

## **Wolf's 2009 Ironman Canada Race Report**

Personal Best: 8:50:27, 5<sup>th</sup> – Swim: 48:28, Bike: 4:55:23, Run: 3:01:00

Ironman Canada in 2009 was a very amazing but difficult experience for many of the 2600+ triathletes who competed. It was most certainly one of the more difficult years with a strong north wind providing a strong head-wind on the toughest and longest parts of the course and running into a head-wind for the last half of the marathon. It was HOT all week and race day was not much better, a true Okanogan desert experience.

Certainly this was my best performance at the Ironman distance. Not just in terms of my overall time and place but also in what I had to overcome both during the race and the preceding months. I truly believe that Ironman is about facing those challenges by searching for the physical and character strength to overcome them and succeed. Getting to the start line is success in itself and the actual race is just the reward for your efforts. The result of the race is absolutely secondary to what one achieves on their journey to the start line.

In my own personal journey I had a great deal of support from family and friends and I'm fortunate to have such great people in my life. Of course our sponsors played big roles; Blue Seventy and GURU have been amazing right from the first day. David Bialkowski and his family at Ontario Trysport have been both tremendous sponsors and like a second family. Perhaps the biggest impact of these sponsors is their 'family like' relationship that they build with their athletes.

Nigel, Fiona, and Sylvie (and Deb in her own special way) at NRG have been relatively new extensions of family who have been integral in helping me face my own set of life's challenges. The athletes who I coach have also been amazing sources of inspiration and encouragement; their flexibility and understanding is invaluable.

Nothing I've achieved would be possible without my parents; I love them and I owe them thanks (and lots of money too... sweet National Bank of Mom & Dad). My very best friend, Andreas, has been a moral barometer and someone I look up to for strength of character. A man I met as a young boy when we were 13, living in Germany, was now able to join us this week in Penticton after an epic flight from Munich. To he I owe more than what words can do justice.

Lastly I must thank my wife, Nicole. We have had our own challenges together, as well as our own personal trials, and despite those she has been an important part of this journey.

Some "play by play" of the race might be interesting; I'll try to keep it so by offering an 'executive summary' or short version and then more detailed rendition.

### **Executive Summary**

I beat Nigel.

### **Detailed Rendition**

**The Swim** (Blue Seventy Helix, and Kiwami Tri Suit):

Before the race there were a few pros invited to do a media presentation on Friday. They each had "lots to say" about how fast they were going to go and what their splits were going to be. I was in line registering (they do this media thing right before the pro meeting on Friday so I usually register right

before the meeting too... hence why I heard what they were saying... contrary to Nigel's thinking I wasn't there to get autographs!).

I did however hear how 'one guy' was going to swim 44min, three others were just going to sit on his feet, they were all going to push 275+ watts on the bike, and then run sub 3 hours. I immediately fired Nigel an email from my Blackberry: "Coach.... I'm swimming 43'high on Sunday." I knew I didn't have 275 watts in me (yet) and I've never run faster than 3:10 off the bike, so I was looking for something to throw back at the 'big kids'.

On race morning the water looked perfect for a fast swim. Right off the start a group went off the front and I found myself somewhere in the second pack. I took my time and worked closer to the front and by the way home (the swim is almost straight out and then back) I was on the back of the first pack. A result of taking the first half a bit more steady I had the ability to push to the front of the lead pack leaving only Mark van Akkeran 2min in front (who we couldn't even see). I actually thought I was leading the whole race. Only Luke Bell was on my hip, until we got just about 100m to the beach... then he surged and left the water second with myself and two others right on his feet. It was a solid 48 min swim (to the mat), faster than I have swam before but not quite the 46min swim that Mark put in.

#### **The Bike: (GURU Crono)**

Since my beginning in this sport the bike has been my weakest link. Second to my lack of cycling ability was my race execution which has been my Achilles heel for the past four years. Traditionally I have ridden like a Rock Star (for two year at IMC I didn't even use my small chain ring, this was before I had a coach) to a point of near detonation (typically an amazing 120km followed by a pedestrian paced 60km finish – see the Ironman Canada TSN coverage from 2007 for case in point) and then suffered the whole way back on the bike and then for the entire run. I have found it difficult to post a fast swim and then let the über bikers go past me and in nearly every Ironman I've attempted I have tried to "race" my competitors right from mile-one of the bike.

Since Nigel has been coaching me at NRG Performance Training he has been teaching me to not only better develop my bike fitness but also my bike and race execution and the use of a power meter has played a vital role in that. This year I was able to let the bikers go while sticking to my own race pace with a higher average power than ever before (although when I finally email Nigel my power file it will show some evidence of declining power output, but I'm getting much better... my power file from Ironman Arizona in 2008 has a negative slope from the first hour to the last and this race was much better).

With my good swim I got on the bike in 3<sup>rd</sup> but got off in 12<sup>th</sup>, a bathroom stop in T2 put me onto the run in 15<sup>th</sup> (I haven't figured out the whole "pee on the bike" thing). Having been right at the front of the race, now running in 15<sup>th</sup> provided two very different challenges; the physical challenge of running faster than those guys in front, and the mental challenge of believing it was possible.

#### **The Run: (adidas shoes and glasses)**

For the first time I used a pace meter (a Suunto T6c with foot pod) to make sure I didn't run my first 10km in some ridiculous 36min pace (I'll reference past years as examples), just to run the rest at a pace that make tectonic plates look fast. I found this really helped control my effort and by the time I was at the 10k mark I had found my pace to be right where I wanted. I got to the half way point in 1:26 and was feeling perfect to come home at the same pace.

The difficult part here (aside from that pace) was being in 15<sup>th</sup> off the bike and the strong north head wind that we had to run into on the way home. The head wind and the heat certainly made it difficult but my 1:34 return trip can't be blamed entirely on the wind. I was certainly feeling the love on the way home and had more than a couple of "what am I doing here" moments".

My smarter bike ride and good pacing early on found me taking out positions very quickly. By the 10k mark I had run into 11<sup>th</sup>, then by 15k I was in 9<sup>th</sup>, and by the turn around I was in 8<sup>th</sup> (the first pay cheque spot). Once I was in 8<sup>th</sup> I felt great and for the first time I found myself moving into the money in a race rather than falling out of it. However, as cool as that was I had Jasper Blake behind me and I knew he was running fast so I was anxious to get what I call a "cushion spot", that would be 7<sup>th</sup> place in this case so if a Jasper Black type gets me I would trickle back into what is still a money spot.

Jasper got me before I got a cushion spot so I was back into 9<sup>th</sup>. I didn't panic and I was still feeling pretty good so I tried to get on Jaspers feet and match his pace until I got close enough to the poor guy in 7<sup>th</sup> who dropped to 9<sup>th</sup> and Jasper and I went by. Jasper left me behind and soon thereafter I found myself really hurting and wondering if I could hold onto 8<sup>th</sup> until the finish line. There were still 10 miles left to run and I was in a world of hurt.

With some determination (and some fear that Nigel might come back from behind) I was able to keep hanging in there (and some coke at every mile was helping) and soon enough I found 7<sup>th</sup> place and heading back into Penticton, with 10k to go I could see 6<sup>th</sup> place down the road. I pushed as hard as I could. I had trained for a 2:48 to 2:50 marathon but wind, heat, and a 180km bike warm up makes things a touch more difficult. With just four miles I caught 6<sup>th</sup> place and I was just amazed with myself, I couldn't believe what was happening. Then with two miles to go I could see 5<sup>th</sup> place down the road, an athlete from Germany on Faris al Sultan's pro triathlon team, my split was 90s back. I 'pulled out the ruler' and found some kind of inner strength to go from my suffering 4:25's/km back to my nice 3:55's and with just over one mile to go I found myself in 5<sup>th</sup>.

I just got to the out & back on lakeshore in front of all the crowds as I passed 5<sup>th</sup> place and I ran like it was for my life. My friends and supporters were yelling and I had tears of excitement, I was so happy. I made it to the final turn around and then looked down the road to where you could see the finish line. It looked and felt like it was a hundred miles away. Everything hurt and I felt like at any time I was just going to pass out and collapse. I had just seen Courtney Ogden and Jasper Blake run by... third and fourth had only a minute or so been where I was now and I was beside myself knowing I was up there with the 'big kids'. As I ran into the finish chute I gave high-fives to as many people as I could, I absolutely loved the moment.

### **Post Race**

5<sup>th</sup> place in 8:50 on a hard day with a smart race execution... I was really happy. However, straight across the line I collapsed and was put on a chair... then in just a few seconds the left side of my face and then body went numb and tingly. Out came the wheelchair and before I knew it I was in the medical tent trying my best to answer questions that were insanely difficult at the time (like how to spell my name, do you know where you are, etc.).

I got my first IV, which was AMAZING, in just 20min you feel like you're born again. The first line they put in didn't get a vein so I got myself a nice big hematoma on my arm or fluid under the skin. The second attempt found the right spot. I'm not a big fan of needles or seeing my own blood so I was glad they only had to do that twice.

For the rest of evening Nigel, Sylvie, Fiona and I hung out at the finish line cheering for all the people we knew. Our crew of NRG athletes and other friends all had fantastic races. There were just a few who didn't achieve their expectations but I did my best to make sure they understood how proud we were that they just made it to the start line.

On Monday morning my dad went and signed up for IM Canada 2010, so next August there will be Wolfgang Sr. and Wolfgang Jr. tearing it up out there. Way to go dad!

Thanks again to everyone for their support,

Wolf