

## Tales from a Duathlete Gone Rogue

I'm a girl that loves to do du's ! Although this passion is fuelled primarily from my love for running and biking, I must admit that there is also a strategic reasoning behind this - to leverage my running skills as much as possible and to avoid facing one of my fears – the swim.

So when the opportunity came up for me to participate in the inaugural Challenge St. Andrew's festivities in New Brunswick this past weekend, my first inclination was to race the "Beat the Tide" 10K running event. But after much contemplation, I decided to grab the bull by its horn and to participate in the half distance triathlon event. After all, if my main purpose for heading to New Brunswick was to write an article about Challenge St. Andrews, didn't it make most sense to actually participate in the race? Oddly enough (or perhaps insanely enough?), I was not exceedingly daunted by the fact that I had only completed one sprint triathlon about ten years ago and would now be doing the 1.9K swim, 90K bike, 21.1K run (disclaimer: this is not an approach I recommend to most athletes!). My saving grace was that I would be "participating" and not "racing" it. With only a few months left to race day, I hesitantly started to hang out in the pool 1-2x/week.

I would be lying if I said that I did not have butterflies in my stomach come race day. Despite racing for years, I was charting in new territory. My biggest questions were not the typical ones like "what pace should I run?" but rather

- When do I put my butt cream on –would it come off in the water, or would I get a penalty for indecency if I applied it in the transition area?
- What outfit do I race in if wetsuits are not allowed? Will the jersey's pockets weight me down?

Duathlons are much more simple! Not to mention more forgiving on the body. Although I knew that many triathletes apply body glide on their necks to prevent wetsuit rash, I foolishly didn't think that I needed it – after all, I had swum 1K a few weeks prior in a wetsuit and had no issues. Rookie mistake! It's now 5 days post race, and I'm still applying polysporin to the painfully raw skin at the back of my neck.

But as proud as I am to be a duathlete, I must say that I had a lot of fun doing the half distance triathlon. First off, kudos to the race organizers who did an amazing job of hosting a world-class event, regardless of the fact that there were hurricane-like conditions and power outages the day before. If you want to experience a top-notch race that is supported by its community and is fuelled by the spirit of the Maritimes, then head to the Challenge St. Andrews! But the main reason for my enjoyment has to do with the way I approached this event; more specifically how it differed from most other races – this time I chose to *participate* (and not race), and to not let myself be consumed or distracted by times, paces, or placements. I wanted to enjoy every single minute of it and pay attention to all the small details while swimming,

biking and running. The beautiful scenic views along the water, the countless number of volunteers with smiles on their faces, the high fives from other athletes, the kids soaking me with their water guns, the sponsors handing out fluid on the course, and the trio of bunnies crossing the road – I noticed and embraced it all.

What did I learn from this experience? Plenty. For starters, triathlons are fun and I will likely do another (but duathlons still rock!). I also learned that my fear with the swim wasn't the big scary monster that I thought it was (it's still a monster, but just a small one that says boo!). More importantly, I stood up to this fear, which feels great and has given me new confidence. But my biggest take-away lesson, and the one that I want to share most with you, is the benefit of going out and participating in an event without the intention of racing it. Although I'm usually at the front of the pack at the starting line, this time I put myself at the back of the pack for swimming. I did not constantly look at my cadence/speed/power while on the bike –I simply rode on perceived effort and always felt like I was holding back. I did not look at my splits while running; I just went and found my groove (or let it find me after the first few kilometres. I would like to think that stopping three times at the porta potties to pee furthers supports my claim of participating rather than racing (on that note, cutting back on the number of pee breaks is one quick and easy way to get a new PB in my next race!). The result? I had a much better race than expected; I enjoyed every minute of it; and it gave me a boost for training and racing again in the fall.

My advice to you? Pick an event where you will participate –not race – and allow yourself to reconnect with the original reason why you started doing triathlons/duathlons in the first place – for the pure passion of it. It is so easy to get caught up with power taps, heart rate monitors or other paraphernalia, or to always be aiming for a new PB; but the risk is that we sometimes forget the most important element of it all –that this IS FUN. So go ahead – and I challenge you – just go out and enjoy one event for the fun of it. Warning: you may enjoy it so much and never want to race again!