



Redman Triathlon Race Report Oklahoma City, Oklahoma September 22, 2012

If you want to save yourself the time of reading this lengthy report, here it is in a nutshell: I wasn't well-prepared for this race, I wasn't enthusiastic about doing it, I had a terribly long and miserable day, and, for hours on end, I wanted to quit. Nevertheless, I persevered and finished the race, in a little over 18 hours. And--thanks to huge blisters on the bottoms of my feet--spent three days after the race being virtually unable to walk.

If you choose to read on, first get yourself a huge block of cheese. It will help stomach all the whine.

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In this, my fifth, Redman Triathlon race report, I'm not going to repeat things that have been covered in previous reports. (You can find those reports on my website.) I want to keep this one comparatively short. Actually, the less I say about this race, the better. As you may have already guessed, this wasn't a pleasant experience.

To start with, my head was never really "in" this race. I signed up for it back on January 24th, far earlier than normal. That's because this year, as it now does every third year, Redman was to host several other races. This limits the number of spots available for the usual Redman race. Thus, you have to sign up early to be assured an entry spot.

I've done an iron-distance triathlon (1.2-mile swim, 112-mile bike and 26.2-mile run) every year since 2003, and it's become almost habit to sign up for one. Since Oklahoma City isn't that far away, Redman is the race I look to when nothing else interests me more. Don't get me wrong: It's a great race with wonderful people, but when you've done it four times in the previous six years, it's hard to get enthused about doing it again. It may sound silly, but one reason for doing yet another iron-distance race is that I've finished nine of them, and it would be crazy to not go for a nice, even, ten finishes.

Spring and Summer 2012

Athletically, this had been a horrible year for me. I ran the GO! St. Louis Marathon in April, and finished just seconds under five hours. That was after spending several months battling lots of little--and some not so little--injuries in my legs, knees, and feet. Some of them lingered all summer and up until Redman in September.

For the third year in a row, the summer weather was hot. Very hot. That made it nearly impossible to (safely) get in the training necessary for an iron-distance triathlon, especially on the bike. I didn't ride outside much at all, and riding indoors for an hour or two (about the most I can stand without going crazy) just can't provide the benefits of an outdoor ride several times that long. Similarly, I couldn't go out and do 12- to 15-mile runs in that heat without taking big risks or being physically wiped out for days. I had done plenty of swimming, but the swim is such a small part of an iron-distance triathlon that doing lots of swim training doesn't really pay off. You can see from the table below that my bike training suffered the most this year. Compared to the bike mileage I was putting in five or more years ago, it was pathetic.

| 12 mos. ending September 30 | Swimming (yards) | Bike (miles) | Run (miles) | Total training hours |
|-----------------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------|----------------------|
| 2003 | 141,100 | 3,412 | 957 | 384 |
| 2004 | 155,100 | 3,462 | 797 | 395 |
| 2005 | 183,700 | 2,265 | 883 | 326 |
| 2006 | 97,600 | 2,160 | 789 | 298 |
| 2007 | 82,600 | 1,958 | 565 | 257 |
| 2008 | 80,300 | 1,319 | 559 | 215 |
| 2009 | 42,700 | 1,067 | 530 | 190 |
| 2010 | 52,000 | 1,003 | 542 | 192 |
| 2011 | 70,580 | 1,251 | 675 | 241 |
| 2012 | 52,204 | 894 | 675 | 214 |

What gets more apparent each year is that my legs and cardiovascular system are not what they were even just a few years ago. My legs simply hurt when I run. Every single step produces some discomfort. Also, I can't get my heart rate up as high as I used to. I find I'm having to walk at the top of even gradual hills nowadays. Because of the declines in my legs and cardio system, I've lost lots of speed and endurance. You could say it's due to less training, and to some extent you'd be right, but I think more of it is due to aging. I honestly don't think my body can handle the training volumes that I did years ago. But even if it could, why would I want to spend as much time training as I used to? Spending an extra hundred hours or two each year to finish a marathon or an Ironman thirty minutes to an hour faster doesn't make sense. It would certainly be worth it if you make a living doing endurance events (I don't) or are very competitive (I'm not), but I have other things I need and want to spend my time on. There's much more to life than this stuff.

September

For all of the above reasons, my enthusiasm in doing this race was lacking. By the time early September arrived, I just wanted to get this race over with.

Something beyond that was also brewing in my head. I was seriously thinking of not doing a long event, i.e. marathon or Ironman, in 2013. My body could sure use a rest, after having had no long breaks from training in ten years. Also, I think I was as close to being burned out mentally as I've ever been. This stuff can rule your life. There are many times when you'd like to be able to go kayaking, hiking, or do something else that's fun or relaxing, but you know you can't or shouldn't because you have an upcoming race for which to train. Also, I have many projects to do around the house and in my music/video studio that I've been putting off--some for years--partly because of all the training. In the early years of doing these long events, the time taken away from other things was never a big issue because I was willing to make the sacrifice. That sacrifice seems much bigger nowadays, especially since another marathon or iron-distance triathlon finish doesn't mean all that much to me.

Off to Oklahoma City

I drove to Oklahoma City on Wednesday, September 19th, to give me a full day (Thursday) to settle in and relax before things were to get very busy on Friday.



As I did on the way to Redman in 2011, I stopped in Joplin to see the rebuilding efforts after the May 2011 tornado. The huge tree that I saw and photographed last year is still standing, and is making a bit of a comeback. The city is coming back, but it will take years to rebuild what was destroyed.

The weather was nice for much of the ride to Oklahoma City, so I drove with the air conditioner "off" and with a window partially opened. That turned out to be a big mistake. As I watched the local news in Oklahoma City that evening, I heard that all of the major allergens, including ragweed, were at high levels. Sure enough, on Thursday morning, I woke up with a minor sinus headache. I took some Tylenol Sinus pills right away, and took more a few times later in the day. While this kept the headache from becoming worse, it still nagged at me all day, and my head never felt "right". I was hoping it would be gone by Friday, when I'd have to spend nearly all day getting ready for the race on Saturday, and didn't want a headache to interfere with that. It did linger on into Friday, but fortunately it wasn't too bad. I stopped taking Tylenol Sinus, since the weird sensation it caused in my head was more annoying than the slight pain. I hate feeling less than 100%. Even worse, I hate feeling bad while away from home.

Not feeling 100% on Thursday and Friday made me even less interested in doing this race. Thankfully, I woke up Saturday morning with no allergy issues. I've always feared waking up on race morning feeling bad, and having to make the tough decision as to whether to race or not. Luckily, I didn't have to make such a decision on this day.

Video

There was only one thing about the race that I was rather looking forward to: shooting video during the race. I had done that to a lesser extent during last year's race, and produced a finished video for which I received much praise and many thanks.

For this year's race, I brought along the camera I bought and used last year, along with my GoPro videocamera, which I wore this year during the swim and bike. On Thursday, I drove over to a Best Buy and bought a small digital camera/camcorder similar to the one I used last year. I was spending almost as much time getting my video equipment and plans ready for Saturday as all of my triathlon gear. At times, it felt like I was here not to do a triathlon, but to shoot a video.



My arsenal of camera/camcorders for this year's race.

Friday

I went to the race registration and expo area at Lake Hefner right after lunch to pick up my race packet. It went smoothly, and after shooting some video at the race site, I headed back to the hotel to get my bike ready and stuff my transition bags. It's all pretty easy, but it's a pain nonetheless. You just don't want to do it hastily and make a mistake.

I knew that I probably wouldn't sleep too well that night, so I laid down and took a nap for about an hour before having to drive back to Lake Hefner to drop off my bike and transition bags. I hung around the lake a while to shoot some more video. I captured a great shot of the setting sun.



Race Morning

Race day was finally here. I woke up at 3:45 a.m., ate breakfast, applied my race number tattoos to my arm and leg, got dressed, etc., and then left the hotel just before 5:00 a.m. It was a quick 10-minute drive to Lake Hefner, followed by a nearly one-mile walk to the race start. Then, it was the usual routine of getting the bicycle tires inflated, filling my water bottles, etc. I waited until 6:30 a.m. to put on my wetsuit. Before then, I had time to go around and shoot some video. That proved to be a great diversion, because it took my mind off the upcoming race. Usually, the last hour before the race start is pretty anxious, but I never really felt that on this morning--I was too busy fidgeting with my videocameras.

The Swim

Those racing in the USA Triathlon Long Course National Championship race started first, a little after the planned 7:15 a.m. start. Those of us doing the full Redman started in the second wave a couple minutes later.

The swim went well, but I suspect (as did many others) that the course was a tad long. I finished in 1:37:22, which was my slowest swim ever, and an inexplicable fifteen minutes slower than last year. I was expecting it to be a little slower, since I started at the very back and had the drag from wearing a GoPro videocamera strapped to my chest, but not that slow.

I wasn't wearing my watch during the swim because it was no longer waterproof, so I didn't know what time it was until I asked someone after coming out of the water. I was very surprised and disappointed when I heard that it was 9:00 a.m. It was my first clue that this would be a longer day than I expected.

Like last year, the lake level was low, which meant that the distance from the water's edge to the transition tent was probably around 200 yards. Having to jog that distance contributed to a slow transition time, but mine was especially slow as I spent time fooling around with my videocameras, including installing the GoPro on my bike's handlebars and taking some video. My transition time was a ridiculous 18:31 (versus 12:28 last year).



Note the GoPro camera attached to the chest harness. Just below the GoPro, you can barely see the outline of a small videocamera stowed in a waterproof bag inside my wetsuit.

The Bike

The start of the bike did not go well at all. My GPS unit wouldn't pick up any satellites, and thus wouldn't give me any information as to my speed or distance traveled. I've never had such trouble. About a mile into the bike, I turned it off and then back on again to see if that would help. That started another slow search for satellite signals. At around the four-mile mark, I finally got a signal and the unit started working. The problem turned out not to be a big deal in the end, but it was very annoying at the time. If nothing else, I was expecting my GPS unit to provide me with mile-marker data for use in my race video.

Actually, I now had a bigger problem to worry about. Soon after getting on the bike, my left eye felt irritated. To this day, I don't know for sure what caused it. My best guess is that something in the muddy lake water had gotten inside my goggles during the swim, rubbing every time I moved the eye. However, it could just as well have been that an eyelash had lodged in my eye either during or immediately after the swim. Regardless, it was very uncomfortable riding the bike with an irritated eye. (Even though I was wearing sunglasses, there was enough wind reaching my eye to add to the irritation.) As usually happens with an eye irritation, my nose was running as well.

So, just five miles into a 112-mile bike ride, I was miserable. REALLY miserable. And, frankly, I wanted to quit, more than at any time at any triathlon or other race I've ever done. Those devilish little voices inside my head were telling me to stop. The lack of enthusiasm in going to Oklahoma to do the race, the sinus

headaches on Thursday and Friday, the slow swim time, the GPS problem, and now the eye problem and runny nose made me want to call it a day. I wasn't having an ounce of fun.

I couldn't quit, though. There was no way I could go home and tell people I quit the race because my eye was hurting or because I wasn't having fun. It's an iron-distance triathlon--it's supposed to hurt and it's not a party. Also, I was here to shoot video as much as to race, and couldn't simply stop doing that after having told people that I was planning to shoot video the entire day. When I tell someone, whether I know them or not, that I'm going to do something, I stick to my word. If absolutely no one knew that I was in Oklahoma City doing a race, and no one knew I had planned to shoot video, I may well have quit. I was looking for every possible *valid* excuse not to continue.



At about the 50-mile mark, my eye was at its worst. For a very short time, I could barely keep it open due to the stinging pain. There was an aid station at the 52-mile mark, and I stopped to ask the volunteers to look into the eye to see if they could see anything that might be causing the problem. They couldn't find anything, but did say--unsurprising to me--that it was completely bloodshot. They didn't have anything like Visine to treat the eye, so I asked them to irrigate it using bottled water. I also asked them to call ahead to the medical tent at the 56-mile mark (which was the turnaround point for the second loop of the bike course) to let them know that I'd soon be there seeking attention. They had trouble with the radios, and I don't think the message ever got through. Stationed not far from the medical tent, though, was an ambulance. I stopped and asked the emergency medical technicians (EMTs) nearby to look at the eye. They didn't find any foreign object, either. They irrigated it for me several times, and that was extremely painful.

This was the time for me to make a crucial decision. I could quit and save myself the misery of another 56 miles on the bike (and the 26.2-mile run thereafter). Or, I could continue, and risk things getting worse and forcing me to stop somewhere along the course. I was right there at the race headquarters, which made it an opportune place to quit. I could grab all my gear, walk to the truck, and be back at the hotel within an hour. I was almost hoping the EMTs would make the decision for me by telling me not to continue. I could then use their advice as my valid reason for quitting.

However, I told the EMTs that I didn't want to quit. It was almost strange hearing myself say that after hours of hearing voices saying the opposite.

The EMTs didn't try to convince me to stop, so I got back on my bike and, for most of the next 25 miles, I rode with only one eye open. I only opened my left eye when it was absolutely necessary for safety reasons, e.g. at intersections or where the road surfaces were particularly bad. The first half of those 25 miles were mostly into a headwind, and on those occasions when I opened my eye while riding into the headwind, the wind caused the stinging to become much worse.

By around mile 80, the stinging had diminished significantly. I assume keeping the eye closed as much as possible helped quite a bit. The eye would remain slightly irritated and completely bloodshot the rest of the day, but it was no longer a factor in whether I would finish.

Weather

Weather is always an issue at an iron-distance triathlon, and this day was no exception. The weather was wonderful in the morning, but not so in the afternoon. The first issue was the wind. As the graph below shows, there was no wind until noon, when it started blowing from the northeast at around 10-15 mph. This made pedaling north on MacArthur Blvd from miles 60 to 71, and eastbound on Waterloo Road from miles 82 to 93, pretty tough. Fortunately, most of the final 19 miles on the course were southbound, so the tailwind was a welcome relief.



The bigger weather issue, though, was the heat. The forecasted high for the day was 86 degrees. The actual high turned out to be 93 degrees--the highest temperature I've experienced during a triathlon. (Thank goodness the humidity wasn't very high (20-29% in the afternoon), because that would have made things much, much worse.) For someone who doesn't do well in the heat (read last year's race report, and you'll see), this added to the day's hardships. I drank plenty of fluids, but ended up dehydrated to some extent. It's unavoidable. During a race in these conditions, you simply can't replace all the fluids you lose.

I finished the bike segment in 8:28:00. It was nearly the slowest bike segment of any iron-distance triathlon I've done, and that includes rides on the extraordinarily hilly Silverman course in Nevada, under even worse wind conditions. Granted, I never had plans to "race" this race, so I wasn't too terribly disappointed. I was never pushing myself too hard, and I lost lots of time due to getting medical attention for my eye, fidgeting with my videocameras, and stopping at some of the aid stations to massage my burning feet. I was just glad to have finished it.

The best thing I can say about the bike segment is that I captured lots of video while on the course.

The Run

With the bike segment completed, I had come too far--literally and figuratively--to quit the race. It was now simply a matter of surviving the 26.2-mile marathon.

Because it was still 90-91 degrees when I began the marathon at around 5:30-6:00 p.m., my plan was to walk the first few miles of the course to try to get rehydrated and take in some calories. My stomach felt fine, but my legs were trashed, owing more, I think, to inadequate training than to anything else. I knew that if I tried to run the early miles, like I did in last year's heat, I would only end up dehydrated and light-headed again. Since finishing was my only goal, I really didn't care about my finish time.

It took nearly an hour to walk the first three miles. I knew that, at that pace, I'd be out there an eternity. So, I started running when I could, and walking when I couldn't. That strategy allowed me to cover four miles in the second hour--better, but not by much. As time went on, I was running less and walking more. I'm not sure when it was, but at some point I gave up on running for fear of cramping up. Even after the sun had set (sunset was at around 7:25 p.m., when I was on around mile 9), I was still sweating heavily. It wasn't until after 8:00 p.m. that the temperature dropped below 80 degrees, which is still pretty warm.

The run course consisted of four, 6.55-mile laps on a perfectly flat course along Lake Hefner. It's an easy course physically, but mentally, a four-lap course is a nightmare. On your second lap, you wish it was your third, and on your third, you wish it was your fourth. At my slow pace, there were few other athletes still on the course while I was on my third lap, and virtually none on my fourth. It's a pretty lonely feeling being out there by yourself, mostly in the dark, while you're tired and hurting, with miles to go.

I could tell that the bottoms of my feet were blistered, but I had no idea just how bad. I would find out after the race. (During a race, you're de-sensitized to pain to some extent.)

I captured on video many of my fellow athletes on the run course. Many of them recognized me by my "Go Jim!" jersey and videocamera in hand, and complimented me on the 2011 race video I had made. Hearing those compliments was certainly the highlight of my day. My only regret this year was waiting for the second lap of the run course to start filming. By then, some of the athletes had already finished, and many of the spectators had left, so I missed out on some valuable footage.

One More Problem

Near the end of my third lap (covering miles 13.1 to 17.6), I suddenly started to feel weak. I knew I was in trouble and had to do something fast, but I wasn't sure what to do. I was close to the finish line area, so it made quitting once again a convenient option. It was very tempting, especially when you have fears of ending up collapsing a mile or two later--in near complete darkness, with few people around. Quitting was probably the smart thing to do, but I couldn't see quitting with only nine miles to go. I had to try to finish, no matter what.

I also had a compelling reason not to quit. Earlier on my third lap, while I was still feeling OK, I had told some of my favorite volunteers--Bonnie Graves, Dustin Tucker and Brian King--that I'd see them again on my final lap. These volunteers had been out there for hours encouraging and supporting the very few of us left on the course, and they said they'd be out there for us no matter how long it took. There was no way I could quit after all they did for me and my fellow racers. I also wanted to see them one last time to thank them for all they had done. If I were to quit, they'd probably worry about what happened to me, and I didn't want to leave them with any such worries.



Dustin Tucker (left) and Brian King



Bonnie Graves

To overcome the sudden feeling of weakness, all I could think of doing was to eat some solid food. At that moment and in that situation, I had no other options. So, I picked up some cookies at the nearest aid station, and more cookies and some grapes at a later one. Thankfully, I started feeling much better. Eating solid food turned out to be exactly what I needed. (I think the grapes were especially effective.) Normally, I rely on Coke and Gatorade on run courses, and add in some pretzels when I want something solid. In any future races, I'll probably start looking to solid foods for more of my nutrition.

It took a whopping 7:24:45 for me to finish the marathon. I ended up walking most of it. That's a ridiculously long time and distance to walk. I never want to be out there that long again.

Finish

I finished in 18:11:04, at around 1:30 a.m. Only two of the 154 finishers came in after me. I'm almost embarrassed by how long it took, and certainly apologetic for keeping the volunteers and race staff out there that late (race director David Wood was at the finish line), but when you consider all the adversities I faced that day, I'm just glad to have finished. I've finished races that were much more challenging both physically and mentally, and races in which I experienced much more pain, but I've never finished one that at times I so desperately wanted to quit. In some ways, that may qualify this as my toughest race ever.

Post Race

If you think my race was a nightmare, it was nothing compared to the hours and days after the race.

On my final trip past the location where Dustin and Brian were volunteering, I mentioned to them that I had been in really bad shape on my previous trip and wasn't sure I would be able to continue on, and thus see them one last time to thank them for their support. I told them that I didn't want to say anything to them about it earlier for fear of causing them any worries. They said that they had noticed it and had even discussed it between themselves.

Dustin and Brian had been controlling traffic going in and out of a parking lot located about a mile away from the race start/finish. This was the parking lot in which I had parked my truck in the morning. I told them that I might see them yet one more time after I finish the race and haul my bike and gear back to the truck. Since there was virtually no more traffic for them to direct, they said they'd leave their position and drive up to the finish line and meet me there, and then haul me, my bike and gear bags to my truck. I told

them that wasn't necessary, but they insisted. Sure enough, they were there to cheer me on as I crossed the finish line.

They were an absolute godsend. Looking back, I don't know how I would have been able to walk a mile to my truck, much less while hauling the bike and a couple bags of gear. My blisters were hurting more by the minute. I shall forever be grateful to Dustin and Brian for their help.

I stopped at a McDonald's drive-thru on the way back to the hotel to get some solid food. It was when I reached the hotel and had to make several trips to haul all of my stuff up to the room that the extent of the blistering on my feet became fully apparent. I could barely walk. The absolute worst momentary pain was when I stepped in the shower (I was absolutely filthy, or else I might have skipped the shower because of the pain) and, when the water first hit my feet, it stung so much that I almost panicked in trying to stop the excruciating pain without falling in the shower. (The pain was akin to someone slapping you hard on severely sunburned skin.) I stepped out of the water and ended up having to lie in the tub--with my feet elevated out of the water--to bathe. Getting out of the tub and into bed was extremely painful. I finally got in bed around 4:00 a.m., almost exactly 24 hours since I my long ordeal began.

The Following Week

Sunday was a horrible day. There were two triathlons being held at Lake Hefner that morning that I would have liked to have watched, but there was no way I could go. I could barely walk. I spent the day working on my computer, watching television, and sleeping. I was lucky in that I had enough food and drinks remaining in the hotel room so that I didn't have to go out. I did venture out in the evening, to go to the drive-thru at Popeye's Fried Chicken (now *that's* my idea of a post-race celebration!) and then watch the sun go down at Hefner Park.

Monday was just as bad, if not worse. In the morning, I had to pack and haul my triathlon clothes, bike, street clothes, and computer and camera equipment to the truck in several trips. I could still barely walk. I tried to walk as gingerly as I could, but every step was very painful. I left for home around 9:30 a.m. I had to wear bedroom slippers, because shoes would be too painful to even attempt to put on. I only had to get out of the truck once on the seven-hour drive home, to get gasoline.



Except for some of the toes and the arch areas, virtually the entire feet are blistered.

Monday night and Tuesday were the peak of misery, since my feet were now also quite swollen. I had to keep them elevated, or else endure stinging pain on the top of my feet. I had to put two pillows under my feet while sleeping, and had to put my feet on the desk while sitting in the study. I was very lucky in that I didn't have to leave the house for anything.



The pain from the swelling a couple days later was awful. If I stood too long, it felt like someone was stabbing my feet with a knife.

I had no choice but to leave the house to do some grocery shopping on Wednesday. While walking around Walmart, I leaned heavily on the cart to take as much pressure off my feet as possible. I walked very slowly--perhaps the slowest of any Walmart shopper that day. That's pretty darn slow.

The worst was over by Thursday. My feet were still very tender and a little swollen, but I was walking better. My biggest question was whether I'd be able to participate in the Moonshine Half Marathon--the first-ever half marathon held at the Lake of the Ozarks--on Saturday. I felt an obligation to participate since I try to support all of our local events.

My blisters were by no means healed by Friday, but I was able to at least put on running shoes and walk much, much better. I thought that, if I wore socks with enough cushioning, I might be able to run the half marathon the next day.

I showed up at the half marathon with virtually no pain or discomfort from the blisters. The race was extremely tough--certainly the hilliest and toughest half marathon course I've ever seen. The hills were unrelenting. My legs felt like lead at the halfway mark. But, I finished, in 2:23:09. I've only run a few half marathons (the last one was all the way back in 2005), and this was my slowest by far.

Final Thoughts

There's probably no need to say it at this point, but Redman 2012 was an awful experience for me. I had a terrible "race", and the following four days were an unforgettable nightmare. I never, ever want to go through an experience like that again.

I haven't made any commitments to doing any long events in 2013, nor do I plan to do so anytime soon. After this bad experience, I'm taking some time off before deciding what to do. One thing is certain: I'm not signing up for any more long events unless I really want to do them. I may have signed up early for Redman but, in hindsight, I never really committed myself to doing it. I did this race partly out of habit, and partly to bring my total to a nice, even, ten iron-distance triathlon finishes. Those reasons simply aren't sufficient. I'm not going for #11 unless and until I'm fully committed to doing it the right way, and for the right reasons.

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Thanks for reading. Hope you at least enjoyed your cheese!

Jim Glickert
Osage Beach, Missouri
November 2012