



Race Report – Ironman Australia 2010 **By Courtney Ogden (4th Place)**

After the Rockingham Sprint race in December, I developed a problem with my right leg – no doubt a result of the stress of running the marathon in the Busselton Ironman two weeks earlier.

I was experiencing pain on foot strike over my right fibular just above the ankle joint. I persevered with it for a week or two before it became too uncomfortable to continue training. I had visions of competing in some early season events, but this injury was the first stumbling block.

As always, I called on the services of Kieran and Greg of BIOSYMM to help sort the problem out. After a week or two of analysis and treatment, the problem was well on the way to recovery. I had very tight peroneal muscles after the Busselton Ironman, and this was causing the problem.

Unfortunately, immediately after dealing with the problem peroneals, a mild case of plantar fasciitis I had been nursing for weeks, started to become a major issue. I am quite sure running in racing flats for the sprint race didn't help matters. This injury destroyed any visions I had of competing in any events prior to Port Macquarie.

Kieran did all he could to reduce the tone in the muscles that may have been contributing to the stress on the fascia, but I needed more help to get me through the running training in the lead up to the Port Macquarie event.

Viv Oldfield, a podiatrist, and one of the athletes I coach, fitted some mouldable orthotics into my running shoes. While not eliminating the problem altogether, the orthotics proved to be a satisfactory short term solution.

I used the same basic training template Robbie Pickard had forwarded me for the Busselton event. I made a few changes to the schedule due to the differences in the Busselton and Port Macquarie courses, and had Rob sign off on them before I commenced the training block.

I completed 6 weeks of consistent swimming and cycling training, but due to the running injuries, I was only able to get two full weeks of the running schedule completed. These days though, I don't need too much more than that to be close to optimally prepared, and I was confident of running well on race day.

I had booked flights for a Thursday arrival in Sydney. Colin Scott picked me up from the airport, and, together with wife Jo, kindly provided me accommodation for the Thursday night at their wonderful family home.

Colin and Jo are the parents of a promising young professional calibre triathlete called Gavin, whom I have recently had the pleasure of adding to my coaching stable. Gav finished the 2007 Busselton Ironman event in 7th place and has performed very well in a number of 70.3 events in the US over the last couple of years.

Gav's next Ironman event will be Japan, and he will start alongside his coach. I am really looking forward to that experience.

After enjoying the hospitality of the Scott family, I was relaxed and ready for the drive with Gav up to Port Macquarie the following morning.

I had booked a cabin in a caravan park on the cycling course not far out of town, and it proved to be a good decision. Although the cabins were pretty compact, it was quiet, leafy and relaxing.

Raija had to work up until Friday, so she caught the red eye on Friday night and I picked her up from the Port Macquarie airport on the Saturday morning.

I had completed the pre-race formalities by 10am Saturday and the rest of the day was spent eating. The day concluded with a relaxing meal with Raija, Gav and my competing athletes - Ric Renton, Rachel Harris (Commonwealth Games gold medallist and Olympian) and Brad Renton.

I think the night prior to every Ironman I make the statement – "I will be glad when it is this time tomorrow". I love the competition and the excitement of race day, but there is always the knowledge that the day is going to get tough at some point in time.

My satisfactory preparation for the event helped to keep me relatively relaxed on race morning. Barring disasters, I knew that I would compete well and finish close to where I thought I should be. There weren't any catastrophes on race day, but it is fair to say that this was my most challenging event from a luck point of view since I started racing over 20 years ago.

The swim start was a debacle.

We were all lined up at the start buoys with 5 minutes to go to the gun. As always, the professionals started creeping up the course, with the age groupers behind following suit. It isn't right, but saying that, it isn't surprising, as the swim start is so crucial, no one is prepared to give an inch.

There is a solution to this problem - a physical barrier, such as a rope could be used to denote the start line. This method is used in Canada with very good success -when the race is started the rope is lifted out of the way.

The creeping wasn't the major problem though. Immediately after the national anthem, with two minutes still left to race start, the announcer revved everyone

up by shouting into the microphone words similar to “are you ready?” and then some idiot blew a compressed air horn. You know what happened next.

A few of the professionals on the inside of the course took the opportunity to start the race. I cautiously started myself, but pulled up after the announcer started shouting for the water safety crew to stop those swimmers that had gone early. Of course, that was futile. On seeing the professionals start swimming, the great majority of the age groupers behind started swimming also.

Like an idiot, I waited for the race to be stopped, instead of gunning it like the others. I only started swimming when it was pointed out by Richard Munro, a fellow pro in the same predicament, that there were 1500 age group athletes about to swim over the top of us.

I was livid, as I knew, under the circumstances, that it was going to be virtually impossible to make the lead swim pack, and, as a result, the lead pack on the bike. The chances of winning the race went up in smoke in those 15-20 seconds of hesitation - I was ready to strangle the fool that blew that horn.

It was stated in the media after the race that the start line debacle didn't affect the result, but I can assure you it did. It affected the whole dynamic of the race.

I did the best I could in the first portion of the swim to bridge the gap to the leading group, but it was almost impossible due to the congestion on the course. There were age group athletes everywhere and I had to swim wide to the left to find a path around.

I felt I was swimming very well, but the damage was done. I found clear water and spied what I thought may have been the back of the lead group some 30 metres ahead as I approached the turn at the completion of the first swim lap. Unfortunately, by the time I had rounded the buoys, all but one of the swimmers had moved to what seemed an unreachable distance ahead.

I caught the lone swimmer in sight on the journey to the far end of the course, and he immediately jumped in my draft and started aggressively tapping my feet. That was pretty annoying, but more annoying was the fact that my calf was starting to cramp – unheard of for me in the last 5 years. I was kicking more than normal, so that may have been a contributing factor.

I stopped and stretched the calf for 5 seconds and, much to my relief, the muscle released and I started swimming again with minimal time loss. By the time I had reached the far turn around point, I had caught and passed the swimmer I had to let go due to the cramp.

I started to encounter lapped swimmers 300 – 400 metres prior to the final turn into the swim exit. My navigation went haywire at this point, as, due to the lack of light, I couldn't discriminate between lapped swimmers and what I thought could have been professionals in front of me. I followed some lapped swimmers to the inside of the course where I ran my hand along a barnacle encrusted channel marker, slicing the skin open in a few places on the outside of my palm. It didn't hurt too much at the time, and never really presented any problems for the rest of the day.

I looked left and could see quite a large group of athletes passing me on that side. I thought I had only had one passenger for the majority of the last lap, but it would seem I had been towing a larger group. I reintegrated into the group and

exited the swim towards the back. There were quite a few athletes in this group, a number of whom would ride the majority of the cycle leg on my wheel.

My transition went smoothly, and I was onto my bike and cycling on the course in good time. Prior to getting on the bike I had a whinge to Raija about the swim start – it made me feel a lot better! At this juncture I noticed blood on my water bottle and realised that my hand was bleeding. I didn't think it was going to be a problem however, and, apart from stinging a bit when it was exposed to the salt in my sweat, it wasn't.

The first 5-6km of the course is undulating, and by the 4th kilometre of this stretch I had caught the second group on the road. This group contained, among others, Berkel, White, Rix, Holborow, Francis and Dmitrieff.

I went straight to the front of the group and towed it for 80% of the first 110km. There were a couple of cameos from Berkel, White and Rix, especially when we got back into town, but I was happy to be on the front most of the time because I felt good and I felt the group was going faster as a whole with me towing it.

After my laziness in Busselton, I had no right to complain about the situation, and I was determined to show the boys that I could, in fact, cycle quite well if required.

I was comforted by the thought that many of those in the group were still getting a solid workout and would need to be very well prepared if they were going to run as fast as me when we got off the bike.

I did suggest to Berkel at the 90km mark that it would be in his best interests to come to the front and help me out a bit on the return to town for the second time, and, to his credit, he made some effort to do so.

It is very hard to comment on the dynamic of the front group, which contained Ambrose, Vernay, Marceau, Neyedli, Chapman and Cominotto, as I only glimpsed it as we passed going the other direction on each lap. I suspect, however, that there were three to four individuals prepared to work on the front, and, as a result, the deficit to my group was growing all the time. After the first lap, I believe the gap to the leading group was close to 5 minutes.

The drafting in this race really was an issue, and continues to be an issue in just about every long course event with an easy to moderately difficult cycle course. Many well trained age groupers could have sat on the back of either of the front groups, especially as there was no way the 7 metre drafting distance was adhered to in either group. I wouldn't say Chapman would qualify as an age grouper, but the group I was towing had an age grouper as a passenger.

The lack of policing of the rules is certainly contributing to the problem, officials are reticent to make any drafting calls, and there are other factors, like course design, contributing as well.

The problem really needs to be addressed, especially in the pro ranks, where money and reputations are on the line.

I had already determined after the first lap of the cycle, that I was never going to challenge for the win, but I felt good and remained positive. I guess the next goal was the Hawaii slot, and I thought that was a distinct possibility.

My attitude changed somewhat when my right aerobar extension rattled loose at the 110km mark – in part, due to the terrible condition of the roads in many areas

of the course. It fell out of its fixing point on a number of occasions in the next 10km and it was doing my head in. In this time, I was yo-yo'ing between 10 and 20 seconds off the back of the second group.

As I rounded the turnaround point adjacent to transition area to begin the third lap, I thought I heard the commentators say the deficit to the lead group was around 6 minutes, so we were close to holding our own on the second lap.

While I knew I had the gas to catch my group whenever I wanted, the situation with the aerobar extension was proving to be a significant mental hurdle and the thought of pulling the pin even crossed my mind. That was until I saw Raija on the side of the road for the first time during the cycle leg while climbing the hill out of town for the last time. I could "feel" her willing me on as I went past, and any thought of pulling out evaporated right there and then.

I stopped at the Shimano tent ten kilometres into the third lap and had the aerobar extension clamp tightened. While the lads didn't move with quite as much urgency as I would have liked, they did a very good job of rectifying the situation and I got back on the bike having lost somewhere in the vicinity of 90 seconds – 2 minutes

Mentally, I felt much better with the problem fixed, and, in order to limit the deficit to the groups in front as much as possible prior to the run, I time trialled the last 50km of the cycle leg with whatever energy I had left.

As I approached the end of the cycle leg prior to entering the transition area, I saw Raija on the sideline and it was obvious she was enthused by my appearance, after thinking I may have not made it due to the problems I was having with my handlebars. This gave me a good mental boost prior to starting the run.

I had a good transition and moved onto the run course with purpose and determination. I didn't feel great, but I had just belted myself for close to 5 hours on the bike, so it wasn't any surprise.

The lead group containing Vernay, Neyedli, Chapman, Marceau, Ambrose and Cominotto started the run close to 9 minutes before me, so, unless there was an "act of god" incident eliminating the leading group of runners from the equation, I was never going to be able to win the race.

I initially focused on catching Berkel, White, Rix, Francis, and Holborow, the athletes remaining in my cycling group, who started the run closer to 1 minute in front of me.

I started the run in 12th and was very interested to learn exactly who the 11 athletes in front of me were. I was aware of the usual suspects, but there were a few wildcards in the mix.

The plan was to hit a pace and try to maintain it for the duration of the marathon. The pace I thought I could handle was a bit slower than I would have liked, but I had no choice in the matter. I just had to hope that those in front of me were running slower.

The first athlete I overtook was Rix at about the 1 kilometre point of the run. He was clearly suffering from the rigours of the cycle leg. I then took the opportunity to look at the competition as they ran by in the opposite direction.

Vernay and Marceau were running virtually side by side and both looked strong and controlled. Next came Neyedli, and he looked good also, followed closely by a comfortable looking Chapman and Cominotto, and then a not so comfortable looking Ambrose.

A bit closer to the turnaround I spotted Berkel and White, both looking good, then about 30 seconds later, Holborrow. Francis was in sight prior to the turnaround and I eased by him just after turning at settlement point.

I was in the top ten after 4 kilometres of running and was satisfied with my initial efforts. Not much else changed, however, for the remainder of the first two 14 kilometre laps. I did notice early in the race that Marceau had withdrawn and I wasn't complaining about that.

After making ground early on Holborrow, he seemed to find his feet and I failed to make much of an impression on him for the remainder of the first two laps.

The only athlete I seemed to be making significant ground on in the first two laps was Ambrose. He was struggling and I closed to within 5 metres of him towards the end of the second lap. Surprisingly, he seemed to find something extra running back to transition to start the last lap and pulled away again. I wasn't overly concerned as I was almost certain I was going to see him again prior to the finish.

I knew I was running well as I was keeping pace with Vernay for the first two laps, so I just had to be patient. I only had to wait for the beginning of the second lap for positive things to start happening. They say the marathon race begins at 30km, and it could not have been a truer statement in this case.

In the space of 5 kilometres, I passed first, a walking Holborrow, a walking Cominotto, a struggling Berkel and a tiring Ambrose to move from 9th place to 5th. As I grunted my way past transition for the last time with 7 kilometres to run, I knew that I had no chance of catching Vernay, Neyedli or Chapman, but the split to Matty White was around 90 seconds and had been decreasing rapidly over the previous 7 kilometres. I still felt ok and made a final push to drag Matty in.

At the final turn around point at the top of the hill with 3.5 kilometres to run, I had closed to within 45 seconds. At this point one of Matt's supporters suggested that he was too far in front and I should give up the chase. That, of course, made me more determined to catch him before the finish and really gave me a psychological boost.

I could see that I was closing in on Matt rapidly in the final kilometres and caught and passed him just prior to the bridge, or with about 800m to run. The biggest obstacle in the chase wasn't my legs, but the congestion on the run course – it was extremely frustrating at times trying to navigate through the mass of bodies on the narrow path.

I was really hoping that Matt was a spent force, but I was fully prepared for a sprint finish if required. Matt mentioned to me on the podium at the presentation evening that he was toasted and could do nothing about it. That was exactly how I felt when Jimmy Johnson ran by me in Busselton with 6 km to the finish. It was great to be on the positive side of the equation this time around.

It was only a 4th place finish, and not quite what I was hoping for, but I was extremely satisfied with my performance. My preparation for the event was good

and I was strong in all three disciplines. I take pleasure in the fact that the time on the clock at the finish is a true representation of my ability on the day, and not how well I can sit in on the bike. I really earned my Hawaii qualification and the airfares we booked previously will now not go to waste – ha ha.

I was paid 3rd place prize money as Chapman was ineligible to collect money due to his age group status, but I was still disappointed to finish off the podium again.

My athletes all raced the event with distinction, and I am proud of their efforts.

Rachel Harris had the fastest swim on the day and crossed the line in 12.39.19 in her first Ironman event. She said she loved it and was hoping that she could race again the following weekend.

Ric Renton, Rachel's partner, finished his first Ironman event in 12.01.38. He was hoping to go under 12 hours, and on any other day he would have.

Brad Renton, Ric's brother and co-owner of BIKEFORCE SUCCESS, posted a 10.33.46 and was very happy with his swim on the day. He didn't feel his usual self on the bike, which was very disappointing, as being his coach, I feel partly responsible. The run was always going to be a challenge for Brad in the heat, but he toughed it out as he always does to get to the finish in respectable fashion.

Prior to the race Brad helped me out with a few items from the bike shop, and I have to thank him for that. Brad is an absolute legend and motivates me everyday to train hard because I know he does exactly the same.

BIKEFORCE SUCCESS is undeniably the best bike shop in Australia.

Greg, David, Kim, Michael and PHARMACY 777 continue to be a wonderful asset and I thank them for their loyal support. Nothing is ever a problem.

Kieran, Greg and the team at BIOSYMM strive religiously to keep me moving. I wouldn't be in any shape to race without their expertise and support.

I should make mention of SWISH DESIGN also. Kelly and the team at SWISH have looked after my website for years now and I appreciate their support.

Next on the agenda for me is the Busselton Half Ironman in May, followed by Ironman Japan - one of my favourite events - on June 13th. I have had three 2nd place finishes in Japan in three attempts. The course is tough and suits my racing style.

I will race Hawaii for the second time this year in October. The plan this time around is to concentrate fully on Hawaii preparation and, in the process forego racing another Ironman event after Japan. This will give me a chance to prepare as well as I possibly can for a tilt at a top 10 finish.

I have already spoken to Robbie P about it and we will work on a comprehensive program together in the lead up to the event.

Hawaii is a unique event for the professionals and represents not only formidable physical challenges, but financial challenges also.

In contrast to other Ironman events, there is an entry fee to be paid and accommodation costs to cover. I must be on the island for at least three weeks prior to the event to acclimatise to the environment and recover from jetlag, so the accommodation costs are quite significant.

The usual cost of airfares must be taken into consideration also, so just to get to the start line involves an investment of thousands of dollars, with limited opportunity for reimbursement from race performance and prize money alone – 10th placing, the last prize money position - pays US\$6000 in a very competitive world class field.

For any other event I am prepared to back myself in and hope I come out the other side in front, but Hawaii is a different situation completely.

I am hoping for some corporate support on this occasion from the WA community to help subsidise the costs of racing. While, realistically, benefits from the support would be limited, I am sure there is some pleasure to be derived from helping the only WA male professional triathlete to have competed in the Hawaii Ironman World Championship over the past 10 - 15 years, to achieve his goals.

If anyone has any suggestions or contacts that may be of assistance in this regard, I would be most appreciative to hear about them.

I can be contacted at courtney@courtneyogden.com.

Take care all.