

Race Report Busselton Half Ironman 2010

Luke was certainly a class above the rest of the competition on this course. He was competing in his own separate race. All I remember is seeing him mashing a huge gear (54x11 for most of the cycle I am led to believe) as he passed going in the other direction on the first lap of the cycle. He had already established, what seemed to me, like a winning margin at that early stage of the race. He is certainly a talented young man and has earned everyone's respect over the last couple of years.

I stated at the press conference the day before the race (tongue firmly in cheek, I might add) that I was going to search for Luke prior to the race start, stand right next to him on the start line, draft off him in the swim, sit on him in the cycle and then run away to the victory.

As expected, not one of these assertions materialised on the day - I didn't even search Luke out at the start, as I didn't have to - Barney (aka Paul Matthews) and Luke lined up right next to me.

Was this a deliberate ploy to make a fool of me? Ha ha ha. I don't think so - as I was standing on the far left of the start line - it was just a sound tactical manoeuvre, which made establishing a break in the swim even more of a likelihood than it already was.

When the hooter sounded to get us underway, Luke immediately swam to the left, while Barney held his line. I was holding my own with Barney for approximately 150 metres of the swim, and Luke was edging ahead ever so slightly to the left. I had another athlete competing with me for Barney's feet, and, to make things simpler for everyone, I chose to swim left and attempt to take advantage of Luke's significant draft. Unfortunately for me, I wasn't swimming strongly enough (and never will) to bridge the gap to Luke, so I had to adjust course to the right where I could see some feet that were still within reach. In this time, Barney, along with one other (Mitch Robins) had also moved out of range, and I found myself swimming side by side with who, I believe, was Guy Crawford.

I don't know if Barney and Luke choreographed the move to separate, but it certainly had the effect of limiting the draft zone behind the two strongest swimmers in the field. By the halfway point of the outward leg to the first turn buoy, Barney and Luke had converged and the duo would swim to the beach unchallenged.

Mitch was swimming solo not too far behind the leading two at this point, while Guy and myself were swimming in front of the two Tim's, as a group of four.

Half way back on the return leg to shore, our group of four caught Mitch, and, as he swam side by side with me at the front of the group for the rest of the swim leg, it would seem he was just cruising and waiting for us to catch him.

I was getting tired in the final portion of the swim and dropped a couple metres to the others prior to exiting, but the real damage was done running the marathon to the bikes. I was shattered when I got out of the water, and while I was trying to stay with the lads such that I didn't get dropped at the start of the cycle leg, my legs and lungs weren't cooperating.

Not only was I incapable of keeping up with the competition through T2, I was still suffering when I first got on the bike, and, would continue to experience stress, much higher than my power output would usually elicit, at least halfway into the first cycle lap.

As stated earlier, by this time, Luke had already established a winning lead, Barney was almost out of reach too, and the group of four in front of me, Tim, Tim, Guy and Mitch, had a lead of around 30 seconds.

When I started the cycle leg, I really thought I was going to catch the group of four immediately in front of me at some point during the cycle, but after losing ground on the first lap, I started to have my doubts.

Raija called out at the end of the first lap that the gap to the group in front was only 25 seconds - it was, in fact, closer to 40, but she chose not to disclose the truth for some reason. Can I not handle the truth perhaps? I had fully recovered from the swim at this point, and was starting to feel quite good. I could see the motor bike that was shadowing the group of four in front from about 4 kilometres into the second lap, and it provided a handy focus for the chase.

I was now cycling well and mowing the group down at a great rate - I erased the 40 second deficit about 12k into the lap, and, as my velocity was much faster than that of the group, I decided to keep it rolling, hoping I would dispense with the four of them immediately.

Unfortunately, I am no Luke McKenzie, and the group of four just jumped onto my wheel as I made the pass. Not totally unexpected, but still pretty annoying all the same.

I led the group for the vast majority of the next 20 kilometres, picking up a cruising Barney in the process, before deciding to shut it down and do what everyone else in the group had been doing for the previous 80 kilometres. If I was in the group, I would have been doing the same, so best not make a Galah of myself and complain too much about it.

I didn't realise it at the time, but Mitch received a drafting penalty at some stage after I caught the group, so with 10 kilometres to cycle, he made a break for the penalty tent. He did get away by a few hundred metres, but it was never going to be enough to negate the four minute deficit he would accumulate.

Despite accepting the "pacing" as par for the course, I did want the result sheet to indicate that I was the strongest cyclist of the group, and that meant going back to the front with a few kilometres remaining in order to be the first to run over the timing mat at the entrance to T2. It was here that my challenge for a top three position ended.

I was the slowest of the group to put on my running shoes and socks. I can't recall whether my opposition put socks on as well, but if they did, they got them on in quick time. As a result, my deficit to Tim, Tim, Barney and Guy, before starting to run, was around 15 seconds.

The situation would only get worse in the first half of the first 7 kilometre lap, with all four pulling away by an additional 15 – 20 seconds. On the return journey, I noticed that the two Tim's were continuing to extend their lead, but Guy and Barney were starting to fade.

I caught Barney close to the start of the second run lap and then eased passed Guy about 2 kilometres later. The two Tim's were now well and truly out of site and I knew there was no hope of getting anywhere near them prior to the finish. Luke, of course, was cruising to the victory some 7 minutes further up the road at this point.

I ran as hard as I could for the balance of the run, but fourth place was the best I could manage. I have to say that I didn't feel too bad on the run, I was just running slowly. My 1.18 split was 2 minutes slower than the previous year and significantly slower than my physiology indicates I should be able to run the 21.1 kilometres with a specific preparation. Again, no point complaining about that either, because Tim Berkel was in exactly the same situation as me – 5 weeks post Ironman Australia with little time for preparation after recovery and taper considerations – and he seemed to run quite well. I was glad too, that Mitch did receive the drafting penalty, because his 1.15 run split indicated that he would have finished in front of me also. It was clearly evident as well, that Barney was having a bad day. It has been stated that he trains too hard at times; leaving limited reserves for racing, and, possibly, that was the case on this occasion.

In summary, I was very happy with my effort on the day; I didn't despair at any point, and remained mentally positive throughout. If the opposition is going faster, aside from "dirty tricks", there is nothing that can be done about it. Solace can be taken in the fact that there will always be a next time.

OG SQUAD Report

I had 9 athletes racing the event on Saturday and following is a brief summary of how each athlete performed:

Brad Wall

The OG SQUAD champion (again).

"Booty Boy" has shown steady improvement over the last couple of years due to his work ethic and consistency. Brad's splits were right in line with what I was expecting from him.

His 4.20.26 was good enough for second in his age group and 20th overall.

Brad is off to Hawaii again this year after winning his age group by 30 minutes in the Busselton Ironman last year.

Brad Renton

After a disappointing race in Port Macquarie, Brad was determined to be rewarded for many months of consistent hard training and sacrifice.

His race consisted of a solid swim, an exceptional 2.16 (and fastest in his age group) cycle leg and a commendable 1.36 run split – right on the pace his current physiology would suggest he should be running. This 4.27.49 performance placed Brad third in his age group and will surely give him the confidence to believe he can content for a Hawaii slot in his next outing over the Ironman distance.

After talking with Brad post race, he was typically reserved, but I could tell he was over the moon with his performance, and, so he should have been.

I am extremely proud of Brad and, although he didn't take OG SQUAD line honours, I think he was "best on ground" for the day.

It goes without saying that after recording the fastest bike split in his age group, his equipment must have been in impeccable order. No surprises there, as he and his business partner, Rob Sharp own Bike Force SUCCESS.

They are both perfectionists, to the point of being anal, and ensure any equipment worked on in the shop leaves in perfect working order. I refuse to take my bike anywhere else when it needs a service.

Troy Ward

By his own admission, Troy had a patchy preparation for this event. He took a while to get fired up after the Busselton Ironman in December, and when he did, his lack of fitness (p#\$^ fitness does not count) made completing a full training load pretty difficult. Throw in a trip to Bali, and this left about 5 weeks to prepare properly for the race.

To his credit, he knuckled down in the lead up to the event and got to the start line in reasonable shape. Although his time was slower than last year, all the indicators pointed to a better relative performance this year, especially as he cycled solo for the majority of the race.

Last year's time was 4.35.28 for a 14th place finish in his age group, this year's 4.40.37, on a slower track, placed him 11th in his category.

I am looking forward to Chalky's next race when he is sure to put it all together and race to his potential for the first time.

Simon Rate

Simon was an honorary member of the OG SQUAD for this year's race. Simon was working in Monaco up until 4 weeks prior to the race, and it was extremely difficult to train due to the frigid weather. Clear evidence of this was his brilliant white complexion and what seemed to be the formation of flaps of fat and skin (ie bingo wings) on the underside of each arm.

Simon developed a satisfactory level of fitness in the 4 weeks leading up to the event, and while nowhere near what he is capable of, finished the race in a commendable 4.44.25 for a 19th place finish in his age group. Last year he was 7th, with a 4.25.39 - the damage done this year in the swim and, not surprisingly the run. His cycle, on paper this year, was probably on a par with his performance of the previous year – which really surprised me – either it was a miracle, or he took advantage of some other athletes around him. It isn't cheating if you don't get caught – right Ratey? (Actually, I don't really know exactly what happened out there on the cycle course, and Simon really can cycle very well when he is fit)

Simon was a welcome addition to the training sessions in the lead up to the race.

Neil Armstrong

After many months of dealing with injury, Neil finally got himself sorted out prior to the start of this season. He was very diligent with his rehabilitation exercises and has maintained his flexibility

and core strength by regularly attending a Yoga class, expertly supervised by Romela Hope, in Kalamunda.

Neil raced far too much this season to perform at his peak in any of the events. However, that is how he wanted to do it after not racing much at all in the previous 2 years, which was totally understandable. Despite this, Neil qualified for the Australian World Olympic Distance Championships team in his age group.

Neil posted a 4.44.49 for a 12th place finish in his age group. With a few tweaks to his bike set up, some work on his swimming technique and a consistent block of specific training, Neil has the potential to go ridiculously quicker than he did on Saturday.

Ric Renton

Ric is the older brother of Brad and used to hold the mantle of king of the endurance athletes in the Renton clan. Ohhhh, how things have changed – ha ha ha.

Ric competed in Port Macquarie in April and then spent two weeks in Sydney, before coming back to WA and spending some time up north.

Although I was sending him a program during this time, it would seem he didn't get much of it done - I quote an email excerpt - "haven't even seen your programme, let alone follow it! BUT, I can't wait for busso half".

I didn't know how to take it when he told me after the race that he had posted personal bests in all three legs. He was pretty chuffed with himself I might add.

I am still taking some credit for it, I can assure you.

Scott Watson

Scott is a relative newcomer to the OG SQUAD, and I get the impression that he feels he doesn't fit in on occasions. It doesn't help when work and family commitments keep him from attending the majority of the group sessions, but I can assure him that he is as much a part of the group as anyone else.

I quote from a txt message – "Great day! Bloody fantastic. PB for the swim, bike and run. Finally went under 6 hours by 1 minute. Run was really tough – not enough training lol"

I think that just about sums it up - A great effort on the day from Scott.

Vivian Oldfield

Viv, the comic relief provider and "darling" of the OG SQUAD, had a lot on his plate in the lead up to the race. His impending marriage to Emma, plus one or two other issues distracted his focus from training in the lead up to the event.

While his cycle time was virtually identical to last year, on, I would say, a smaller overall volume of training, and his swim was similar too, due to the long swim this year; his run time was significantly slower, indicating a lack of overall work.

Under the circumstances though, Viv performed relatively well this year, and, after seeing him on the last lap of his run, there was no lack of application on race day.

He has signed up for the Ironman in December and is all fired up to train diligently and race to his full potential.

Rachel Harris

The OG SQUAD Olympian and Commonwealth Games gold medallist.

I deliberately avoid inviting Rachel to any OG SQUAD open water swimming sessions (in which I am taking part myself).

Rachel competed in Port Macquarie in April with her partner, Ric. I have no idea how she got the training done in the lead up to the Ironman with her work commitments as a Doctor. After she informed me that her working hours had changed to 6.50am – 6pm in the lead up to the half, I

knew it was going to be very difficult to get a significant amount of the training done. Even more so considering the mental tiredness developed preparing for and racing an Ironman.

Ric let the cat out of the bag when he told me both of them had “done nothin’” in that infamous email, but did also assert that “the half will be fun”.

I hope you had fun out there on Saturday Rachel.

I must extend a big thank you to Greg and Sue MacKenzie from PHARMACY 777 for allowing Rajja and myself to stay at their wonderful family home, again, in the lead up to the event. We had the place to ourselves and it provided a very relaxing atmosphere in which to prepare for the race.

Greg, David, Michael and Kim from Pharmacy 777 were the first to contribute to my Hawaii costs by donating \$1000, and, I must thank them for not only this, but their ongoing financial and product support. I continue to be impressed with the community responsibility Pharmacy 777 show in the operation of their business.

Kieran and Greg from BIOSYMM WIM were the second in line to contribute \$1000 to my Hawaii costs. Kieran and Greg strive to keep me injury free and, are in no small part responsible for my consistent performances over the past 12 months.

Kieran, with pregnant wife Sara, infant Ollie and Max the hound, made the trip down to support all the OG SQUAD members on the day.

Brad, Rob and Bike Force SUCCESS, as stated earlier, are my first port of call when I need anything related to bikes. Give them a go, you won't be disappointed.

Damien Nabbs, another of the athletes I coach, lent me his virtually brand new front deep rim carbon race wheel to use for both the Port Macquarie and Busselton events. This is the typically supportive behaviour Damo shows to all around him – he is a true gentleman.

I am looking forward now to a short break, and then preparing for my next major outing at Ironman Japan on June 13th. I am very much looking forward to reacquainting myself to the Japanese food and hospitality.