

UK Half-Ironman 2010 Race Report

by Jay Briley

Well a year has passed and many miles of swimming, cycling and running have been completed by me in the hope that it will get me across the finish line at the Full Ironman in Bolton on 1st Aug. I needed a “measuring Stick” to see if I am progressing in the right direction, so after last years battle with Wimbleball I booked straight back in for this year. That day arrived oh so quick. Before I knew where the winter had gone to, I was in my wetsuit freezing cold at 7am about to start the UK Half Ironman again. This was hailed as the “toughest Half-Iron” in the world again by the pro athletes and commentators. I already knew that and took no comfort in the fact I knew what was coming over the next 8hrs. There was over 1500 athletes their on the day and over 1000 were first timers. Poor little lambs to the slaughter, kept springing to mind. Anyway, this is how my day went...

1.2 mile Swim in open water

This year I decided to start somewhere near the back so that every one didn't crawl over the top of me. I had a little bit of space but that kept getting taken up by other people panicking, stopping and treading water with legs flailing in my facial direction. Many times I had to stop, look up, wait for a gap, then swim round them and carry on. This made the first 400m really disjointed. When I got round the first turn buoy things had spread out a bit and I managed to get into a rhythm. I did bilateral breathing all the way as that is what I have been practicing and it causes me to control my breathing a lot better and I seem to sight perfectly with it. Things went on steady until the finish chute came back into sight and I was soon exiting the water. I couldn't believe that after all my stops and being right at the back I had crawled through a fair few people and even beat last years time by almost 2 mins. I wondered what I could have done with out the stops. I exited the water, stripped my wetsuit down to the waist and run up the stupid hill all the way to transition past supporting friends of the club. It was awesome to see Dave Hall and Emily there. Every time I saw Dave throughout the day he was to give me a real boost.

T1

Much better than last year as I did the whole event in a Tri-suit so didn't need to get changed into cycling gear. I grabbed my bag from one of the 1500 pegs, threw my self on the floor and shouted “please Peel me”. A willing volunteer rushed over, grabbed my wetsuit arms and in one motion peeled it

off, folded it up and put it in my bag. Brilliant. I got all my bits on that I needed for the cycle, ran out to get by bike, ran up to the toilets, emptied my bladder and headed out to the bike course.

56 mile cycle including 2000m of climbing over 52 hills

This was always going to be the biggest challenge again as it is just such a tough course. But I attacked it from the start. I started overtaking people straight away. I must have taken about 30 people on the 4 mile climb out of the lake. I knew then that my cycle training had put me in a far different league than last year. I felt positive and just kept reeling people in all the way round the first lap. I quickly went from being scared and anticipating the hills to “enjoying the challenge” of the next one. This is a great way to feel when on the bike and was made even better by overtaking so many people who had got off to walk. By the 2nd lap I had started to catch up the “real Cyclists” on amazing looking carbon bikes. I even overtook 2 people with aero, teardrop helmets on. This just spurred me on even more and even though I knew I was using a lot of energy which would be needed for the run, I just thought “do you know what; I’ll deal with it when I get to it”. This is the first time I have had this attitude in a race as I always conserve energy for my worst discipline (the run). I ate a bit of flapjack and had some energy drink every 5 miles just like in training but I had stomach cramps all the way on the bike. It was really painful but decided I would battle on and stop in transition for a loo break to see if this helped. The end of lap 2 came quicker than I expected I hopped off my trusty £300 (also 300lb) bike, and entered T2

T2

As soon I handed my bike to a volunteer I headed for a toilet. I spent a good 5 mins trying to relieve my cramps. This was time wasted as I felt no better. I binned it and headed out to get my running kit sorted. This was a slick affair, Bag off, trainers on, cap on, sun block applied, watch changed to “running”. all cycle kit stuffed into bag and gone. I was annoyed about the time spent in the toilet for nothing so sprinted out onto the course to amazing cheers from the crowd.

13.1 mile Run

The crowd really spurred me on and I got a rush of blood to the head so when I looked at my watch I was doing sub 8 minute mile pace. As soon as the crowd were out of sight I slowed right down to 10 minute miles and tried to get into a rhythm. The trouble is this undulating multi-surface course really makes it difficult to get into any rhythm. I walked the first big hill like everyone

around me but managed to run the whole of the first lap in the searing heat only stopping at the “fuelling stations” for a few seconds to fuel up. I saw my good friend Willsy on the run course who was having a stormer and felt a little guilty as I had slowed him down for a chat both times, but it was really great to see him at that stage. The second time I came back round to the hill I was the only person around me to run the whole hill. I was secretly chuffed about this but quickly realised I was only about 20 metres in front of the walkers who subsequently overtook me on the down hill while I recovered. Hilarious. The second lap was the hardest but it is also where you realise you are over half way round so it spurs you on to get to the final loop. I spent a lot of time running with a first time girl called Ali. We had the same running pace and got on really well. This definitely kept my pace up when my legs wanted to stop. The third time up the hill I decided to force march up it at the same pace as she was running. It was then that she asked if I was ex-army. How could she tell? Was it the “left, right, left, right” I was whispering under my breath? Or just the mad stiff arms I was using to grab the air in front of me and pull me onwards as if force marching up the Brecon Beacons? Anyway with just over 2 miles to go I got cramp in my hamstring. I have never suffered from this on any of my training, so it was a real shock. I knew I was on to smash last year’s time and this was going to ruin it. I decided to stretch it out by walking up the hills and then striding out on the flats, after about 5 mins of this it relieved itself. I was so happy and picked up the pace even more. I had lost Ali though.

Then I met Paul North from the Club who had an amazing bike, so he was also on his last lap. He had a problem with his knee though and told me to go on. Fair play to him for not making me feel guilty. All the way round the run people were asking me if I did it last year and if I said “yes” they would reply “I knew it, I read about you in the 220 Triathlon Magazine”. One guy that I ran past stopped me and said “jay, do you know you are the only reason I am doing this today?” he said “I read your article and decided that even though I am over 16 stone I am gonna have a go”. That well touched me. How cool is that. Inspiring other big people to stop watching TV and do some exercise. The thing is people like him inspire me, I mean he was a big fella, really struggling but would not give up the dream of that finish line. Brilliant.

So, I looked at my watch and finally let myself believe I could go sub 7 hours. I went for it and came up to the finish in no time at all. No cartwheels this year, this was business, just a few last scalps up the hill and straight through the finish line in 6hrs 45. Amazing.

I waited in the queue for my medal and then saw Ali just about 5 places in front, she was crying with pride and achievement, I went to give her a cuddle and then it hit me what I had done today. I had beat last year’s time by 1hr and 8 minutes, that was it, we were sobbing together within seconds. I am not embarrassed about it at all. The sense of achievement was uncontrollable and all my hours of training in the freezing cold winter and all

the effort I had put in on the day came flooding out with a new friend I had made on the way. A truly amazing day for me.

Thanks to everyone who has supported me on this journey so far especially my family, the club, friends, ThomsonReuters and my "ironman-Cycling buddies". Aso my running partner - IronDog. Just 6 weeks to go until this mission is complete. I know I can do it now. But I will definitely not be pushing that kind of pace.

Thanks for reading.

Jay

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