



IRONMAN
Wisconsin Madison

SEPTEMBER 11TH 2016

OFFICIAL TIME

12:33:33

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What are the events in the Ironman triathlon and what are the distances?

An Ironman consists of 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike, and 26.2-mile run (a full marathon). You have 17 hours to complete all three events.

Where and when did you participate in this event?

Ironman Wisconsin is in Madison and took place on Sunday, Sept. 11, 2016. It is a great racecourse with the swim in Lake Monona, a beautiful but hilly bike course through the Wisconsin countryside with almost 5,000 feet of climbing, and a run through downtown Madison and the University of Wisconsin. The spectator support was incredible.

Was this your first Ironman?

Yes! This was my first full Ironman 140.6. I've completed five Ironman 70.3 events (the half-Ironman distance).

Where did you participate in the Ironman 70.3 events?

In July I did Muskoka 70.3 up in Ontario, Canada, and I've done Steelhead 70.3 here in Benton Harbor four times (2012–2015).

How long did you train for this?

I signed up in September 2015, but started training in January 2016.

What was the hardest part of the event?

The wait before heading down to the water was one of the hardest parts of the day. Butterflies started to dance in my stomach, and my nerves came out of nowhere. The enormity of what I was about to attempt loomed over me, and all of the “what if’s” tried to crowd in. “What if I panic during the swim? What if my chain or derailleur breaks? What if my legs haven’t recovered properly during taper? What if I didn’t train enough?”

What were you thinking when you lined up at the beginning of the race?

I was praying and thanking God for the opportunity to do this, marveling at the thousands of spectators lining the shore, and trying to stay calm and relaxed. Once we headed down to the lake and entered the water, peace just settled over me.

What part of the event did you like the best?

Honestly, I enjoyed the entire day. It felt liberating to have such a smooth, internally peaceful swim amidst the chaos of hundreds of other triathletes violently hitting, kicking and swimming over you. The bike was beau-

tiful and for the most part quite fun despite all the hilly climbs. I felt surprisingly strong on the run and kept a steady pace. At mile 23 with 5K left in the marathon, I decided to push myself. I picked up my pace and started really laying it down. Running down the finisher’s chute was the most amazing experience. I slowed down and tried to enjoy the moment. Crossing the finish line and becoming an Ironman was absolutely worth every tough training day and early morning workout over the past year.

What were you thinking when you crossed the finish line?

“I’m an Ironman!” I finished in 12:33:33, faster than I’d dared let myself hope for.

What were your methods for staying focused and motivated throughout the race?

Mentally, I struggled around the 80-mile marker of the bike. I hadn’t seen my husband cheering me on yet, fatigue was starting to kick in as we hit miles of headwinds, the hills felt much larger on the second loop, and I felt slow. I had to repeat to myself over and over again, “Snap out of it. You’re doing great. You’ll make it. Enjoy the day! Everything you’re worrying about (time, pace) truly doesn’t matter. You are HERE, doing an IRONMAN.” I prayed, remembered God had my back, and tried to force myself out of negative thinking into a positive frame of mind. An endurance event truly requires as much mental perseverance as physical fitness, perhaps even more. On the bike, I split the distance into 20-mile segments to make my progress seem less... intimidating. During the run, I also split up the distance. “Only 12 miles to go? That’s nothing! That’s my normal weekend training route! 6 miles? That’s only a 10k, no problem! I can do that!” And when all else fails, just put one foot in front of the other.

Who were some of your main supporters/trainers/coaches?

There are so many amazing people who have helped me along this journey. My husband, Van, for his endless patience during long training hours and his support. My parents, Robert and Kathy Johnston (both Andrews’ alumni) for happily listening to me talk on the phone with them about splits and paces after each event. My dad is a cyclist and swimmer, and my mom is a cyclist and runner. Gregory Morrow for tearing apart my swim stroke and building it back into a smoother, faster stroke. Allen Stembridge, my boss, for cheering me on ever since I signed up. Kelly McWilliams

for getting me into triathlon in the first place, Herbie Helm for keeping my bike running smoothly, and my local training partners in the Niles Distance Training group.

How many other athletic events of this sort have you participated in?

Five half-Ironman 70.3 triathlons, four marathons (including one trail marathon), two weeklong cycling trips—one across Oklahoma and another up lower Michigan from Indiana to Mackinac Bridge, nine Olympic-length triathlons (usually a 1,500 meter swim, 40 kilometer bike, and 10k run), 12 century bike ride events (100 or more miles in a day), three half marathons, and a few 10ks and 5ks in there... so far!

Why do you participate in them?

I love to swim, bike and run! I was doing all three events long before I ever signed up for my first triathlon. For me, it is almost a spiritual experience. I love the outdoors and being active. It is amazing what God has created our bodies to be capable of doing! Pushing my body physically while surrounded by the elements—sun, wind, rain, hills, waves—oftentimes draws me closer to God. I love the peace that nature brings while being in tune with your body’s active capabilities.

Do you have a bucket list item related to this kind of activity?

My real dream race is the Isklar Norseman Triathlon in Norway. It is an equivalent distance to Ironman with a cold fjord swim, mountainous bike and then two possible run finishes depending on your time, the preferred one being a trail up to the top of the Gaustatoppen Mountain. It’s a lottery system to gain entry and would be expensive to travel and stay in Norway for the race, but we’ll see.

What would you say to anyone considering trying or currently working toward one of these events?

Start small; take it one step at a time. Sign up for a 5K or a local sprint triathlon. Build up your distance slowly. I competed in triathlons for five years before signing up for a full Ironman, and am glad I didn’t rush it. The shorter races can teach you valuable lessons about how you need to train, hydrate, race and manage transitions. Find a training partner. Training partners can motivate you, help you improve, hold you accountable, and give you a friend to train with. Most of all enjoy the journey and rely on God through both the tough and good times!