

Bassman Half Ironman, May 5th, 2013 – Race Report

After 30 weeks of training, the Queens half marathon in March, and a 3-day training camp in Lititz, PA in April, I grew impatient to finally bring it altogether and test my fitness in one of two half-ironman test races I have in May in preparation of Eagleman. This race (my first half ironman ever!) kicked off my triathlon season, and I hoped to use it as a reference to a) hopefully build up confidence, and b) use some data and personal sensations to adjust my training in the 4 weeks leading up to Eagleman.

Saturday...A bike rack story!

Will picked me up around 3:20pm and hooked my bike onto his roof rack. I wasn't really sold on it, as it didn't look sturdy enough to handle the highway. He could sense it. His question to me: Are you nervous? ...I was. It only took 2 minutes driving on the Turnpike to see my bike clinging onto the strap on the rear wheel, the front wheel dangling and the bike about to fall off. I kid you not - We had to pull over on the emergency lane and "catch the bike" before it completely fell off. After another failed attempt, we (finally) stopped at a rest area, took off my wheels and put the bike in the car! HUGE sigh of relief! Now off to the race!

We got our race packet at the lake before meeting up with some friends at Stefano's, a seafood restaurant on Long Beach Island, NJ, around 7pm. I'm still not convinced that seafood is appropriate the night before the race, but it was delicious. We stayed at Will's friends on LBI and got ready for the race. The 15-minute "get-ready" workshop from Will was incredibly helpful. Here are some valuable tips he shared:

- a) Wrapping the bib up around the belt and tucking it in your shorts. It made a huge difference on the bike. The bib wasn't flapping in the wind, and I was able to put it on for the swim and not have to worry about it at T1.
- b) How to efficiently take off the wetsuit and the importance of the Aquaphor Vaseline. No chafing on the bike and run! Priceless!
- c) The convenience of speed laces – I need to get some, pronto!

Race day

Setting up my transition area

We got to the lake at 5:45 – Air temperature: 45F! I was anxious about that, as I know my stomach doesn't cope well with cold weather. I tried to shrug it off and focused my attention solely on my transitions and warm up. My mind was already in the race at that point. The conditions are the same for everybody, anyway – No excuse!

I organized my transition so that I had enough space between my bike and the next to hang my wetsuit onto the bike rack. I made sure to remove my bags and extra noise that would clog my space and would ultimately slow me down. I taped up 3 Honey Stingers on the frame, and had one gel ready for each transition. My bike shoes weren't clipped onto my bike, as I haven't really practiced that yet. With Will, we agreed that it made more sense not to try it, but rather practice it over the next month. Bike shoes and helmet on the towel in front of my running shoes and fuel belt.

Swim: 31'

Freezing! I'm glad I did a warm up swim, as the cold water of Lake Absegami caught me by surprise. I had a really hard time breathing in the first 2 minutes, but it finally eased after 5 minutes. I looked at the buoys and realized how big the loop was, only to be told that we had 2 loops to do: 2 clockwise loops in shallow waters. I can only breathe on my left side and the buoys were on the right! Not ideal! I never swam 1.2 miles straight and in race conditions, and in cold waters for that matter. Some people said the water temperature was in the low 60s; I wouldn't have been surprised to see a polar bear coming out of the water! I convinced myself the swim would be okay, feeding on people's behaviors (they all looked cold!), and talking to friends to forget about the race. I have to take my hat off to the guy from Columbia University who swam

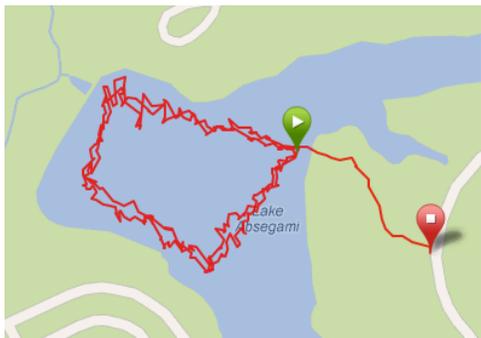
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in his speedo! I thought to myself that it'd only be torture for 35 minutes (at least I hoped it'd only take me 35 minutes!), and that I had the bike leg after that. I think it helped!

Off we go!

All the adrenaline, excitement, and euphoria that accumulated over the past few months and even more so since 5:45am this morning burst as the gun went off! **FINALLY!**

I felt good in the first 5 minutes, but I started to feel constrained around my rip cage after the first buoy. I had hard time breathing and started to feel panicky. My goggles fogged up, and the swimmers kicking and all the



splashing around me didn't help much. It wasn't a pleasant feeling. I immediately stopped and tried to collect myself. My first reaction was: "This is stupid, I hate it, I'm gonna call it quit!" That's the emotional stage I was in at that particular moment...**NO WAY** I was going to quit, obviously! Not after all the training and energy I put in for 6 months! I was just not thinking straight at that moment.

It literally took me 3-4 seconds to realize that I was okay, in a good place, and that all I needed to do was to focus on my swim and my swim only. Those 3 seconds probably saved me from a disastrous first 1.2M swim. I got back at it and swam at my own pace, building up

confidence, eventually passing people, and feeling stronger. I came out of the water with good sensations, and ended up enjoying it. Although I could definitely benefit from straightening my swim a tiny bit! All the zigzags I did probably cost me some time. It gave me a massive boost of confidence for the bike leg. My official time in the water was 31 minutes.

T1: 1:32

After taking off my wetsuit, I put on my helmet: "**Slow is smooth; smooth is fast!**" I made sure to remember that while putting it on. I chose not to clip the shoes onto the pedals beforehand, and opted to ride without socks (first time!). It turned out to be more comfortable than if I had them on, as the shoes are designed to be worn bare foot. The transition time was somewhat decent, and I felt I was well organized.

However, I think I can improve with my wetsuit transition: It took me longer to take it off than I anticipated. I will also focus on learning how to mount the bike with my shoes already clipped on. That should allow me to shed some time in my T1.

Bike: 57.2M – 2:25:46

The course was 3 loops total. I was a bit concerned about the air temperature (around 50F), but the swim warmed me up nicely and I was ready to go.

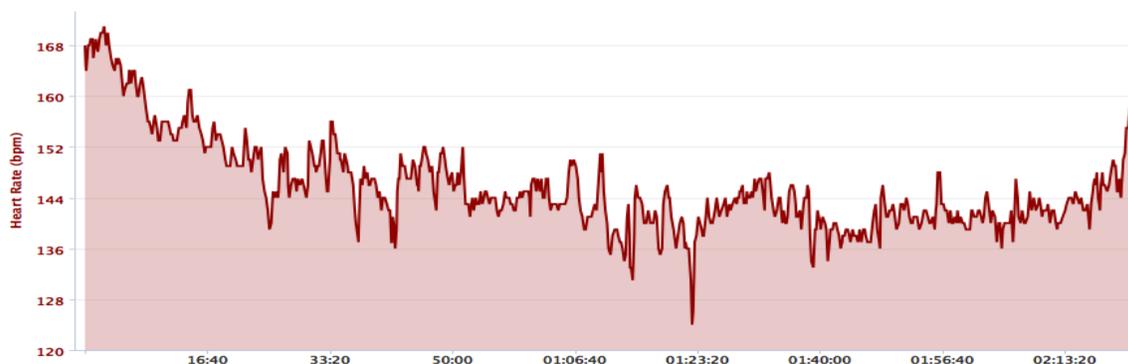
Once I passed the transition and was all ready to go, the first thing that came to mind was nutrition. I took my first Honey Stinger 2 minutes into the ride and drank few sips to refuel. It gave me the sugar kick I needed to get a good start. Not knowing what to expect on the bike leg, I rode at a conservative pace in the first 4 to 5 miles, and got my HR to progressively drop back down to my aerobic zone (145-150), a zone I am comfortable riding in. The course was pancake-flat, which made it easier to drop the HR and maintain a constant pace all throughout the ride.

I found a good rhythm rather quickly into the ride (92 rpm), and tried to maintain a good form all throughout. I know I usually don't drink enough in the first hour in (almost) all my trainings, so I made sure to take a sip or 2 every 10 minutes.

The first loop completed, I knew what to expect and where I could expect headwinds and tailwinds. That was key to help pace my efforts: I pushed when I rode with tailwinds, and paced myself in headwinds. I felt good, the legs were there, and I was confident that I wasn't over doing it. I took my second gel after the first hour, and finished my first bottle 1hr15 into the ride. The second bottle had more calories in it. I like to start my

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rides with a more watery drink, easy to take in, and easy on the stomach, to then move on to a heavier drink in the 2nd hour.



One mistake I made in the second loop was to try to follow the triathlete ahead of me (bearing in mind the 3 bike gap between us to avoid a penalty for drafting!). I Lost sight of the overall goal for a moment, forgetting that I still had 20+ miles to go and a half marathon on foot after. I did it for a good 30 seconds to a minute, and started to feel the lactic acid build up in my quads. I quickly backed off and got back into a more reasonable pace, averaging ~146 HR and ~92 rpm. Had I continued, I would have probably had a tougher time in the 3rd loop, and on the run.

The 3rd loop went really well. The legs were still there, and I constantly reminded myself to ride a conservative pace to save some energy for my run. I took in my 3rd and last gel around 1:50 into the ride, but could have used another one in the last mile of the ride. At least I would have liked to have the flexibility of having an extra one if need be. This would have avoided taking it in at T2. I find it a lot easier to refuel on the bike than on the run. Ditto for Eagleman! No flat or any mechanical problems, and I had the impression that I still had a good amount of energy left for the run, but it still needed to be verified. The sensations on the first 2-3 miles would give me a good sense of where I stood physically.

T2: 1:01

I dismounted the bike leaving the shoes clipped onto the pedals. It happened fast. I got to my rack, but had to slalom in between triathletes who finished the international distance. I racked up my bike, took off my helmet and struggled to put on my shoes. The speed laces would have been helpful. I came out of T2 feeling good and mentally ready to tackle 13.1 miles on foot.

The run: 1:27:30

With Aidan we agreed on a 1:33 overall time for the run, which came down to a ~7:11 min/mile pace. We took a conservative approach to it, based on the half marathon I ran in March. I felt confident I could maintain that pace in a good day.

Things were looking good. The temperature was perfect, around 55-57F. It was cloudy for the most part, and trees covered most of the course. Water stations were spread every 2 - 2 ½ miles. They had water, bananas, oranges, and Hammer Nutrition gels.

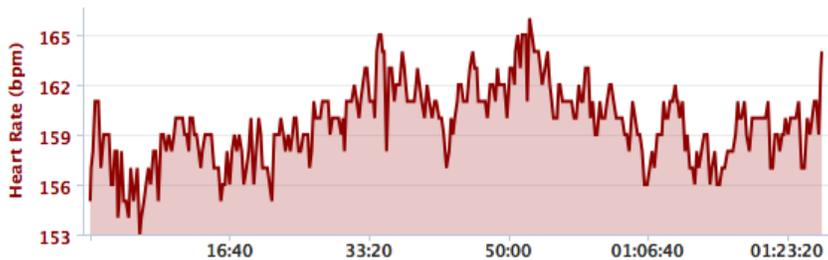


I felt very good in the first 3-4 miles. I still couldn't help and wish I were at the "mile 9" mark when I saw it next to the "mile 2" one! I had a gel really early on as I knew I wouldn't want any of it in the last 3-4 miles. My plan was to take one in in the first mile, then 20 minutes and 1 hour into the run, and save one for the last 20 minutes in case I needed it. That was until I dropped one at mile 8! I had prepared my drink with 2 scoops of Heed and 1/2 of a scoop of Carbo pro...mistake! This formula turned out to be too heavy in calories,

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making it hard to take in. Not a pleasant feeling! I decided not to drink my mix, but to take some water at the water stations instead. It helped in the first 10 miles, and I still felt surprisingly well, keeping a good pace and good form overall. The cold temperature certainly helped.

I tried to relax and avoid unnecessary tension with my arms or upper body. I averaged a 6:34min/mile pace in the first 8 miles, and realized that I could maintain it. This boosted my confidence level for the last 5 miles.



I finally looped back to that “mile 2 / mile 9” mark and this time I was 9 miles into the half marathon, with only 4 miles to go. At that time, my HR read 158. I still felt good, although I started to run low on energy and started to feel dehydrated. This was confirmed rather quickly in mile 10 where my legs tensed up. I also started to lose my form. I ran the 10th mile in 6:53, and that’s

when the runner behind me passed me. He looked fast and comfortable. I wanted to follow him for a quick second, only to realize that I would set myself up for failure if I decided to keep up with him. It turned out to be a good decision, as he ran his half marathon at my PR pace! I wanted to finish strong to come out of my first half ironman feeling that I somewhat controlled my race. It paid off. At mile 12 and with only 1.1 miles to go, I refocused on my overall form and pace. I crossed the finish line in 4:26:48, and ran the half marathon in 1:27:30, with a 160HR avg., and 6:37min/mile pace.

Great first half ironman!

I finished in 4:26:48 | Swim: 31 minutes | T1: 1:32 | Bike: 2hr25 | T2: 1:01 | Run: 1:27:30

I placed 7th overall and 1st in my age group

I couldn’t have hoped for a better performance in my first half ironman:

- 1.2-mile swim was hard, and I have a lot of work to do, but I came out of the water with good sensations and ready to tackle the bike ride. I am glad I experienced some hard times, though. Although I felt panicky for 3-4 seconds, I managed to quickly collect myself and got back into it at my own rhythm to finish strong.
- My nutrition on the bike seemed appropriate, and so was my pace. I didn’t feel like I was outpacing myself, except for a minute when I tried to keep up with the triathlete in front of me.
- Wrapping up with a half marathon was a bit intimidating. I felt good at T2 and managed to maintain a good form and good pace overall. It gave me a boost of confidence to see that I could maintain a 6:34min/mile pace in the first 8 miles.
- My fueling on the run was horrendous! My mix was too heavy. I barely drank 1/3 of what I was carrying in my belt, making it useless and carrying some unnecessary dead weight. I will try to run with Heed only in my bottles and add another gel or 2 in my pouch.
- I finished the race with a feeling that I could have pushed a little more on the bike and run courses. However, the cold weather was misleading, making the run a lot easier overall. I will need to take a step back on the performance on my run and be prepared for much warmer conditions at Eagleman.

