

Well as many of you already know, despite a pretty serious bike crash 5 weeks before race day, dislocating my shoulder and rupturing the tendon on the end of my collarbone, threatening surgery, putting me out of action for much of the build up and a serious doubt as to whether I should realistically continue to intend to race at all, I completed the 2.4mile swim, 112 mile bike and 26.2 mile run in a respectable time of 13 hours 28 mins and 56 seconds and heard the magical words PAUL WILLS FROM ANDOVER....YOU ARE AN IRONMAN!

I cant even begin to describe how chuffed to bits I feel, it really was a mental battle and at times very sore and painful as swimming with a shoulder in the state mine is in was probably nothing short of stupid, add to that resting on the bars for a further 6-7 hours and then running for nearly 5 hours jolting it around and I was beginning to think I should have listened to the advice I was being given leading up to starting this amazing race. But....in reality having poured almost 8 months of hard structured training into this and effectively allowing Ironman to take over mine, my friends and Vicki's life there was no way I would be not at registration on Friday 30th July.

So how did it go?

SWIM -

This was the bit I was dreading, only one week before I managed to swim 2250 very slow and awkward meters at the lake and I knew that failure to complete the 3800m would end in massive disappointment and much heartache. So strapped up with "special" tape (I have Sam to thank for this as part of the excellent rehab she gave me) and drugged up to the eyeballs I entered the water. I was so determined to take it easy, not get involved in the usual melee/washing machine/brawl and find my own space and just get round before the 2.20 cut off time. I waited right at the back and was one of the last to enter the water. Got in and found my space on the far right hand side...a tactic I can highly recommend as I didnt get bumped, kicked or touched for the whole duration of the two laps. Infact with the first lap completed pain free in 40 mins I decided to try to continue at this pace for the 2nd and see what happened...a risk maybe but in all fairness I was beaming and so happy to be taking part and competing. About 10 mins into lap two and a very loud click started to be audible under the water, this was actually my shoulder joint and although a bit achy it was more annoying than anything else...the strangest feeling. Still I pressed on realising that the exit was fast approaching and it held out thankfully for me!!! As I ran up the blue carpet I clocked the time, one hour 25mins...thats only a little bit slower than my best time in training, I went nuts and the crowd dutifully reciprocated my joys by shouting and cheering. Infact nobody supporting me expected to see me out of the water so soon and they also went crazy when they saw me smiling and so relieved, my Dad and Vicki were absolutely ecstatic.

T1 -

Slowest and most methodical T1 I have ever done, I wanted to make sure everything was right, took some food on board and some drinks and off I set for the bike.

BIKE -

Normally this is an area I excel in, cycling is my strongest discipline and one I enjoy competing in and training for. I like to go out and blast the bike but in the case of Ironman and my current condition I chose to sit up and stick to my race plan of around 17mph average which would hopefully leave something in my legs for the marathon. The bike course was as I had been told, rolling hills, not much flat and one mother of a climb. Excellently supported around the whole course and each lap saw the same familiar faces cheering and giving encouragement. It helped that I had WILLSY printed on my tri suit as I heard my name called out lots of times which gave me a real boost. With laps one and two out of the way I was still thoroughly enjoying myself, beaming with smiles and thanking supporters for continuing to cheer. My shoulder was sore and I struggled to get down on the tri bars for lap three, opting instead for comfort. I had also developed a pretty bad stomach ache which I put down to the disgusting lake water we swam in earlier that morning. I am sure it was not the nutrition as I was very strict with this, taking fluid and food regularly on board. Lap three was tough, the big

climb felt like a big climb now and more and more people were hopping off to walk...something I would not be doing!! About half way round the final lap I saw my family and Vicki on the roadside so I stopped for a quick kiss and hello how you feeling type of chat and pressed on. I now felt amazing!!! The ride took me 6hrs 44 mins, all going to plan and still very happy. Entered T2 and gave my bike to the race official waiting.

T2 -

Again I opted for a take is steady stop here, changed my socks for fresh clean ones, put the compression calf guards on, toilet stop and off I went.

RUN -

The run was hard, mentally and physically hard. I managed to run the first 11 miles and felt ok-ish but boy did I have bad stomach ache again. Another toilet stop and a bit of a walk at a feed station and still I felt pretty rough. Then cramp set in and I was reduced to a walk, shuffle, walk affair for probably the best part of the next 7 miles. I was in trouble and slowly the air of doubt was setting in...the demons were whispering to me, you cant do this, you hurt, your legs are shot, your stomach hurts, your brother has just gone past you on his last lap while you have one to go, lots of others are passing you looking like they are fresh and feeling fine...stop Willsy, walk Willsy, keep looking at your watch Willsy as the time speeds by!!! In all fairness the cramp really was annoying and relentless, but I managed to keep moving, I figured a fast walk was better than stopping completely. I then saw Paul North coming towards me, he was on about 20 miles and I was on around 17. He gave me some magic anti cramping beans which I threw enthusiastically down my neck waiting for them to take effect...within 15 mins they kicked in and slowly I was able to jog more and more. I started to pass people and the miles crept by. At 22 miles I saw Paul Venus and Jase heading towards me, they were heading out for their final lap and looked too full of beans for my liking (Mr North's magic anti cramping beans maybe?) We stopped for a short while and had a bit of a hug and Jase told me in little over 30 mins I would be an Ironman...this lifted me immensely and on I plodded. Rounding the final corner and seeing the massive crowd and all the Andover IRONWAGS and my friends and family together I made a dash for the line...as I crossed it and heard the words from the commentator that I was now an Ironman I leapt up punching the air! I completed the marathon in 4hours 57 mins...spot on! Absolutely made up.

Vicki was waiting for me as I had my timing chip taken off and gave me a massive hug and kiss and the reality of what I had just done set in...I couldnt believe it...amazing.

I then caught up with Paul North and Dan Mason who told me their excellent times and we chatted about the race while we waited for the highly anticipated arrival of Mr Briley and Mr Venus...Jase's finishes are legendary and worth every minute of them...literally they do last for a few minutes before he crosses the line!!!

So now its over, I am pleased to say that although the shoulder is still not right I dont think I have further damaged it by doing Ironman. It still clicks like crazy, aches a bit and is poking up at the end which doesnt look great but at the end of the day I now really dont mind so much. I would like to thank Sam for her excellent physio sessions and advice, without her I really doubt Ironman would have been possible as straight after the accident she had me doing things I would never have attempted on my own. I also cannot thank my lovely girlfriend Vicki enough as she has been nothing short of a star putting up with my gripes, restless nights, grumpiness when I couldnt train, grumpiness when my training hurt like hell, frustrations at what had happened. She has had such a positive influence on me and constantly was there to pick me up when I was down. She is also an awesome cook too!

Thankyou to everyone who sponsored me, I raised about £1300 for CLIC in the end which is the most I have ever raised for charity.

Thanks also to my fellow Ironbuddies...it was awesome to train and do this race together and apart from the bike crash I would do it all again exactly the same! Also I have to mention how well my brother Mark did, he finished in 11 hours 20 mins placing 166th overall...he is a

machine but I will beat him one day!!!

Ever since I watched my first triathlon in Sherbourne in 2007, which happened to be an Ironman, I knew that was what I wanted to one day do. That November I bought my first bike, joined the club and have never looked back...so really this Ironman journey was 3 years in the making and now I have achieved this goal...whats next though...

Cheers for reading and see you all soon,

Paul.