

Ironman Lanzarote Race Report. (A super tough race).



INTRODUCTION

Lanzarote lived up to its reputation as one of the hardest ironman races in the world. The main thing about the Ironman race is making it to the startline in one piece. I was lucky in my training with Richard my coach for this one and actually felt ready. Although a little niggle in my head told me I should have trained more up the mountains. With two minor falls (walking) leading up to the start I didn't let it phase me I was doing this.

With a few comments from team mates after my rough performance in Challenge Galway last year and my coach Richard saying ok Ironman Lanzarote but don't expect any record breaking times and my own brain added to the mix on several occasions I thought gosh am I able for this. I had travelled to Lanzarote in March to cycle the route and see what lay ahead. Mick McLoughlin an Irish Cycling fanatic living in Lanzarote brought me around the tough cycle. I finally realised why it's called one of the toughest Ironman races there was relentless sun, wind and mountains. With a change in my nutrition plan and working hard on my mental tool box I was 110% ready. In a way I wanted the most gruelling race simply to prove to myself that I was tough enough to go through it. I firmly believe now never ever, underestimate the power of your mind, dream it, plan it, work hard and achieve it.

RACE PREPARATION

I arrived on Tuesday before the race kicked off on Saturday. I was well rested and acclimatised and surprisingly enough calm. I reminded myself how grateful I was to be on that startline. A week before I had met a true gentleman Kevin from Pulse Triathlon Club who had crashed out up the Sallygap and didn't make it to the startline. In true hardcore sportsmanship style he still made it to Lanzarote with his wife to cheer everyone on. To my wonderful dad he supported me throughout in his own little way and without fail was always there for me. A Huge thanks to my amazing friends, Athy Triathlon club and Trilogy Triathlon club which I'm both a member of. A heartfelt thank you to what seemed like the whole of Athy who kept believing in me and backing me as the adventure rolled out. I continued to try and remain positive and focus on the training I had put in and what I

could control. I met many amazing athletes along the way from Ireland, UK, Germany, Switzerland, USA and Italy to name but a few. Each with their own journey that brought them to the startline on race day. After Base2Race had carefully placed my bike into a bike bag it was time to head to Rennes bike shop in Lanzarote to see if Hunter was back in one piece after his travels. Hunter was ready to go so no more worries for now about my bike.

Wednesday I registered at Club La Santa and got my race pack with loads of goodies and the essential numbers, bags, timing chip and swim hat for race day.

On Thursday I realised the wind in Lanzarote does what it does and you just got to deal with it. I walked down the street nearly blown over, the choppy white seas looked horrendous and the thoughts of me on a bike on that particular day were crazy. I was reassured by Saturday calmer winds were due so I returned to focusing on what I could control.

On Friday after a final spin to ensure everything was in working order I racked Hunter up ready for race day. Strangely enough I felt comfortable and relaxed. I even happened to get a photo of a Pro athlete checking in and racking her bike. Lucy Charles from the UK at the age of 24 happened to win the race in the end. I racked my bike and run bags with more than enough essentials. I always have a what if scenario so I suppose better to have it if needed rather than want it.

RACE DAY

1) Before the Start

My alarm sounded at 3.45am. My essential wakeup call so I could have my prerace breakfast 3hr before kickoff. There was an eerie silence at breakfast as all the athletes ate their tried and tested breakfast and went through last minute prerace rituals. Those tried and tested mantras began in my head as I kept my nerves at bay and I reminded myself to focus only on the next 15min when the race begins. I reminded myself of my target heart rate on the bike and run and my nutrition plan.

I headed to the transition area for 5am for those last minute bike checks- tyres checked, bottles filled and nutrition checks. Finally I dropped off my special needs bag (dropped at 104km on the bike by the organisers if you need it with your own food and supplies) and street wear bag drop off. I queued at the portaloos as I pulled my wetsuit up to my waist this was the final tick on my checklist and the most important prerace tick. Every athlete hopes it works like clock work on race day. When I was done, with my previous history I took some prophylactic immodium and I was ready to roll. It was time to put the game face on.

2) Swim- 3.8km

With my wetsuit on I made my way to the pen I had a good look around. Nervous spandex clad athletes were all around. I walked to the front for a look out at the first buoy still feeling surprisingly calm. Eventually I made my way back to where I felt comfortable. The Pro athletes were out front, then the All World Athletes were up next then the Age group athletes who slotted themselves into a time that they felt was reasonable for their swim. So there was 60min, 70min, 80min, 90min etc. The cut off time for the swim was 2hrs 20mins. I stood under the 70min flag. As everyone wished each other the best of luck I finally heard the gun go and that was it I was off. I didn't quite know what to expect but I quickly got the message. Run for dear life, dive in and swim. It was evident this was going to be a swim like no other. It was a pure brawl as everyone sprinted for the first buoy. Arms

and legs were everywhere. With lots of nudges and shoulders I tried not to let it phase me too much. I could see a guy ahead of me panic as he changed to breaststroke I thought no way. A guy behind me was getting impatient and began to swim over me I'm sorry but that ain't happening. There's no Mr/Mrs Nice Guy in this game its dog eat dog. With nowhere else to go I scrambled across the guy ahead of me and continued on the panic was over. I tried to draft off a faster swimmers feet but with legs and arms everywhere for the first 800m I found it hard to get a rhythm. Before I knew it the first lap was over out I ran and returned to the water. The second lap was a little less chaotic as I tried to draft off a faster swimmer once again. On my way around I could see the sholes of fish and big blue fish below which was a cool, calming distraction. I finally exited the water in a time of 1hr 16min. Running up the beach I grabbed my bike bag. I found an empty seat in the changing tent and was covered by the assistants in suncream. I then gathered my things handed over the bag and ran to get my bike. It was time for the 2nd stage the 180km bike.



3) Bike- 180km

First part of the bike was like the calm before the storm. A flat ride through Puerto del Carmen and the crowd. The roads were pretty good and we were treated to some of the most spectacular coastal scenery. I settled into a rhythm and as my alarm went off every 10minutes I took fluids and carbs on board as needed. I knew this wasn't going to be easy but I was focused and ready to stick with it. I had secretly thought this will take me 7hrs- 7hrs 30. Boy was I wrong. I kept to the plan and knew those mountains which i'm not so amazing on would try to break me at every turn. Mentally I divided the race up into sections divided by the aid stations. 10 aid station ok and roughly on most 20km apart. I can do that. With a new water bottle at most aid stations I was going well. I wanted to power on at the start but I held back knowing from 80-118km was the hardest stretch of all. In my mind after 118km I had mentally decided it was mainly downhill and I would make up any lost time there. Boy was I wrong. The winds just weren't going our way. A smile came through several times as I thought to myself you are doing it girl just keep going. I stopped at the special needs stop as I swallowed 2 sandwiches and was quickly on my way. I was amused at the amount of people sitting to have a picnic. There were slow hard climbs along the way some athletes were broken and got off and walked up the climbs. There were some terrifying, fun, technical downhills with crosswinds trying to break your focus. I continued to repeat my mantras to keep my mind on track and in the zone. After a long gruelling 9hrs I came to the end of my bike a little despondent it had taken so long note to self need more mountain training the next time I do this. Will there be a next time?? As we neared the crowds and returning to transition I mentally went through my transition checklist and psyched myself up for the run. Leaving behind whats done it was time to move on to the marathon. As I dismounted the bike a lovely volunteer took it from me as I ran along to get my run bag. Then quickly to the changing tent and out onto the run and the last stage of the Ironman. I was doing it I had it in the bag didn't I? Just the marathon shor I could handle that couldn't I?



4) Run- 42km

The run was 2 laps 30km +12km. Mentally I had broken it down to 2 laps of 15km+ 2laps of 6kms. Easy Right!! After the bike which I found tough it didn't take long for the crowd to spur me on to these 4 short runs in my head. There were aid stations at every 2km which mentally was a welcomed distraction and time for some well deserved water, sponges, apples, oranges and towards the end coke. There were lots of other things there but that's what I could stomach. To hear the words of encouragement along the way spurred me on to keep one foot moving in front of the other. The Irish truly are one of the best nations for supporting and all the others too. My knee was hurting from falls I had but I zoned out and kept going. The most uplifting of all was the cheers of Athy supporters out on holidays. Joe who ran with me and Shauna and the kids thank you. I will remember this day. To Nicola and her family thank you for the shout outs and the cheers and the video to capture it all. Jennifer also thank you for the many cheers and updates. I was blown away by the cheers and well wishes back home that spurred me on to the finishine. The final 6km was tough it felt like it went on forever but I knew I was getting closer and closer as the cheers of the MC could be heard in the distance.

As I carried myself down that finishing chute I smiled from ear to ear. The visualisation video of the finish and my dance had actually come to light. I shadow boxed and cheered, I shadow boxed and cheered, I shadow boxed and cheered. Giving them time to place that ribbon in position. I looked up to the sky kissing it twice to thank my 2 angels who had watched over me throughout the race. Finally as the MC announced- " DEIRDRE WALSH YOU ARE AN IRONMAN" I lifted that ribbon and let out the loudest cheer you could imagine. I will never ever forget that moment. My final time was 16hrs 18mins i'm chuffed to say yep I did it Ironman Lanzarote the toughest Ironman on the circuit.

SEE BELOW.....



IN SUMMARY

When you have fears, doubts, nonbelievers never ever give up. The mind is powerful beyond belief. If you put in the training you can do it too. If you don't try you will never know so get up, go out and conquer whatever goal or fear you have. I went into the race with one aim keep going and cross that finishline so I guess I am tougher than I could ever have imagined and when it got tough I just kept going. Overall I'm ecstatic and still on cloud 9. My minor war wounds will heal but my memories will last a lifetime. I will continue to be humbled at the amount of support I had on my journey. Thank you all for sharing that journey with me. I will be forever grateful. There's certainly something truly magical about Ironman Lanzarote. Just do it!!

Wishing you much success and an enjoyable summer.

See you at Ironman Barcelona in October.

