

“Interdimensional Flight BH523 requesting clearance for de-particularization to time quadrant Delta, Echo, Charlie, fiver, two, zero, zero sixer (Dec 5<sup>th</sup>: 2006) Crew of fifteen with 211 passengers...over”

“ID flight BH523, you are cleared for flight; commence de-particularization, stabilize ion and molecular filters and God-Speed!”

If only time travel existed. Besides the many and obvious advantages, it would certainly serve someone like me and my atrocious memory skills no end. I try and imagine a world where I never forget people’s names, or birthdays or even which hand to wipe my...well you get the picture. It would be way cool. Like jumping on the above flight for example and going back to my maiden Ironman race and doing those couple of little extra things which would have seen me take a further one minute and thirty six seconds off my time and in so doing, rid me of a single minded and all pervading purpose that has dominated my life for the past two years since...to go Sub-9.

Going under nine hours wasn’t even on the radar that day. I entered the race with two very distinct goals. 1: Get to Kona; and to do so, go somewhere in the vicinity of 9:15 to 9:25, (but hopefully and quietly, a little better) which judging on the times of the last couple of years should have been sufficient enough to earn a slot, and 2: Run a sub 3hr marathon.

As the moment of truth arrived, I finalized my warm-up and preparation and ready to embark on one of the biggest days of my life, terrifyingly, as (I hope) we all do, traded parting hugs and kisses with my partner. Squeezing each other in a manner that can only be described as the cuddling equivalent of the Last Supper, she proceeded to bid me her final words of encouragement...”Just don’t do 9:01”

Nine hours, one minute and thirty five seconds later, I crossed the line.

Just don’t do 9:01...

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These words have reverberated through my head more times over the past two years than what would be considered acceptable limits for healthy mental development and well being. Don’t get me wrong, I was blown away with what I achieved that day. I had managed 17<sup>th</sup> overall, a 35-39 age group victory, a course record, a sub 3hr marathon and a ticket to Kona, all on debut. The fact I just missed out going under nine hours didn’t even register...until the dust settled. The reality that I was one and a half minutes from really putting the icing on the cake...of really doing something special became clear. And so from the aftermath of that special day a new mission was born. A mission that would test the limits of spousal support, understanding, patience, selflessness...patience, sacrifice...patience, forgiveness and oh! Did I mention...patience?

What an incredible woman I married. After 20 years together, you would think you’d have a pretty good handle on a person, but throughout the course of this Ironman journey, I have been privileged to bare witness as the so often unworthy recipient, the complete and utter selfless

support and sacrifice, all played out for one singular purpose...so that I may achieve my goals and dreams. It almost seems wrong when I register for IM as an individual competitor...we are such a team. Every emotion that accompanies each and every IM journey, from that first official training session to the days post race...we share together. Team Hosko...go you good thing!

So, after that tantalizingly close 9:01:35 here in my first IM two years ago and having just performed well under adverse circumstances and trying conditions in Kona; I felt the time was right once and for all, to break that elusive nine hour barrier. With tens of thousands of kilometers between 06 Busselton IM and now, the woes of an injury ridden season now seemingly behind me and a dedicated arsenal of time reduction hardware at my disposal, it was a case of 'if I couldn't take at least one minute and thirty six seconds off my time after two years, then I have wasted a ridiculous amount of time, money and energy.' I didn't believe this to be the case. My training records indicated otherwise and as such I found myself at the start line fit, raring to go and confident of a solid race.

Still, at the same time though, as with every race of this magnitude, the battle to ward of the 'Yang' of the equation was being battled. Those nagging little self doubts that for some reason keep popping up at times when they're least appreciated. I had them in check this time around though, as me and the 'Ying' had been working out and bulking up. We weren't going to be bullied, intimidated or pushed around by no 'Yang' "You're going to have to try harder than that buddy!" and so, at 6.15am on Sunday December 7<sup>th</sup> 2008, my date with destiny began.

The swim whilst still an IM PB for me was probably one-two minutes slower than I thought I was capable of going on the day. A mix-up with a wetsuit order saw me only picking up on the Friday two days out from the race, the first long sleeve wetsuit I have ever swum in. Despite it being the latest Blue Seventy Helix TST, the one 20 minute trial swim I was able to manage, was not enough to counter what I believe are the restrictive effects of a fully encompassing wetsuit.

I had seriously toyed with not wearing it. Thoughts of 'don't try anything new on race day' weighing heavily in the decision process. Several votes of encouragement in favor of it's use from a few trusted sources however, convinced me otherwise and the decision was made. Unfortunately, I feel this restriction took it's toll, with upper body fatigue setting in early. My opinion is, that it doesn't matter how well these wetsuits are made (and this one is a cracker) if it's a long sleeve then there is some degree of restriction and this will impact. I'm really looking forward to continued wear and adaptation though as it is a superior wetsuit and certainly worth more to me in time than was realized this time around. In the near perfect conditions I exited the water in 56:46 in 73rd place; an unusually high position to find myself after the swim. Phase one of three had gone basically to plan. I was pumped and looking forward to hitting the bike and this awesome course.

The bike was to start off a little shaky, with me forgetting to retrieve a squeeze bottle containing four Carbo Shotz gels from my bike bag and my polar watch that I would use to assist with my pacing (in conjunction with the foot pod) on the run and much less importantly, my splits on the bike. This threw my tried and true nutrition strategy into a bit of disarray. Quickly dispelling any negative thoughts though, I set to work devising a revised plan. Four gels was certainly not the end of the world. I still had my full compliment of Carbo Shotz energy bars and with two of my

six allocated gels still in my bento box, I would substitute those missing with bananas out on the course. I stuffed up again though when I had one of my two remaining gels too early when it should have been some solids. No drama, just add another banana to the equation. As for the watch and run pacing dilemma...I would just remove the cat eye computer from the bike before I dismount and use the inbuilt clock to provide regular updates on my splits. Too easy, now back down to business.

My goal was to finish with a minimum 37kph average. Anything above this of course would be a bonus, anything less though would put more pressure on a run I was not completely confident in after a run depleted year. The plan was to head out and ride the first lap in the comfort zone, monitor where I was at, then tweak the plan of attack for the remaining two laps. I finished the first lap with a 37.9kph average and was feeling great. To finish the lap in the speed I did feeling the way I did was a great confidence boost; there was no need to do any tweaking. I was riding faster than my target average and doing it feeling comfortable. Hold this average and I would be way ahead of where I wanted to be heading out for the run, build on it and I would buy me an even larger degree of bonus time to either hold or counter a slower third lap split. The second lap saw my overall average speed creep up to 38.1kph. I was still feeling good and confident of finishing above my original target. Failing any mechanical mishap, my sub-9 goal was well ahead of schedule. The revised nutrition plan was holding fast and an increasingly robust level of self belief and motivation was brewing deep within. With the winds having picked up over the course of the final lap, I managed to hold my ride together for the duration and still feeling strong entered T2 in 28<sup>th</sup> position with a cycle time of 4:45:21. Finishing with an average a smidge under 37.9kph.

Phase two was complete and with 15 minutes of bonus time (over and above a three hour marathon) up my sleeve, it was time to go and nail the run.

T2's otherwise speedy execution was slowed considerably when on taking my seat to don runners etc, realized there was somewhere in the vicinity of 100 if not more, prickles wedged stubbornly in the soles of my socks. As I did not have a spare pair (another lesson learnt) in the transition bag and running in no socks was not an option, I had no choice but to set to work frantically removing every last one. It was frustrating, costing me somewhere in the vicinity of close to a minute. With that taken care of I could now set to work tackling the next task on the agenda...a little thing called 'Marathon'.

As it turned out, I exited for the run exactly at midday, so working out my splits on the regular clock of my cat eye computer would be a lot less mentally taxing. A lemon V to keep me company for the first couple of k's and a caffeine Carbo Shotz to move things along a little and I was on my way. Typically the legs were still in bike mode and there was a numbness in the left foot, which if it didn't subside, I felt could become an issue. As it turned out, it would remain with me for the entirety of the race, though some toe curls on the move whilst largely ineffective did help to alleviate it somewhat. Around the five kilometre mark the cycle legs were replaced by the running legs and I systematically settled into a comfortable rhythm and speed. A six kilometre speed check revealed a faster than sub 3hr pace. This was extremely encouraging as the plan of late has been to find the comfort zone and hold it, which I have been able to do and with today's comfort zone happening to be sub 3hr pace, the fire of self belief began to burn

even brighter. First lap of three was a 56 min split. I now had 19 bonus minutes up my sleeve to divvy up over 28 k's

The second lap was much a repeat of the first, holding rhythm and pace. It was warming up but at the same time there was the wind to provide that bit of air-conditioning. A religious dedication to my nutrition and cooling strategies was keeping the race ending demons of energy deficiency and heat at bay and whilst I had no idea where I was in the field let alone my age group, it was encouraging to never be overtaken and instead continuously and strongly pass those ahead of me. I completed my second lap in 59 minutes. Another bonus minute. 20 minutes of 'losability' up my sleeve for the final stanza. Nothing but a cruel act of God would deny me my sub-9 goal now. It was time to smile a bit more and enjoy the final part to another incredible day. Busselton had turned it on again; it was time to get my ass to the finish line and enjoy that wonderful and near euphoric post race high. Bring it home Team Hosko!

I managed to hold for a 1:01 final lap, giving me a 2:56:03 marathon. Crossing the line in 8:43:12 in 12<sup>th</sup> place overall, missing out on 11<sup>th</sup> place and another pro scalp by five seconds. First non-pro, first in the 40-44 age group breaking the age group course record by over five minutes and just missing out on the overall age group record by around two and a half minutes. As the first West Aussie across the line I was also privileged to pick up the Mark Batten perpetual trophy in the process.

Unfortunately Sonja and I had made the decision to give Kona a miss this year, and so it was with much sadness that we had to decline our spot. Having gone to the roll down and witnessed the absolute excitement though of some unsuspecting person win that spot was pretty special. I believe the last person to pick up the spot in the 40-44 has tried eight times to earn their way to Kona. That definitely brings a warm fuzzy feeling to the heart. Good on you mate...you are in for the greatest day of your life.

Entering this race I had set some pretty lofty goals. They were goals I truly believed I was capable of achieving at this stage of my development in the sport, but with the true physiological effect of Kona still to be revealed, it was a venture into the unknown. It was going to have to be a case of everything going right on the day and basically having the perfect race... and the perfect race it turned out to be. My goals of 1. Breaking nine hours. 2. Winning my age group. 3. Breaking the 40-44 age group course record and 4. Running a sub 3hr marathon, were all realized. It is a relief to finally vindicate and justify the money spent, the effort put in and all the sacrifices made, from not only myself but from those who love and support me as I journey through this sport.

The intention now is to back off over X'mas and go short for the immediate term. Savor the memories of that perfect day in Busso for a while until things kick up again for the Busselton ½ IM in May. With the hope of making the team for the world Long Course champs in Perth in Oct, It will have to be a near perfect race there as well, as it will be the last qualifier for the year. After (hopefully) the worlds in October, kick it up a notch for a fourth installment of the Busselton IM in December and hopefully qualify again for Kona in 2010.

As I never get the chance to publicly thank or promote the wonderful people who help, support and sponsor me along the way, I would like to take this opportunity to thank them here. In no particular order...

Steve from 'Padbury Pharmacy'.

Frans and the awesome team at 'Bikeforce' Woodvale.

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Skins Compression Garments.

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Daz and Steph Griffiths at 'Shotz' Sports Nutrition.

To all of you, a big thankyou...and to all of YOU!, see ya out on a course somewhere.

Cheers!