

Psychology tells us that we are happier living in the moment rather than always focusing on the future. Many people would say that a race that takes 9 hours and 28 minutes to complete is not a 'moment', but if you compare it to the two year journey to get there it is just the blink of an eye. Thankfully I really enjoyed those 568 minutes of the race in Hawai'i. More importantly I enjoyed the 2 years of training and racing that it took to get me to the start line of the 2019 Ironman World Championships in Kona. It was a challenge fitting the training in with work, diabetes and family and I will be eternally grateful for their support.

People often say it is 'the journey that matters, not the destination'. The journey started when I decided to take up triathlon at the end of 2017 and only now did I know that the destination was the 2019 Ironman World Championships in Kona, Hawai'i.

It has been a great journey. I have certainly become fitter, my diabetes has improved and I have achieved things that I did not think were possible before I started. The two years of training and competing had been fun and included highlights of a 50mile ultra run in Rotherham, completing the London Marathon in 2 hours 33 minutes and winning my three triathlons in 2019 (the 285 mile 'Brutal' triathlon, the Midnightman and the Yorkshireman) but as great as this journey had been, it was now ALL about the destination.

The World Championships were never going to be about me getting on the podium, instead it was about spending a day racing in some of the toughest conditions against the best triathletes in the world and being able to hold my own. I wanted to celebrate this achievement with my wife, two children and my parents who came with me to Hawai'i for this event (along with my bike and every bit of triathlon kit you can imagine packed up in a large box - from compression and massage kit to caffeine and protein powders).

Unlike our English October, it was hot, windy and humid in Hawai'i. We landed in Kona a week before the race. Whilst my family rented a car to drive to the apartment I was changing into my running gear. I wanted to know that the heat wasn't going to affect me too much. Some athletes arrive 3-4 weeks before to acclimatise to the heat. I didn't have that time so I built a hut out of insulation boards and put an electric heater and my cycling and running machine inside so I could replicate the 30 degree heat and 75% humidity. Training in this hut was unpleasant/frankly horrible however it was clearly worth it as I felt good running in the heat as soon as I got to Hawai'i.

There is always a big build up in the week before the annual Kona race. Celebrities and professional athletes give talks and greets. Bicycle, nutrition and sports science companies give away freebies and let you borrow their expensive kit such as the Normatec compression device (inflatable boots that squeeze your legs like a vice to get blood moving and aid recovery).

The swim course is set up in the Kona sea all week. The crystal clear water is up to 90 feet deep and you can see all the way to the bottom where fish swim around the

coral along with turtles and the occasional shark. 750m from the shore, Starbucks have a boat giving out free coffee to the athletes all week. Only in Kona!

On Tuesday, there were aquathlon races for the children which Caleb and Esme took part in. Caleb flew round the short aquathlon swim and run and won his age group race. He wants to do the proper race one day and following that performance I hope he'll be challenging for the win!

At 7am on Thursday there was the annual charity underpants run. 1000 athletes turn up to run in their favorite pants. It seems everyone is trying to wear the smallest, tightest and most colourful budgie smugglers. The British team all wore matching speedos but they were nearly indecent and so any photos of this event are probably best kept out of the public domain!

On Thursday evening there is the pre-race banquet and entertainment. Athletes get to eat their bodyweight in pasta and enjoy an evening of entertainment by traditional performers around of various Pacific Islands including fire eaters, dancers, singers as well as talks about the theme of this year's Ironman. This theme was 'Ohana' which is Hawai'ian for family, specifically the importance of extended family. This seemed so apt. My close family were all here with me. My extended family had followed my journey on facebook and strava. The support and good wishes from friends around the world had been heartwarming. Furthermore, we were now made to feel like part of the new Ironman family, especially part of the GB team. It was a great evening; the only thing missing was a beer or two but none of the athletes were going to be drinking that until Saturday night.

On Friday we all put our bikes in the transition area next to the pier. There were nearly 2500 bikes here by the end of the day. Many were ludicrously expensive and it was estimated that there was more than £10million in kit crammed into the one acre plot. Usually I am nervous and stressing at this point before a race but instead I was calm and ready. I have probably competed enough times now to feel more relaxed, but mainly I think that I had put less pressure on myself for this race. My main goal was to enjoy the experience.

I woke at 4am on Saturday. I had a quick breakfast and coffee and got the day's ablutions out of the way. This is always important when you are in a one piece tri-suit for the next 10 hours. I made my way to transition where we had our numbers put on our arms as 'temporary tattoos'. We are weighed so that they know if we are severely dehydrated when we finish, we then get into the start line at the water's edge by the pier on 'digme beach'. This was no ordinary race. There were TV crews everywhere. Helicopters were overhead. Olympic and world champions like Alistair Brownlee were lining up just ahead of us. A canon was fired to start the race.

That many swimmers heading for the first buoy always results in pandemonium. You are kicked, punched and swum over but after the first 400m it gets slightly better as the field thins out. It was not an easy swim and it is my weakest part of the triathlon. The currents were the strongest they had been for years here and the waves made a lot of people vomit. My goggles fogged up after the first kilometer. I was pleased to

get out of the water and it took 10 minutes longer than I planned due to the conditions and I came out of the sea in 176th in my age group.

Once on the bike I was feeling confident and started smiling. The support around Kona is incredible. The whole town has a party atmosphere as you loop around it on the bike course for the first 10km. After this you head out on the rolling 'Queen K Highway' which runs through old lava fields and the trade winds do their best to blow you over. Sadly I saw a few athletes crashing due to the intense winds this year; there is a fine line between racing and pushing too hard. Due to the winds I was gripping the bike with such ferocity that my shoulders were still stiff two weeks later. The heat is the other enemy. You need to ensure you take on enough fluid and salts to keep hydrated as you can sweat up to 2 litres an hour in the temperatures above 30 degrees. You also need to ensure you take on enough energy to keep the engine fueled; this involves energy drinks, energy bars, gels, bananas and red bull. I was able to keep a good even pace until the end when I was back at the transition zone in Kona.

After nearly 5 hours on the saddle, I was up to 100th and was delighted to get off the bike and start running. Unfortunately my legs were definitely not as happy at first but within 3 miles they were starting to feel better. Like the bike course, you loop around the town of Kona to start with. The crowds cheer, spray you with water, throw ice, run next to you and play a lot of music to keep you working hard. I was not expecting to be singing and moshing to System of a Down and the Foo Fighters at 8 miles and 20 miles but the energy and positivity the crowd gave me was an incredible and unforgettable experience.

I fed off this energy but then the crowds thinned in the middle section of the marathon as you head out into the old lava fields where nothing grows except the heat. The black lava absorbs all the sun's radiation and passes it straight back to the athletes running past it. My heat and humidity training in the insulated hut was paying dividends; whilst other athletes around me were struggling with dehydration, sickness and cramps I was keeping a good pace on the run and enjoying it! As I got near the finish I was able to increase the pace and raced back through Kona to the red carpet and across the finish line. I was up to 50th place in my age group and finished the marathon in 3 hours 6 minutes which was 7 minutes faster than Ali Brownlee's run split. My finish time was 9 hours 28; 30 minutes slower than my best ironman time but given the conditions I was very satisfied with that.

At the finish you are presented with your medal and lei (a Hawaiian neck chain made out of Kukui nuts and tiny sea shells) before relaxing on a shaded beach. Here I was able to eat my bodyweight in pizza, pulled pork and ice cream as fast as I could before seeing the family where we shared memories of the day and I ate yet more food and enjoyed a couple of beers.

It was a magical day. My hope had been to get below 9 hours 30 so I achieved this but more importantly I completely enjoyed the whole experience. The build-up in the week, the challenging environment, the crazy support from so many people in Kona and back home as well as meeting and racing some of the best triathletes from around the world and being able to share all of this with my family whilst not

becoming too stressed by the whole situation all added up to one of the best weeks of my life.

I have said 'never again' as the toll it has taken on me and my family is probably too great. However, Caleb had now decided he is going to do this as when he turns 18 so watch this space in 8 years as we both try to qualify again!