

Triathlon World Championships – Vancouver 2008

Some of us have just got back and some are still over there exploring the Rockies or on a cruise to Alaska. The Vancouver Triathlon World Champs have been and gone.

Monday 2nd June, my mum and I leave for Canada. Stop over in Singapore and Korea before we touch down at the Vancouver airport. A hint... if that big tri belly of yours is still empty after the 100grams of food that gets served on a plane, go to the back of the plane when everybody is asleep and ask for some snacks. I managed to grab ALL of the business class food. Yipp!

We landed at lunchtime and we felt like we had just been flying for 20+ hrs, only to find ourselves back in Perth?! Weird. We grab a taxi to accommodate my 30kg of bike box and head to the hotel that accommodates dogs, cats and triathletes. Unlike Hamburg we were able to get a place with a kitchen, which, like you all know, could be called a triathletes living room due to the amount of hours a day we spend in there. What do you need a TV for? You can stare in the fridge for hours! Staying at the Lord Stanley, we had an awesome view of Stanley Park, part of the cycle course and the water.

My legs were crying for some exercise and I headed out for a quick sprint down the street taking note of the pedestrian and traffic flow. People actually stop for you when you need to cross the road over there! Wow.

Monday night, Luana Main and I cycle around the beautiful Stanley Park for the first time and met the local racoons and black squirrels with sea planes taking off and landing near by. We had timed our arrival to receive the coldest June there in 50 years. Wicked. It doesn't take long for Claire Bear (Goldsmith) or myself to start shivering at the Challenge Stadium pool, so I (and the rest of the Aussie team) was very curious to see how cold the water really was. Rumour we had heard was it was a little colder than what we're use to. Tuesday, Luana, Claire and I start walking down to where the start is to test these water conditions. Tim Chambers (team counsellor) also comes along to give his support and to get us psychologically prepared. Wetties on and Claire Bear prepares to put her toe in. It was cold, very cold, very freakin cold. I screech as the water rides up my wetsuit and hits my groin. I thought it would be similar to Hamburg, I did not expect it to be 11 freakin degrees. Goose bumps, shrinkage and blue and purple skin were the least of our worries. I prepared to put my face in. I decide to get out and just charge in with all guns firing. I was meant to swim a couple of k's that day, according to the program Grant Landers gave me for the week. My attacking of the water for 25 metres had to make do. We walked back passing Javier Gomez and team with our wetsuits and neoprene caps still on. We were due to have a team swim on the course the next morning but it was definitely to be a warm pool, doggy paddle for me. That arvo I rode the course with Tessa Garside and her father Garry, who hired a bike for the week. It was another freezing day and I was silly not to wear gloves. I stopped to fix a flat halfway through our first lap, *&%\$!!!! Big hole in my new back tyre. Now I was cold, again, very freakin cold and would have gone back if Tessa and Garry were not there. After two laps I had enough and left Tess to fend off the racoons by herself. I needed to register at the Aussie team hotel anyway (that was my excuse). Got back to the hotel and my hands

were red from the cold. Made some hot choc and had my 4th bath for the two days. In the morning I messaged Tess and met her to go for a swim at the 50m pool down the road. I discovered this girl is a bit of a power walker and I find myself needing a pumpy walking rhythm to keep up with her.

Swim was good. I made up for the lack of swimming I did that previous day. My main set was 8x50m fast, this pumped me up and I remembered why I was there in the first place. In Hamburg I went into holiday mode too soon and consumed too much German dark chocolate before the race. Woops. I promised myself I'd wait till Sat night this time.

Back to the hotel, and I started munching on the 4kg of pasta mum made on the first day. Bless mothers. Wasn't the best breakfast but I couldn't wait till the Team breakfast at 9am.

A few things I/we discovered a few days into the trip...

1. When it says feeds 4 people on the packet, it really does mean, feeds 4 people! With plenty left over.
2. 1cents is valued, which leaves you with lots of annoying coin in the pocket.
3. Annoyingly, no tax is added to any advertised price. Which means when you get the exact change ready to hand over, they up the price, you don't have enough in coins, so you have to spilt a bill, which leaves you with more coins.
4. You must have the exact change on the bus.
5. You must look left first when crossing the road. (something I never got use to)
6. Pooches are allowed to stay in hotels, which is always a good thing.
7. My racing shoes had holes in the front of them.
8. All the sport shops had sold out of tights, skins, arm warmers and neoprene caps in the first couple of days and I could not find any much needed racing flats.

We all knew we had to get use to this freezing water somehow so it was time to jump in again and attempt to swim more than 25 metres. Tessa, Luana and Claire jump in to the water straight away, leaving me standing on the dark grey beach reconsidering my options. Tess and Lu, may I add, wore sleeveless wetsuits. Were these hardcore tri chicks or what? We swim about a 1000m with a run out onto the beach. Swimming after about 200m isn't so bad. Face, hands and feet go numb, so all you need to worry about is keeping your technique. Lu was still swimming without realising she had a friendly seal swimming by her side.

Thursday brings more rain and cold weather and I realise I haven't done a transition for a long time. I convince Lu to come down with me and we change into our wetties at the hotel and ride (first time in a wetsuit) down to transition, bringing the team counsellor and now newly appointed UWA tri club photographer, Tim. The tide was amazing and it would seem like it went down by 3metres, exposing about 150metres of sand and rocks. We agreed on three full transitions and could barely get through them. The cold certainly took its toll on Lu and I and we struggled running 400m off the bike. With an outdoor heated pool right next to transition we ran straight for it.

This certainly told us, a warm up was a necessity before the start and some serious thoughts about what to wear in the race were needed. We ran back to the hotel leaving Tim to bring our bikes back. Our first priority was a hot shower only to find Liam Johnson had finally arrived and was hogging the bathroom. The guy looked shattered, arriving Thursday and racing Saturday, leaving him only a day to get over jet lag. Let me say the guy is committed to his work.

The juniors raced that morning and suffered big time with the freezing conditions, resulting in a few athletes in both the male and female races getting hypothermia. It was then said anything may be worn on the bike and run to keep warm, which was certainly welcomed by all athletes due to race over the next few days.

A quick shopping spree down town with Luana and Tim that day was a fun experience. We checked out all the 2010 winter Olympic merchandise and apparel, and found some great deals on shoes. About 4 or 5 racks of shoes, each with four or five rows were for sale. Randomly thrown on the selves, each was priced around \$700. Wow, amazingly cheap! Down from \$1200! What the hell! Anyway, I found some racing flats and we all found some gifts for the loved ones that got us there.

I went out to dinner that night wearing my new racing flats trying to 'wear them in' before the race. Over dinner Tessa tells me the swim has been shortened to 1000m due to the hypothermic conditions. I didn't know as I didn't go to the 'question and answers' session that day at the team headquarters. I was a little disappointed but could understand why the decision was made.

Friday was meant to be completely a rest day but I needed to try wearing a few different things for the race. I had the idea of wearing under my race suit my 2xu tights and a compression top I purchased the day before. The tights were great but the wet top had a big wind chill factor. So I would put my wind vest on in T1 instead. What good are the arms after the swim anyway? I intended to put on socks in T2 remembering my numb feet for 6k of the run in Hamburg. I felt the short experimental session was well worth the effort and bumped into the rest of the UWA gang on the way back. Claire Bear and Liam had purchased matching cycling gear once again as did Lu. You can guarantee Claire and Liam will be wearing the same gear on every ride they go on. All Liam needs to do is dye his hair a nice white blonde and... wallah!

RACE DAY! Saturday morning. First waves are off at 7am which included Tessa. Rough water conditions made a lot of the ladies anxious before the start. The water had been flat as a pancake all day, everyday leading up to the race. None of the Aussies seemed to care about the rough water, just the temperature of it. If anything the rough conditions would give the Aussies an advantage. Lu, Claire and Liam took up the idea of putting their TriTravel swim cap over their bike helmet in order to stop the cold air passing through, as seen by an Aussie in the sprint race the day before. It was a pretty funky idea and being a yellow cap with AUSTRALIA in green on the side, it didn't look too shabby either.

I was much more relaxed this year compared to Hamburg and just listened to my Dave Matthews band up until we were due to the start. I take my carbo-shot then hear an announcement about a 1 hour delay just before the last of the women were due to go. So back go the earphones and I tried to relax as much as possible. The swim start became a mass of silver people as emergency blankets were everywhere. I got given a heat pack which I instantly shoved down the front of my wetsuit. It was then announced... SWIM CANCELLED. With a 2mm layer of lard melting off his face, it was easy to see Stu Denton was pissed! For those who started, it was a beach start and it would seem that some of the girls had not felt the water temperature until race day as they came to a dead stop as soon as they entered. Some swam two strokes, turned around and unfortunately pulled out of the race. Big decision after coming all that way. On the way back to transition, Liam and I spot Claire, well in the lead with Michelle Wu. Claire Bear Power!!! With solid sprint sessions with Grant a few weeks before I knew Claire could out sprint Wu if needed. So it would be Duathlon World Champs for the boys and some of the remaining ladies with more than a 1 hour delay. After finding out the UWA girls were racing strong, through SMS from coach G-Lander and his internet access, we started getting ready for the 3/40/10 duathlon. I decided to wear compressions on top and bottom since we were starting dry, plus socks. No swim cap on the helmet though. Just before I made my way to the start I hear of Claire Bears unfortunate result through Liam. He was running around like a headless chicken trying to find her, probably not the best thing before the start. The poor dude was sick in the week as well and decided in the end, not to race.

Anyhoot, my race (20-24) started and the boys took off like greyhounds. I could not believe the pace they started at! Steve, who just recently started training with UWA and was up with the front of the pack and I was certainly well at the back. It was certainly an impressive effort by him to make a World Champs so soon into his triathlon career. To my relief, it seemed to only be a 1k crazy sprint, and many of the guys dropped to their 5k pace quickly. It was a 3k run to start and I kept that 3k pace to keep the front guys in my sights. Maybe this was a bad move because I would never start this hard in a race normally but I knew transition would be like peak hour on the freeway. T1 came almost instantly, and I couldn't have asked for a better transition. I passed at least 15 of the boys who lead out the on the run and I pounced on my bike like it was trying to take off without me, passing another 5 boys just at the bike mount. Bike was very tough and the 1k gradual climb halfway around Stanley Park hurt like mad, but I planned to push it hard up and off the saddle which the two Aussie boys who I passed going up followed. It paid off for the first three laps, until I got passed by a constant pack of carbon fibre and teardrop helmets on the flat. Oh well. It was a very busy course, not being very wide with a few sharp turns. The officials obviously expected to see a few crashes, as they put straw bails on each major corner. Hit T2 fast and hard running into the back of a lady who was in a wave before mine. SORRY! Had another great transition and made up two more places coming out of T2. I could see a couple of Aussies in front and I knew there were two behind me. I was by myself for the first lap of the run but I didn't mind. I passed one of Aussies as well as a Mexican and two Americans but also got passed by four other boys who all flew past me in the final lap. I blew up 1k before the finish, which made that last bit of the run really not enjoyable and I was unable to put in a sprint finish. Hearing the support from mum and others, I did hold my ground though and finally came in 14th (70th last year in Hamburg). Which I didn't believe for a long time until everybody seemed to confirm it. First Aussie came in 10th and well done to him.

I'm ecstatic with my result and have Mum, Dad, Grant and UWA tri to thank for it. Well done to all the West Aussies who made the trip over!

The week after the race was the best week of the year yet. Sunday morning, Tim, Luana, Tessa, Garry, Mum and I go to check out the Capilano Suspension Bridge on the north side of the mega structure of the Lions Gate Bridge. On Monday, Tessa, Brynt McSwain, Stu Denton and I made the trip up to Whistler and met Mark Batten, Megan Scott, Bob Scott, and Jude Scott up there. The next few days were filled with some serious hours of XC mountain biking, downhill MTB, snowboarding, skiing, rockclimbing (indoor only unfortunately), eating, drinking and dancing. Unfortunately after all that, I didn't get to paddle any Canadian white water. Next time.

Catch you all at training.

Cyrus Hands.