HR down by following this plan. I was surprised to find out that my ave HR was only 139 during the marathon. Other than a porta potty stop at mile 10 or so, things were going well. My feet weren't bothering me, no signs of cramping. I don't ever recall the hills being a challenge. Most of the run is on the Queen K, so it was a nice change to turn down into the Human Energy Lab. This is the dreaded few miles where the heat is supposed to be at it's max. By the time I got there, the sun was starting to go down and it was a welcome part of the race until I started to get nauseous around mile 13. It's difficult to eat and drink when you don't feel well, but I knew I had to stay fueled. It took me a while to remember I had antacids in my belt, and they helped quickly. Unfortunately, I didn't have too many on me, but I remembered I had some in the special needs run bag at mile 16, so I made sure to grab those. By now I was walking more than I wanted but when I was running, I was able to hold an ok pace. It was around mile 20 when I realized I may be able to break 13 hours. I didn't have any performance-based goals for this race, and at no point did I have any idea of how I was doing relative to my age group. It was at mile 23 when I got that watery mouth feeling you get just before you toss your cookies. At that moment I remember writing in my race plan "when things go south take in sugar". I had a couple packs of maple syrup left and I took one and immediately felt better. I just had to hang in there for a few more miles. It was dark till the turn onto Palani Drive with a mile left to go. That was the sweetest mile I ever ran. I remembered being told to pause and take it all in during that last mile. That I did. I took my time and slapped as many hands as were offered coming down the finish line. Hannah and Jen were screaming and as I heard my name being announced, a volunteer catcher told me that he was Jessie's Coach and that she and Steve let him know I was finishing. That was cool.

Run split – 4:49

15th in AG

Total Time 12:54:43

19th in AG – 9th in US

Lessons Learned – I have so much gratitude for having had the opportunity to do this race. Some athletes spend their lifetime trying to qualify. Having just done Lake Placid and making the decision to compete with only a few months to train, I decided I would have no expectations and just enjoy the experience. Finishing of course and giving it my best effort but having no idea how I would stack up to the World's best, my goal was to be patient and stay in control by maintaining hydration and nutrition while keeping my core temperature down. I did not expect to have such a great race where I finished in the top 20%. When I found out, I started the "oh man, if I didn't spend 10 minutes in T1, and if I didn't have to wait for the porta potty, and if I only ran through the nausea, and so on". It took me a couple weeks of reflecting and realizing I had such a great race because I stuck to the plan. I did what I set out to do, I stayed in control, kept cool, stayed hydrated and got it done. I raced with gratitude and a deep respect for every woman out there on that course. I took time to thank volunteers at every opportunity, especially the kids who thought that dumping ice down someone's back and in their hat was an absolute hoot!! I did the best I could on that day and had the race of my life! Anything can happen on any day and to have had the experience I had will be with me forever.

I was so lucky to have Hannah and Jen at the race. Physical and moral support is so huge in any race. Getting my gear to the transition, pep talks during the week, having them taking amazing pictures and just being able to share the experience. They were in awe. Even inspired them to try a sprint triathlon next year.

The support of Jim convinced me to take a slot. Not many Husbands would tell their wives to go to Hawaii without them. Training for an Ironman is very time consuming and to do back-to-back Ironman races is a lot to ask of your family.

And Chris who always gives the best advice when needed at just the right time. The decision for me to maintain my fitness and not risk injury was the reason I had such a great race. I felt so strong and tapered, but not stale. Trust the process.