

"A Different Perspective" of a Dream

By Gary Bredehoff

It started Saturday morning October 16, 2004 at 4:00am, Kona Hawaii, the Ironman World Championships, first time here. I had qualified back in July at Lake Placid, NY, with a time of 10:32, 9th in my age group. I knew the conditions would not allow for any PR here in Hawaii but I wanted just to put in a good race.....little did I know that I was about to face one of the toughest days of my life.

I arrive at the race site at 5:00am, first to get body marked, drop off the special needs bags and final bike check, pump up tires, and fill bottles on the bike with sports drink. Next I hit the port-a-john one last time before relaxing in the host hotel before the start. 6:30am head out to get in line for the swim start (2.4 miles), the ocean waves crashing against the sea wall as we descend into the water. Swim cap & goggles on I begin the swim out to the start line at 6:50am, deciding to position myself about center 6-7 rows back. I had a good start at Lake Placid in a similar position in the center of the pack 3 rows back. Begin treading water waiting for the gun, 1:00 until the start, 30 seconds, anticipation growing, BANG! and we are off. Water and bodies flying everywhere here is one of the most challenging parts of the race, it's like a rugby match. Triathletes hitting you from the side and from behind, nothing out of the ordinary tough at this point. Trying to find any clean water I can to get into my stroke, someone just cut diagonally in front of me to impede my stroke momentarily. Approximately 10 minutes into the swim still very crowded. I just lift my head to site when "bang" someone cuts in front me and kicks my goggles off my face. I remain calm slowing to try to reposition them on my eyes but I am getting run over by the swimmers behind me, trying to gasp for air I take in big gulps of sea water. I am still trying to swim with one arm and position my goggles with the other, choking on the water. Finally getting them positioned with one goggle half full of water I try to recompose myself and get my stroke back. As I continue the swim it seems like forever to get to the turnaround, I reach more clean water on the back side and try to empty some of the water in my goggles. I begin to feel a little queasy, stroking for home trying to get a smooth stroke going. The transition area nears, it seems like hours, not quite 1:21:00 as I emerge from the water to the transition area (about 15 minutes slower then I hoped), I am not feeling to well at this point, nauseas and queasy. I take extra time in the transition area to drink and eat something before I head out on the bike.

The bike stage is 112 miles which should prove challenging with the 100 degree heat index expected today. Need to stay hydrated throughout the day. About 30 miles into the bike I am feeling nauseas again, I pull over on the road feeling

sick and eventually throw-up. Trying to recompose myself I try taking on fluids slowly for about 5 minutes, bikers streaming by me. I finally begin cycling again still feeling a little nausea. I continue on, feeling the headwinds building. 10-15 miles later I get a sick feeling again pulling off the course I again throw-up by the side of the road, not much left. Feeling weak I think about calling it quits, but instead slowly take on fluids and some GU to try to get to the turnaround which should be about 10-15 miles away. Climbs, headwinds, and crosswinds which nearly blow me off the road a half dozen times are taking its toll, I feel like I am bonking, I continue to take on fluids as I head for home hoping for some tailwinds, but the winds seem to have changed, more strong headwinds heading back toward Kona. The sun by this time has been beating down on me for 6 hours. I decide to survive and just slowly bike back and pull out of the race, it seems like an eternity. I approach Kona seeing the runners heading out to the energy lab (Lava Park) on the shared part of the course 8 miles from home. Emotion, combined with exhaustion is running high. As I approach the transition area, crowds screaming, I feel my dream is gone, no way I have enough energy or feel good enough to run a marathon..... It's over! As I rack my bike volunteers helping me to the change tent and grabbing my run bag, I tell them I am going just sit a while and drink and eat something if I can keep it down. My back is searing from the sunburn, seems the suntan lotion didn't do its job. Although I was out there over an hour more than I expected. Mixed emotions are running high inside me, I had never quit or not finished a race before, and I didn't travel this far to not give it all I had. About 20 minutes pass and I put on my running shoes and decide to give the run a try. As I head out on the run course the crowd is inspiring, I see Julie (my best friend's girlfriend) who runs up to me with her cell phone. My wife thousands of miles away is on the other end. Emotionally I tell her I got sick on the bike, she asks with concern if I can continue, I tell her I'm going to try. "I love you" she replies, "I love you too, I wish you were here". Emotionally I started running slowly 9 minute miles, used to running 7-7:30 miles at this point I feel physically like I would at the end of the race. This is not going to be easy. I stop at each aid station taking on fluids and trying bananas to keep my energy up, but at this point I stop at each port-a-john, seems like everything I take in is going right out. I continue the pattern for about 10 miles, pace slowing to 11:00-12:00 minute miles.

At this point I know I will not finish at this rate, so I begin to walk knowing that if I slow my heart rate down and rely on burning more fat stores for energy I may survive to the finish. I look at my watch, 16 miles to go, even at 15 minute miles I will be out here for 4 more hours!!! Quitting is not an option I am devastated with not being able to finish respectively, but respectively is all relative. To most "just finishing" is respective. As a coach myself, what would I tell my client? Adverse times and experiences make you stronger; a positive lesson can be learned out of each experience no matter how tough and disappointing.

I head out of Kona on the course, sun dropping low in the sky, people passing me by the dozens, something I am not used too. I am stopping at each aid station to take on fluids; I finally decide I can not keep solids in me so I keep taking fluids and GU gel. Talking with some participants, encouraging each other as darkness falls on the island. With no moon the course is black, sounds of footsteps hitting the pavement and light sticks floating through the darkness is all you see. As I approach the energy lab my pace has slowed to 20 minute miles. One bright spot, I don't have to experience the suns heat within the lava field. I start with 8 miles to go to drink the chicken broth available at the aid station; I need to continue to keep my sodium levels up. Chicken broth and some water keeps me going, my pace continues to slow. At this point nothing is going to keep me from finishing. I approach mile 20, then 22, and 24 walking about a 25 minute pace at this point. Didn't know I could walk so slowly. I hear the finish line announcer. I approach Alli drive about ¼ mile from the finish feeling all kinds of emotion, relief, pride, disappointment, happiness and sadness. Friends run on to the course to encourage me and congratulate me. People screaming as I approach the finish line walking, crossing the line in 15 hours 18 minutes, almost 5 hours longer then my qualifying race in Lake Placid. Why do I feel like a failure? At the same time proud that I endured the toughest test in my life? I DID NOT QUIT! I am helped to the medical tent were they give me I V fluids. I have survived race day, and I always believe a positive comes out of every bad situation. Life does not always go the way we want it to; it's what we make it! The excess intake of sea water in the swim or maybe some stomach bug was the probable cause of my sickness; it ended up lasting for two more days.

It all started 12 years ago, this dream of competing in the Ironman World Championships. My dream, my goal, came true, maybe not like I had envisioned, but the way God wanted me to learn from it.