

## *Embrace the Improbable*

It was a mid-winter evening, dark outside with the lashing rain being lit up by the street lights outside. Question time was on the Television in the back ground but I didn't really understand, the audience were moaning about something or other and the panel responding with bobbins. Getting more frustrated with the constant yacking, which I latter realised was my other half, I went back to contemplating the meaning of life, which after deliberating for 30 seconds or so I decided 42 was as close as I was going to get.

It has been a long day, cold wet and miserable, work had been crap and I had a lingering threat from James Hooley, blow that fffing whistle one more time and it is going where the sun doesn't shine, as I coached the regular Thursday swim session; I needed a big challenge, but what. Various things came and went, climb Everest – too cold, lands-end to John Groats, - too hard, no it was Ironman time again, the older boys in the club had decided it was time to dip their toes in the world of longer distance so it was decided IRONMAN BARCELONA!!

The planning started the next day, the training plan was not the hard part it was broaching the subject with her good-self, I had the normal threats of divorce, which is regular anyway, it will cost you dear and don't expect me to be cleaning your bike after every training session I only do it once a week. The new bike request was considered but thought that was pushing it a bit too far and the experiences of Richard Mason trying to blag that ZIPP wheels only cost £200 quid, his other half is a unit!!

The winter and spring came and went, interspersed with a JSNT training camp in the beautiful surrounds of Majorca, although a week sleeping with Steve Herriman is not the best, he snores like a trooper. I was getting fitter by now but the schedule was interrupted by a bout of the screaming abdabs and another threat of divorce but that was Rich Mason, as he bought yet another set of ZIPP's for a ridiculously low price not, only try that one once Rich!!

The journey to Calella was uneventful, apart from meeting Elaine, Stuart's better half, who kept us entertained for the whole afternoon. My bike arrived in one piece, which is a surprise as we had travelled with Ryan Air; finally we got on the bus and ventured to the Hotel, 'Cheap but Cheerful'. The weather was a bit rubbish and actually colder and wetter than Burton but with a forward forecast for brighter conditions. Over the next few days the remaining athletes and spectators arrived all in good form. However, for me terror had set in - I had left my heart rate belt at home, which had been there through thick and thin, how was I going to survive. My saviour was Richard Mason who thankfully was still at home and able to pick it up for me, panic over.

The weather was a bit up and down as was the sea, a young Irish athlete had entered the waves and been promptly thrown back on the beach resulting in a broken collar bone, was this a sign of things to come - gulp. Having got everything stuffed into the transition bags off we all went to rack our bike and reekie the site. Walking around transition the tones of a German Brass band rehearsing for October Fest could be heard harmonising with the sea as it smashed onto the beach - strangely soothing, or I am getting old.

So there I was stood 11 months later looking at the bacon and strange looking sausages on the breakfast menu, Sarah Clarke had asked me the previous evening, are you all there, to which I

responded am I ever and this morning it seemed even truer. It was still dark outside but thankfully the rain had stopped, there was an eerie tension in the air or was that the smell of 'Odour of Triathlon', we have all smelt that!! The Fox suit was sighted shamefully sniffing and trying to hump the leg of young triathlete, J Brownlee. With my wet suit now done up and no time to really think the Ironman heartbeat sounded in the big Bose speakers, we are off. A rolling swim start works well and I was soon into my rhythm riding the choppy waves and watching the massed crowds on the beach slowly fall away from sight. Each of the buoys marking the course passed quickly and occasionally came in to view at each cresting of a wave and apart from swimming through some sick the swim was easy. Running to transition the thought of one down two to go gave me confidence - today is going to be a good day.

Transition are strange places, crowded and some of the sights will give you nightmares for a long time, Ian Burrows and his bear backside - not funny; I was changed and running through transition and all seemed to be going to plan. The bike route was along the coast the sea on one side the mountains and hotels on the other, with the hills, which can only be described as false flats in comparison to the Derbyshire dales and hills of Staffordshire, rolling into the distance. Bike after bike streamed past me, keeping my heart rate within target zones I knew I would see them later, no way will they maintain that pace whereby a strange sense of satisfaction came over me - I was actually racing smart. Each lap passed and got faster and faster, I saw MVH'ers - Lisa, James Ben to name but a few, all putting effort in and even smiling. Each of the feed stations were placed at the top of the false flats, with some of the less experienced riders walking or brake testing others, as they scrabbled for the dry energy bars and not so nice gels. MVH support was fantastic everyone shouting and encouraging the athletes to keep going, which is immense and gives a warm feeling, much welcomed in times of hardship and toil. Five and a half hours later I am back - two down one to go and all is well.

Transition was less crowded this time around, the grotesque sights of the morning had long since disappeared only to be replaced by a slight musty smell, oops perhaps I need the toilet! Out we go on the run, the crowds had grown and some, Mike Fishwick, Graham Clarke, Sarah getting louder, which I suspect was taking too much of a liking for the local brew. Luckily the weather had been kind, the sun had made an appearance but not to drive the temperature to ridiculous levels, the passing of the hours saw the sun slowly go down behind the horizon bring darkness and making the flashing lights of the finish area more vivid. The course has bits of real beauty, leafy lanes, beach views but at times narrow, which caused me to throw a bottle at some 'jonny foreigner' for knocking me off my feet, not his fault to be fair and I did feel bad for being a lout!! Each lap was tough and I did have a moment when I wanted to give up, I even cried as stomach cramps had got the better of me, I had not stopped but I was encouraged by Liz, the magnificent people of the club and Eleanor (Richard's wife) to get on with it, you are nearly there and you can do this. Every step was a struggle now and I had to stop and use the facilities, never again. I opened one door and was literally snapped backwards by the smell OMG what was that, the second toilet was not much better either, desperate now I open door number three only to be presented by, well I can only think Damian Hirst or one of those arty farty artist had been in there to create a new master piece for an exhibition at the Louvre, it was everywhere but a few heaves later I was back at it.

Entering the journey up the finish shoot, one which never gets boring, the bright lights, shouting crowds and banging music make for a magical experience. Liz was shouting from the over bridge as I

ran towards the tape smiling ear to ear and secretly proud of what I had just done, the voice of Ironman announced I was now an Ironman and through the finish I went. Soaking up the atmosphere I collected my medal and thanked anyone who wanted to be thanked, heading into the tent I was greeted by a number of other MVH athletes and friends and hearty congratulations were handed out, plus a beer or two. Tee-shirt now in hand I headed out of the tent and back to the Hotel. Even though I had a bit of bother with my time - that is it, a job well done, even though I say so myself.

At home now and I cannot finish without saying a few closing words. These sorts of things are impossible without the support of family and friends, I have been a real miserable sod at times and I am sure those supporting anyone training for an Ironman would concur. I am lucky to know and have some real good people around me, I need to thank them all especially Kacey my daughter, Liz my significant other, great friends and supporters who without you all I would have failed. Oh and I raised £450 for McMillian. HERES TO THE NEXT TIME???!!