

Matthew Bach
Ironman Kona 2015
10-10-15

Woke-up: 4:30 AM

Breakfast: 4:40 AM (2 slices of Martin's Whole Wheat Potato Bread with 3tbsp peanut butter each – 760c, 360mg sodium)

Weather: 76 at wakeup, 80s and sunny on bike, 90 and sunny during run. Humid throughout, few clouds. We did get a little rain in Hawi, and the last 30min of my run was mostly cloudy. Dew point was 71 degrees. Humidity averaged 66% in a range of 53-77%. Winds 7mph from the ENE (crosswind/slight headwind) at start of bike, and 12mph from the S (headwind) coming back on the Queen K.

Gear: 2015 Team Zoot one-piece sleeved trisuit, Aquasphere Kayenne Mirror goggles, race provided swim cap, new Zoot Swim Skin, A&D, timing chip (left ankle), Garmin 920xt, white Zoot arm coolers, Specialized Trivents, Lazer Aerohelmet, new Smith Optics PivLock Arena sunglasses, Zoot Ultra Race 4.0 racing shoes, Zoot race belt, 2014 Team Zoot visor, Zipp 808 front wheel, Zipp 808 rear wheel, CEEPO Viper (SRAM Force 12 components, ISM Adamo saddle, X-Lab rear mount, Gorilla Cages, Quarq Elsa powermeter 170mm crank, Look Keo 2 Max pedals, TorHans 30 aerobottle, Garmin 510 bike computer on Zipp mount, latex tubes, Zipp Tangente race tires)

Race Statistics

SWIM

368th fastest swim, **1:03:11, 1:38/100m**

Fastest swims were around 51-53min. Came out 44th in my AG

BIKE

170th fastest bike, **4:57:21, 22.60mph avg**

Fastest bikes were around 4:25-4:30. Got off bike in 20th in my AG, 159th overall

RUN

75th fastest run, **3:15:02, 7:26 pace**

Fastest runs were 2:50-2:55.

OVERALL

72nd fastest time, **9:23:12**

Beat 9 of 58 male pros, not including 20 who DNF'd, 29 male pros beat me. 5 chicks beat me. 38th amateur. 11th AG.

Race Commentary

I am largely disappointed with my performance (5.5/10) because I know what I am capable of and I wasn't able to achieve anywhere near my best. I took a risk and paid the price. An aggressive bike strategy resulted in a near bonk late in the ride where I bled lots of time to my competitors and set myself up for a difficult run. I managed to fight the demons and run a great marathon effort-wise, which was a decent marathon time-wise to finish 72nd in the world.

Race week: I generally felt calm and cautiously optimistic. I rolled with the punches and stresses of race week and tried to "hole myself away" more than I did 2 years ago so that I wouldn't be emotionally drained come race day. I arrived Friday afternoon on October 2nd, 8 days before the race, to acclimate to the heat and humidity, the time difference, and to settle in to the environment. I stayed at the Kona Tiki Hotel, like I did in 2013, where there are no frills including no AC. I intentionally chose this to better acclimate to the conditions. When I arrived I picked up food from Island Naturals, Target and KTA so I'd be all set for the





week. I brought my own peanut butter from home in the gear bag that I sent with TriBike Transport because that's key! On a couple of occasions I swam at the Kona Aquatic Center rather than on the course so as to avoid potentially getting sick from the run off that has ended up in Kailua bay from all the rain they got last month. Also, it's an awesome free pool where all the pros go! I saw Tim Don and Rachel Joyce there, and saw Pete Jacobs, Dede Griesbauer, Jesse Thomas, Gina Crawford, Sarah Piampiano, Mark Allen, Dave Scott and many others throughout the week leading into the race. I ate awesome food throughout the week including lots of poke and other fresh fish. I even had to slow down my ahi tuna consumption because I was afraid of mercury poisoning. I ran a "Guess my Splits" contest during race week that people seemed to have fun with, and had some great prizes to give away from my sponsors.

Prior to arriving on the island, I had done a fair amount of heat acclimation already, including wearing extra clothing, using a sauna and steam room, running during the hotter parts of the day and turning the fans off when on the trainer. One example is when I did a

one hour trainer ride with fleece tights, an UnderArmour long sleeve base layer, a long sleeve shirt, gloves and a knit hat with no fan on. I followed it up with 45 minutes in the sauna at 160 degrees. I was sweating more than ever, which was a good sign. Surprisingly, my HR didn't climb higher than around 100 during my stay in the sauna. Others have claimed that HRs often get up to around 140 due to the heat stress, but I was fairly comfortable considering the temp. On one occasion, I did a hard 15 mile run and then went into the steam room at the Summit YMCA for 20 minutes and that was actually a struggle. My HR did reach 140 by the end and it didn't feel easy. The season key workout sessions, particularly the 2 Metric Ironmans I did, went very well. I nailed my power targets and run paces without feeling like I was going all out. I also nailed a few workouts like 3x20min at 100% of my FTP with 5min recovery in between, or 2x30min at 100% FTP. The "Blow-it-up Brick" workouts that I did prior to Eagleman were still fresh in my mind and were big breakthroughs. Earl and I even decided to add a key workout to the season because things were going so well and I nailed that one as well. The only rough patch I had was when I was coming back from a 2 week break after Eagleman. I decided this year to experiment with a mid-season break to recharge my mental batteries, but underestimated how hard it would be for me to come back after that. I had a few bad workouts, including the worst workout of my life, during that time period, but after a few weeks was bad in the swing of things and nailing my workouts again. My running and biking were both at all-time highs leading into Kona.



Joe LoPorto at FitWerx tuned up my bike and we put a new chain, cassette and bar tape on it. I removed the bottle cage down beneath and instead replaced it with a new TorHans 30 Aerobottle that I would be using race week and during the race. It was a late change that I felt was worthwhile to help me hydrate and for aerodynamics. We also removed my saddle bag and instead strapped the flat repair kit

under my saddle and in a new nut on the back of my rear mount that holds CO2 and the dispenser. This is the first time that I've really done some work on the "cleanness" of my bike and its aerodynamic setup. There is more room to improve but we left it at that for now.

Lauren hand painted some amazing T-shirts for my cheering section to wear in Kona. She makes them for most of my big races, and these were the



and for a while after that. I told myself "you can't swim that hard at the end on Saturday." The training swim was much less chaotic than race day but a great way to stage a dress rehearsal for the effort ahead. I came in a day earlier than last time just so I could do this race. I also did a 50min run with pickups to continue acclimating to the heat and boy was it hot! When you are acclimated to heat, you sweat 10-15% more and the salt concentration in your sweat goes down by about 50%. Sounds about right – I sweat A LOT and it was pretty watery. Later that day, I went to the CEEPO condo to meet Marc-Andre and Gilles and to do a photo shoot with them. Marc and I went to the car, loaded up the bike, and then the car

wouldn't start. Battery sounded dead. A local, who was a mechanic and a really nice guy, came to our rescue. He jump started the car and it worked! We were excited and about to move on with our mission, but he asked us if the car had been in storage. We said no, it was a rental, and that concerned him. The battery shouldn't die like that unless there's a problem with the alternator. He said if we took the car out, we'd end up getting stranded somewhere on the Queen K so advised that we take it immediately back to Budget to get a new car. We had to reschedule the photoshoot and Marc took the car back to Budget. It turns out that Budget said that because the tank was only half full and there were CEEPO stickers on the side of the car, they couldn't swap the car (even though they had provided him with a busted vehicle!). He grudgingly agreed to go get the tank filled but ended up breaking down on the Queen K and waited for over 2 hours for someone to come fix the broken down car! Finally, he got a new SUV and we rescheduled the shoot for Tuesday. My Aunt Meri, cousins Gina and Shana, and Gina's boyfriend Adrian all showed up on Saturday. They came to Hawaii to come cheer me on! And to take in the sights of the island. They visited places all



bomb! As a thank you for all of her support this year, I ordered a Spanish hand-painted hand fan with a hibiscus and clever note on it.

On Saturday, I did the Ho'ala Open Water Swim race where I swallowed a lot of sea water, practiced surging to get on fast feet, and swam a decent race coming in around 1:04 on a course that's almost identical to the one on race day. I felt like puking as I ran up the beach to the finish line



over the island and Gina and Adrian had a chance to go deep sea fishing for two days. Gina had a 600lb marlin on the line and fought it hard for a while but sadly ended up losing it. Adrian is a professional



photographer, specializing in underwater photography. What an opportunity for me to have him there to take shots of me during the race! I normally have to rely on FinisherPix to get some decent shots of me, and then pay a bunch of money to get them, but instead I had Adrian's amazing talent at work taking many of the shots you see in this report. On several occasions during the trip, I had the chance to sit down with the crew and catch up. It's been many years since I've seen Gina or Shana, and this is the first time that I've met Adrian (thanks all for coming!).

On Sunday, I met Sarah Piampiano for the first time. She's a pro who left the finance industry working at HSBC (with Rich Burke and Clyde Wardle) to pursue professional triathlon as her career. She's been at it for four years now and it's working out well, especially because she had a massive breakthrough in Kona this year finishing 7th overall in the female pro field! It was great to meet her in person finally and hear more of her advice. Later that day, I met up with Stefan Irion to drive up to Hapuna Beach with our bikes and running gear for a 45 mile ride up to Hawi and back followed by a 25min run. It went well but I think the island was merciful as the winds were manageable.

On Monday, I met up with Kevin Portmann and Mariesa Carrow and went to the Energy Lab for a run. Mariesa dropped us off and we ran for 40min with some pickups mixed in. Again, it was brutally hot and we were both sweating like crazy. We got some great shots from the run though with the dramatic landscape full of lava fields, palm trees, the volcano and the ocean in the background. Later on I went to the CEEPO Launch Party for their 2016 lineup of bikes. The Viper looks pretty sweet and has proven to be much more aerodynamic and lighter without compromising the stiffness of the frame, which I find to be its biggest advantage. I had the chance to meet the founder, Joe Tanaka and many other CEEPO staff and athletes.



Athlete Packet Pick-up began on Tuesday, and when I arrived, they whisked me away immediately for another drug test! This was number 3 for me and I don't know why I'm still surprised at this point. I had to pee, but I held it knowing they would probably ask for a sample. Instead, they took blood but didn't need a urine sample, and I was left to squirm for our whole session. I finished up testing and packet pickup to find my rental car under live, high voltage wires. A huge banyan tree had fallen due to today's insane winds, and it landed on wires which were now draped over my car and several others. The hurricane off shore brought 40mph sustained winds with gusts much stronger than that. I was kind of wishing to be on the Queen K at that point battling those winds to see what it felt like! That way, anything that Saturday threw at me would feel like nothing. Instead I went to grab a bite to eat until the officials were able to power down the wires and let me pull the car out. That afternoon, I went back to CEEPO for the photoshoot. This time, we were able to do it, but with the winds as strong as they were, we decided to go to the Energy Lab to see if the waves were crashing up against the lava rocks enough to create awesome backdrops for me while I stood with my bike. They most certainly were, and then some. The waves were smashing up against the rocks and then surging over the top of them

threatening to sweep us away while we stood in knee deep water on slippery, algae-laden rocks trying to get a good photo. We were both soaked and the wind was so strong that the bike was lifting into the air when we turned it horizontal to the wind. Nuts! In the end, there was mist on the lens and we didn't even get a good shot. I left my bike with the CEEPO guys so Gilles could get the salt out of the drivetrain and give the bike a final tune-up for race day.

I went to the Fish Hopper on Wednesday morning for a CompuTrainer event. I use the CompuTrainer a lot in my training because Earl has 20 of them at his Tailwind Endurance studio on 23rd and 6th in NYC. I had a lot of downtime today intentionally and holed myself away at the hotel for some reading and quiet. It was time to get out of the buzz and spend some time mentally preparing myself for the race ahead. I had a quiet dinner at Daylight Minds Coffee Company with Earl and Stefan, until Dave Scott walked in with a group and had dinner right near us. On our way out after our meal, I stopped and asked Dave Scott for a picture. I talked some smack and said I could beat him in a triathlon at this point. He talked smack back by grabbing my quad, then my butt, and said "soft like butter." Then he asked me what my goals were and I boldly told him I wanted to break the age group world record if conditions allowed, and that I wanted to be the first amateur across



the line! Earl and Stefan loved the interaction.

Thursday morning, I did the famous UnderPants Run (UPR), then had breakfast at Splashers with Dave Trager, Tom Yakowenko, and their families. It was the first time I got a chance to meet up with my Mapso buddies since arriving, partly because Tom was only given a meager 4 days off to come out and race and arrived on Wednesday. That afternoon, Chef Gordon Ramsey walked by me when I was sitting at my hotel! He wasn't staying there, but he decided to check out the swim turnaround, which is just offshore from the Kona Tiki. I got a picture with him of course! Lauren arrived on Thursday at 3:30pm



and I picked her up from the airport. So glad she finally made it! There was this subconscious feeling all week like I was waiting for something, but when she arrived it went away. I was now armed with my moral support, and my Sherpa. Ready to go to battle.

My father-in-law, Jerry, arrived on Friday and we picked him up at the airport and drove him to his hotel, Uncle Billy's, right on Ali'i drive only about a half mile away from the finish line. We get a call 20 minutes later when he gets to his room and he is furious. Apparently, he was put in a room across the street, where I guess Uncle Billy's has more rooms, and he was pissed about it. He also thought the room was in terrible shape considering the price and complained vigorously to the manager. That was before he realized that his room was actually heavenly compared to ours at the Kona Tiki Hotel. He had a kitchenette,

AC, a flat screen TV and tons of space. Lauren and I were floored! He realized that he was wrong to complain so much, that the prices were inflated because of Ironman week, and that he was probably overly upset because he was so uncomfortable from the heat and the fact that he was sweating. He apologized to the manager later. In the early afternoon, I decided to put the phone away and not go on Facebook or Twitter, respond to text messages, or take phone calls anymore. Time to buckle down and focus. At 2:30pm, Lauren and I went to Bike Check-in. For anyone reading this that hasn't been to IM Kona before,



Bike Check-in is quite a scene. Media swarms the location knowing that all the Pros will be there, representatives from companies flock to the barriers to note the equipment choices of participants as we file down the corridor into transition where we will rack our bikes. It's so crowded everywhere that you can barely move, yet you are out in the sun getting baked the day before the big day. A volunteer escorts you through transition and through gear bag check and explains the flow of transition to you, then escorts you out of transition when you're done. I tried to move swiftly through it all so I wouldn't be too emotionally or physically drained (and dehydrated) from the experience. Missy Manning, Kevin Portmann and I did this all while Dave Cruz, Erica



Manning, Earl and Lauren waited outside transition. On our way back to the hotel, we found out that Aunt Meri, Gina, Shana and Adrian had their car broken into while they were visiting a different part of the island. Some things were stolen, they were going to have to wait for the police to come and file a report, and then go to the rental car agency to swap for a new one. They figured they probably wouldn't make it to dinner in time so said to go ahead without them. What a bummer! Jerry, Lauren, Earl and I went to dinner at Huggo's that night, our favorite place, and had a great pre-race meal consisting of tomatoes and mozzarella with olive oil, and opah (fish) over purple sweet potato mash with arugula and a coconut milk curry sauce. After dinner, I did my sodium loading and final race prep and called it a night at 9pm. I slept well considering I had such a big event to look forward to the next morning!

Pre-race: I woke up at 4:30am, got dressed, ate, and collected my gear. My phone was blowing up already with friends and family wishing me luck and cheering me on. Two years ago we walked the mile and a half to the start, but this time we decided to drive over to Uncle Billy's parking lot



and park there even though we would be trapped once the race started. We walked the rest of the way to the King K so I could be body marked in the parking lot. They use temporary tattoos at Kona and they look pretty sweet. I submitted my bike and run special needs bags, then moved on to transition to go set up. I used a communal pump to inflate my tires to 110psi, then clipped my shoes in and rubber banded them to the bike, which was set in the little chain ring to help me go up Palani after the mount line. I taped 4 salt capsules and 2 caffeine pills to the stem (planned on taking just 2 of the salt capsules and 1 of the caffeine pills but wanted backup in case I dropped something). I put my bottles of nutrition in the rear cages and 2 Nuun tablets in my empty aerobottle. My helmet was resting on my bike and I decided to wear my watch during the swim this time so I wouldn't have to put it on in T1. I secured my sunglasses to the bike cables, keeping in mind that I lost my sunglasses at Eagleman doing this. Once I was all set at my bike, I found a volunteer to take me to my Run gear bag where I wanted to place a flask

of UCAN for the start of the run. While I was doing this, I took in most of my "shot" of UCAN and took 1.5 caffeine pills. I left transition, dropped my "morning clothes bag" and found Lauren and Earl who were waiting by the King K to wish me luck before they went to the seawall to get a good spot to view the swim

start. I put my swim skin on up to my waist and had my Team Zoot sleeved tri kit tucked neatly underneath it. We exchanged final words and I gave Lauren one last kiss before I walked over to the starting corral. I got the rest of my swim skin up, put my goggles on, then my cap and moved into the water ready to take on the day. I was nervous as expected, but collected and confident. I swam out to the starting buoys inserting some quick spurts to wake my body up and get my HR higher. I positioned myself further to the left this year, but only about midway out, so I could avoid some of the chaos that happens near the pier, and happened to be right near John Potter. We said good luck to each other and I planned on swimming on his feet because I know he's pretty quick. I was in the third or fourth row of people and just treaded water like everyone else until the start time approached at 6:55am. Two years ago, and again this year, I turned around and took in the scene...thousands of people lining the sea wall, hundreds of athletes wading into the bay and treading water around you, helicopters loudly hovering overhead, drones buzzing around taking video and pictures, and the announcer prepping the athletes for what's to come. Absolutely amazing.

Swim: BOOM. The cannon fired and chaos erupted all around. Arms flailed and feet kicked as 1,400 of the top male athletes in the world all try to swim in the same direction at the same time. I lost John instantly. I swam over people, and people swam over me. Some clawed at my ankles and shoulders, and I was knocked in the left eye by someone's elbow. Immediately I could feel my eye swelling and I couldn't see because the goggle had been filled with salt water. I held that eye shut and swam sighting with just my right eye for a while, but the sea water was irritating my eye and I eventually let the water out mid-stroke



without missing a beat. This brawl persisted for ten minutes until we spaced out enough to have a tiny bit of room to maneuver around each other. I worked on using open patches to surge up to faster feet and drafted as much as I could, following the bubbles. It didn't seem to take too long and we were already at the turnaround buoy and I continued to surge and draft, surge and draft. I felt fairly controlled, much more so than during the Ho'ala OWS, and felt that my HR was somewhat low relative to that race, which was a good thing. I swam the last third of the race well and was passing people, especially because I was working well in the bubbles of a faster swimmer who was making a late charge. I got out of the water in 1:03:11, 1:21 slower than 2 years ago. It doesn't surprise me as I haven't been swimming that much this year so that I could focus my limited time on cycling and running. My watch had the distance at 4,589yds, which means I either did a fair amount of swerving (~350yds) or my GPS is off. The pace according to the IM website was 1:38/100m and my watch had 1:23/100yds. This is one big piece of low hanging fruit for me to tackle as the top professionals are swimming around 51min, or over 10 minutes faster. They say you can't win the race in the swim, but you can lose it, and I'm definitely losing it right off the bat to most of them.

T1: I had a pretty good T1 in 2:57. Swift and no unnecessary movement. I pulled my Zoot swim skin down to my waist, rinsed myself with a hose quickly, pulled up my sleeved tri suit over my shoulders, and threw my goggles and cap down for a volunteer to take. I put on my Zoot arm coolers while I ran to my bike. I put my helmet on and ran with my bike, shoes clipped in and rubber banded, to the mount line.

Bike: It was congested, but I rode smoothly around the block and onto the Kuakini Highway where riders generally rip 400w and blow by you even when you're working pretty hard. Everyone is excited to be on the bike, and feeling fresh so they go too hard on the first hill up Kuakini. I kept it controlled and let my

wattage rise just 23w above the target (250w) to 273w for that first climb. I barreled down the hill after the turnaround and at mile five a bee flew into my left temple and stung me! It hurt but I laughed a bit about it as I thought to myself “a little thing like that isn’t going to stop me” and then thought “what if because the sting is in my temple I have some crazy reaction and get dizzy and fall off my bike??” The pain gradually subsided and I stayed on my bike. We got up onto the Queen K and I settled into my 250w target. I found pretty quickly that it was hard to maintain a steady pace because there were so many riders of similar caliber around me. I would either have to pass them and push over 300w while doing it, or ease up to stay out of their draft zones and push under 200w. This wasn’t an issue at other races where, even if there were lots of riders ahead of me, they were going slow enough that I would just swing around them. The course was heavily marshalled (good to see that) so we all had to be extra careful. One lapse in concentration and you could drift into a draft zone or end up with some other penalty. I checked in on my HR and saw that it was right around 150. In training, on the trainer with stagnant air, my HR was normally well into the 150s or even at 160 riding at 250w, so this was really encouraging. It seemed I could ride my target and feel pretty relaxed doing it so I kept up the effort. This surge and slow pattern continued until Hawi where I checked my average NP

and saw that I was spot on at 250w. My HR continued to be steady at around 150 too. The winds weren’t too bad going north on the Queen K, though I did notice it was a slight head/cross wind, so I began looking forward to maybe having a slight tailwind on the way back. As we approached Hawi, the winds picked up as they always do but it wasn’t anything extraordinarily bad. We also started getting rained on, which was a welcome treat. It didn’t rain so hard that we were



soaked through, but enough to cool us off a bit. Up until that point, I had been using tons of water from aid stations to spray all over my body to keep my core temperature down. I also had filled my empty aerobottle so that the Nuun tablets would dissolve, which I drank in the first 25 miles. After that point, I kept refilled my aerobottle at each aid station and drinking straight water. At mile 30, I drank my whole UCAN bottle of 3 scoops Lemonade with 1 SaltStick Capsule and 10g of BCAAs, and threw the bottle away. I used that space for water bottles from aid stations so that I could spray myself down when I got dry before getting to the next station. I did a pretty solid job of staying cool given the conditions, but because they are so harsh, I still was a bit overheated. I noticed that while the arm coolers were nice and cool when they were wet, they were a bit toasty when they were dry. They did provide sun protection, and my burn is not nearly as bad as it was two years ago. As we approached Hawi, I took a caffeine pill as planned.

When we made the turn, I still felt pretty good and was nailing the target, which gave me a mental boost, but the descent from Hawi was the first time that I started to feel a bit fatigued. In training, I was able to hit my numbers even on the descent, but now I was struggling to keep them high enough and found myself using it for recovery instead. My NP for the descent was just 226w. One of the tougher and underrated parts of the course is Kawaihae, where you stop descending and climb again up to the Queen K. The air is stagnant and hot, and all of a sudden you have to work harder again to keep moving up the hill. I held 251w NP and was back on the Queen K for the final 35 miles back to town. This is where things

started to really unravel. I was at about mile 80, and I started to really struggle to hit the numbers and couldn't figure out why. By mile 90, I knew I needed to do something besides just willing myself forward, so I took my 2nd bottle of UCAN, this time 3.5 scoops of Cran-Raz with 1 SaltStick Capsule and 10g BCAAs, rather than wait till mile 100 as planned. The idea was to have the bottle as close to the run as possible to "front end load" it so I didn't have to take in so much during the run when it's more difficult. Nicci suggested taking the bottle early if needed, and then just have a flask of UCAN in T2 that I can take with me to bridge the gap to the special needs bag where I had another flask of UCAN stored. The race had thinned out and I was still passing people, though less frequently, and the wind had picked up dramatically. The tailwind that I had been hoping for turned out to be a headwind and gusts coming off the ocean threatened to toss me from my bike a few times. By mile 100, I was getting passed back as my power dropped closer and closer to 200w. Early in the race, I was saying "let the posers pass you" as people blew by in the early miles. Now I was saying to myself "shit. YOU are the poser!" Not the type of attitude you want in a race. I was in a dark place, and no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't sustain the 250w target I wanted. I would "settle in" and ride by feel for a bit, then look down at my power and see 170w. Terrible. I thought I had simply blown myself up and that my legs couldn't take it, but was baffled because I had ridden comparable efforts in training, and had something left in the tank. I was confused and demoralized, and watched as competitors rode by me, dragging my dreams and goals with them in their wake.

Finally, mercifully, the bike ended. I must have bled a solid 10 minutes on the top age groupers as I rode 216w for the last 30 miles, 211w for the last 20 miles, and just 203w for the last 10 miles (65% of FTP). My HR drifted lower from 152 in the first half to 144 for the last 40 miles, 142 for the last 30 miles, 140 for the last 20 miles and 136 for the last 10 miles.

Bike Statistics:

Up Kuakini: 3.6 miles / 273w / 159HR / 89rpm / VI 1.05 / 87% FTP / 20.2mph
Down Kuakini to Queen K: 2.58 miles / 253w / 159HR / 91rpm / VI 1.02 / 81% FTP / 26.7mph
Queen K to beg of Hawi climb: 34.3 miles / 250w / 153HR / 87rpm / VI 1.02 / 80% FTP / 24.4mph
Climb to Hawi: 18.2 miles / 242w / 149HR / 87rpm / VI 1.03 / 78% FTP / 20.8mph
Descent from Hawi: 17.8 miles / 219w / 147HR / 88rpm / VI 1.03 / 72% FTP / 26.5mph
Bottom of Hawi to Finish: 35.1 miles / 220w / 143HR / 85rpm / VI 1.03 / 70% FTP / 20.7mph

First Half: 56 miles / 250w / 152HR / 88rpm / VI 1.02 / 80% FTP / 23.3mph

Second Half: 56 miles / 223w / 144HR / 86rpm / VI 1.03 / 71% FTP / 22.0mph

Overall: 4:57:21 / 238w / 148HR / 87rpm / VI 1.03 / 76% FTP / 22.6mph

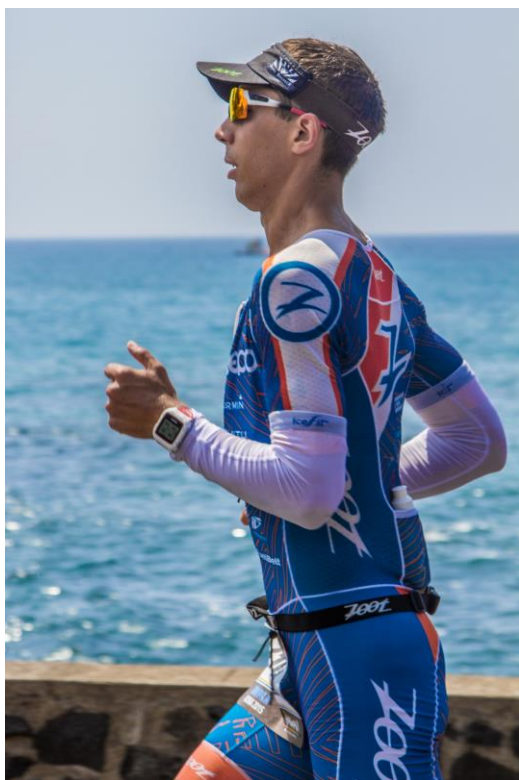
Though I struggled so much on the 2nd half of the bike, the 4:57:21 split is almost 10 minutes faster than 2 years ago, and this time the conditions were more difficult.

T2: Horrible 4:41. I couldn't get myself to do a flying dismount so I hopped off the bike, took off my shoes and asked the volunteer if he could take them for me. He said yes, but then said he's not supposed to. He took them anyway. I "ran" around the edge of transition to the run gear bags and changing tent. Wow did I feel awful. My legs weren't working properly, nor was my brain. I sat down in the changing tent and slowly put my socks, shoes, race belt and visor on. I gave them my helmet, and grabbed the flask of UCAN along with a Mentos container that I had filled with salt capsules and a caffeine pill on top. I took my sweet time in this transition but needed every second of it to recover and reset my mind to try to run. I lost around 2 minutes to the top age groupers here.

Run: The negative attitude that "all was lost" pervaded my thinking. My goals were out the window and part of me just wanted to throw in the towel. I thought on several occasions over the first 2 miles that I should just walk the damn thing, try to enjoy the Kona marathon, stop and chat with Lauren and my family, get my finisher medal and be done with it. I was still running at 7 minute pace to preserve the option of still

running my hardest as I bounced back and forth between the two choices. By the third mile, I had convinced myself that it was still worth it. This was what I had worked all year for and I have too much pride in my performance to bag it. Also, this was Kona after all, and you have to respect Kona with your best effort. Another convincing factor was that running the marathon would be much faster than walking it, and the torture would be over sooner. Finally, I thought to myself that however bad the end of the bike was, if I could run a decent marathon, then at least I would have something to be proud of from the day, no matter how much it would irk me to think about the “what ifs” later. I said to myself “the pressure is off now, just go run a marathon,” and thought of it as a training run, like one of the many I have done alongside Alden Basmajian, Alexandra Niles and Shawn Williams from Brookdale Park with Tom Fleming telling jokes from the car he drove beside us.

Even after just the first couple of miles I was feeling alright, hitting my target pace and using garbage bins full of ice water to dunk my head under. I learned that trick from Sarah Piampiano to keep the core temperature down, and it worked like a charm. I trotted along passing lots of people and sucked down some of the UCAN in my flask. I took salt capsules every few miles after that with water and tried to drink as much water as I could. I tried a new approach here by walking through almost all of the aid stations. It was partly because “the pressure was off” and partly because it was so hot that having the extra time at the



aid stations to cool off and drink more water was very helpful. I got to Keauhou and the turn around, and began trotting back to Kona, all the way looking for someone to run with. It’s always nice to have someone to run alongside to help pass the time, especially if you’re able to strike up a little conversation. Unfortunately, the only two people that I ended up running beside for any length of time were foreign and didn’t speak English! Oh well. I made my way back to town and saw Earl, Lauren and the rest of my family who were cheering me on loudly. Lauren said “do it for Justin!” which gave me an extra reason to run this damn thing. Running up Palani was brutal. It’s not that terrible of a hill but when you’re mid marathon and have been competing for 7 hours already and it’s 100 degrees out, it’s not fun. Almost everyone was walking up it, and I tried for a moment to do that, but found it was slower than running by enough that it wasn’t worth it. I ran again, but at a slow clip to keep my HR under control.

Two years ago, I ran a good first 10 miles, but then fell apart on the Queen K and in the Energy Lab. Once I got to the Queen K this year, I said to myself “hey, let’s see if you can run those parts well.” It’s the toughest part of the course because you’re really fatigued already, it’s really really hot with no

shade, and you still have 6 miles just to get to the Energy Lab where there are no spectators and even more sun. I was still passing people, and now at an even greater rate, because my pace was remaining steady and theirs was fading. I felt good, and I even picked up the pace a little here wondering if maybe, just maybe, I could still end up on the podium. When I saw the top pros in the race running towards me on the Queen K on the way to the finish, I started counting them. Then I saw the top amateurs going by and I started taking note of their bib numbers to estimate what place I was in in my age group. After I counted to around 70,

and about 15 in my age group, I lost count and was a.) demoralized because the podium still seemed impossible and b.) encouraged because I could break into the top 100 of the race.

I ran the Energy Lab really well, continuing to stop at aid stations to keep cool and drink water. One competitor was running through the aid stations, as I normally do, but I found that he would pull ahead while I walked and then I'd catch up by the next aid station. This happened several times with this guy, but eventually I ran past him and never saw him again. Getting the extra aid may have paid off in the long run. The Run Special Needs station is in the Energy Lab and I looked forward to my 2nd flask of UCAN. I ran by and they called out my number, then the volunteers panicked saying "it's not here! It's not here!!" and I had to run by without getting it. I wasn't able to get it at Ironman Maryland either – damn! I ran up and out of the Energy Lab still running past people and feeling good. Just 10k to go!

Back on the Queen K, there was carnage. At this point, many of my competitors, some of the fittest athletes in the world, were walking. Reports after the race said that it was the hottest day for the World Championships in the last 8 years. We were 20 miles in and most people cracked, but I was able to keep it together and run well even though every step was agony. We were given the blessing of shade for the last 30 minutes of the marathon because clouds finally decided to block the sun. I don't remember much from the last 3 miles, except that after I crested Palani, I was running very hard for the finish. I didn't know where I stood in my age group, but since I had been passing so many people, I thought that maybe there was a chance. I had visions that I'd cross the line and Lauren would say "you got 5th!" and a rough day would produce something great to celebrate. I charged down the famous Ali'i drive taking it all in, the crowds roaring and Mike Reilly in the distance before crossing the line with my tri suit neatly zipped and my arms held up high. I had no idea what time I ran but I thought it might be pretty good. Turns out it was 15 minutes off my target, which, given how close I was to bonking and how terrible I felt in T2, is a miracle.



Run Statistics:

First 5 miles – 6:58 pace / 6:56 NGP / 147HR / 87rpm
Miles 5-10 – 7:24 pace / 7:27 NGP / 147HR / 87rpm
Miles 10-15 – 8:09 pace / 8:09 NGP / 139HR / 86rpm
Miles 15-20 – 7:32 pace / 7:31 NGP / 148HR / 88rpm
Miles 20-25 – 7:28 pace / 7:24 NGP / 149HR / 90rpm
Last 1.2 miles – 6:21 pace / 7:09 NGP / 154HR / 91rpm

Climb up Palani – 9:17 pace / 7:53 NGP / 142HR / 86rpm

Last 10k – 7:15 pace / 7:21 NGP / 150HR / 90rpm

Overall: 3:15:02, 26.2 miles, 7:26 pace



Overall Race Time: 9:23:12, 72nd overall, 67th in gender, 38th amateur

After the Finish: Volunteers immediately came over to support me as they could see I was in bad shape. Lauren was yelling my name from about 20 feet away and I didn't even hear her! I looked over my shoulder because I knew Lauren would probably be trying to find me, but I still didn't even see her because my vision was not so great. I hobbled on and the volunteers asked me questions to get a better feel for my status and I guess they weren't too happy with what they were seeing so they brought me to the medical

tent. I was having trouble speaking, a little trouble thinking (though I was able to tell them my name, age, and where I was), and could barely see. They weighed me at an astonishing 137lbs with my sweat-drenched clothes on, and realized that I had lost 17lbs during the race. The med tent volunteers were then very concerned. They laid me down on a pool lounge chair with my feet up on the head end and got an IV going, took my blood pressure, pulse and temperature. My temperature wasn't too bad they said, but they still put ice bags under my arm pits. There was a team of about 10 people around me asking me questions and tending to my exhausted body. Both of my Achilles hurt so I asked if they could put bags of ice under them. After two bags of IV were given to me, I was feeling a lot better and was able to speak and see properly again. It's amazing to have such a great team of medical personnel there to help us recover. Over an hour after arriving there, I collected my things and left the medical tent.

Next was the athlete recovery village where I ate a slice of pepperoni pizza and drank more water. I got my finisher medal and my morning clothes bag and tried go to find Lauren. It took me a while to hobble around but I eventually found her where we agreed to meet and Earl and Lauren congratulated me. We went back to Uncle Billy's so I could clean up and change into some fresh clothes. Lauren and Earl were awesome enough to go to transition and retrieve my bike and gear bags (wow, thank you!). We left my bike in my father-in-law's room because I was going to be bringing it to TBT the next morning to ship home, and we brought the gear bags to the car, which we would use later to get back to the Kona Tiki Hotel. Soon we went to dinner at the Kona Inn, right near the hotel room, and learned that Jan Frodeno would be there celebrating his win with 20 others! Awesome! I got a picture with him before we left, though he didn't seem too excited about it.



We decided before the race that we were going to do whatever we could to drag ourselves back to the midnight finish, which is one of the most amazing things in all of Ironman where you get to watch the final finishers run, walk, crawl, or stumble across the finish line in front of a crowd of thousands after they've been competing for nearly 17 hours in conditions that give Hell a run for its money. Mike Reilly says "You are an Ironman!" with his iconic voice after each one comes home across the line. It's a sight that bring chills and inspiration and has certainly motivated as least a couple people to sign up for their first Ironman. With three hours to go till midnight, it was a tough decision to stick it out, but we did. Lauren and I walked toward the finish line and had some ice cream, then met up with Earl and watched the last hour of the race. Earl introduced me to Jesse Thomas, and I introduced Earl and Lauren to Sarah Piampiano, who we bumped into near the finish line. We were exhausted and it was definitely not the best thing for my recovery, but it was worth it!

Nutrition Recap

4:40am: 2 slices of Martin's Whole Wheat Potato Bread w/ 6tbsp peanut butter (360mg sodium)	760c
5-6am: Finished Sodium Loading (1000mg sodium)	0c
6:15am: "Shot" of Lemonade UCAN (2 scoops in 6oz water, 10g BCAAs, drank 80%, 272mg)	160c
1.5 caffeine pills (300mg total)	0c

Bike:

Mile 20: 2 Nuun tablets with water in aerobottle (718mg sodium)	0c
Mile 30: 3 scoops Lemonade UCAN, 10g BCAAs, 1 salt capsule in bottle (725mg sodium)	240c
Mile 55: 1 caffeine pill (200mg)	0c
Mile 65: 1 SaltStick Capsule (215mg sodium)	0c
Mile 80: 1 SaltStick Capsule (215mg sodium)	0c
Mile 90-95: 3.5 scoops Cran-Raz UCAN, 10g BCAAs, 1 salt capsule (775mg sodium)	280c

Run:

Mile 5: 1 flask 1.5 scoops Lemonade UCAN (255mg sodium)	120c
1 caffeine pill (200mg)	0c
Miles 7-20: 4 SaltStick Capsules (860mg sodium)	0c
Mile 22: 3oz Red Bull (75mg sodium, 28mg caffeine)	41c

Calorie Target:	680c
Actual Calories:	681c, 73c/hr
Total Sodium:	3838mg, 409mg/hr
Total Caffeine:	728mg
Total BCAAs:	30g

Reflections and Conclusions:

After taking some time to mull over the experience, I wrote the following as a recap on Facebook that summarizes my takeaways well:

Over the past 10 days, I've had a chance to reflect on my race and I'm (finally) ready to share my thoughts. My initial reaction was one largely of disgust and disappointment, and while I am still experiencing those things, I have come around a bit and have identified some positive takeaways. Here they are:

- 1.) I know what happened, and how to fix it
- 2.) I hung tough for a decent marathon after hitting a very low point late on the bike
- 3.) I'm proud I had the balls to go for it
- 4.) While it was not the day I was going for, I was still 72nd in the world, which I guess isn't too shabby

From the congratulatory notes (much appreciated!), I understand that most people thought I had a good day, and may be confused that I was disappointed. The reason I am disappointed is because I know what I am capable of, and what my training indicated I could do, and my race wasn't a good reflection of that ability. I had a breakthrough season, but didn't cap it off with a breakthrough where it counted, at my "A" race. I set high expectations for Kona and ultimately chose a risky execution strategy that was either going to pay off with a huge result, or end in what happened (or worse). Here were my goals going in:

Goal: Sub-9 and podium

Reach Goal: 1st amateur across the line

Ultimate Goal: 1st amateur and, if conditions were favorable, the age group world record (8:37)

I met none of them. Given the fact that conditions were particularly difficult this year (even though the forecast was a favorable one with calm winds and cloud cover), going under 9 would have been an extraordinary day, but being on the podium was well within my reach (I was 5min off but estimate that with a more conservative bike strategy, I would have been >15min faster). Why would I risk being off the podium trying to hit a homerun? Here's why:

- 1.) My training indicated I could do it. Biking at 250w was on the higher end of my range (79% of FTP), but after trying to blow myself up 3 times and failing to do so, it's a shame I finally found that limit in Kona.
- 2.) If I biked at a more conservative 235-240w and ran onto the podium but didn't give myself a chance at the top spot, I would regret not having put myself in position to go for it. I would have asked myself "what if?" and I didn't want that to happen
- 3.) Conversations with my coach and others resulted in us all agreeing that 250w was appropriate.
- 4.) Forecasts indicated favorable conditions, the type that warrant a more aggressive strategy, but we were surprised with much tougher than expected conditions (windier and hotter)
- 5.) Subconsciously, I was too [choose your adjective..."arrogant" or "overly optimistic" or "delusional" are a few that come to my mind] to think that if the aggressive plan went wrong, it would result in me falling back enough to not be on the podium

So what went wrong?? Read a few more paragraphs to the Bike recap...

Swim - 1:03:11 / 368th fastest. A touch slower than expected but not bad. I haven't been swimming much this year and instead devoted my resources to bike/run improvement, so it didn't surprise me that I was a couple minutes slower than my time in 2013 at Kona. It was very physical as it always is, but I did a good job swimming efficiently.

T1 - quick. Moved swiftly through transition pulling up my sleeves and arm coolers while running to my bike

Bike - 4:57:21 / 170th fastest. I went for it, and paid the price. I rode too aggressively through mile 70 and had a really tough last 40 miles. What happened?? A combination of these three:

1.) Dehydration. I was drinking a lot, and taking more sodium than any race I've done before, but when the medical tent volunteers told me I lost 17lbs during the race, it explained a lot

2.) Nearly Bonking. My "aggressive" cycling for the first 70 miles involved not just targeting a high effort level, but surging to pass groups followed by easing up to stay out of drafting zones. At a steady 250w, I burn 75% fat / 25% carbs and my nutrition plan is appropriate, but when an athlete employs a hammer and soft-pedal pattern, they burn carbs VERY fast when they're hammering (for me, 75% carbs at 300w) and it depletes your 2000c of glycogen stores rapidly. I was low on energy at mile 90 because of that, and so I took my [#UCAN](#) early (mile 90 instead of at mile 100). Things I could have done to prevent the low energy...I could have ridden steadier to stay in a better fat-burning zone. I could have taken another 100-200c of UCAN. I could have taken my 2nd bottle of UCAN even earlier (mile 70 instead of 90). Any one of those three, or a combination, would have solved my issue. Lesson learned.

3.) Fatigue. Training indicated I was capable, but fatigue combined with the above 2 reasons led me to a dark place

I struggled to hold over 200w for the last 20 miles and bled about 10 minutes on my competitors. Overall, I held 238w NP.

T2 - horrible. I felt faint, dizzy, weak, and shaky. All a result of the dehydration and lack of fuel. The bottle of UCAN I took at mile 90 hadn't kicked in yet, but fortunately did as I started the run. I spent an extra 1:30 here trying to get a hold of myself

Run - 3:15:02 / 75th fastest. The part of the day that I was most proud of. I hung tough mentally to still put forth a great effort even though the time doesn't reflect it. Given how low of a place I came from, it was a miracle I ran as fast as I did. I thought on several occasions over the first 2 miles that I should just "throw in the towel" and to "just walk/jog and enjoy it" because my Ultimate goal was now impossible. I fought the demons and I'm glad I did. I was able to run my way into the top 100.

Overall - 9:23:12, 72nd in the world, 11th age group. I took in just 681c for the entire race, or 73 calories per hour, and besides the late bike issue that I now know how to solve, I felt fueled the whole race.

All in all, I'm proud that I had the balls to go for it. It's not like me to do that - I'm normally more conservative - but I'm glad that I had the courage to take a risk on the Big Stage.

First off - a massive thank you to my [#IronWife Lauren Bach](#) who put up with all the time I spent training, picked up the slack when I was too exhausted to do things, and believe in me even I didn't. You are incredible!

Thank you to my father-in-law [Gerard Cieremans](#), Aunt [Meri](#), cousins [Regina Gallant](#) and [Shana Gallant](#), and [Adrian Gray](#) for coming to Kona to cheer me on!

Huge thank yous to all my sponsors!

[Team Zoot](#) is an incredible group I have been part of for two years, running in [Zoot Sports](#) amazingly comfortable shoes and apparel.

My coach [Earl Walton](#) at [Tailwind Endurance](#) pushed me to new heights again this season, challenging me when the time was right, and backing me off when I needed a break (even when I didn't think I did)

[Joe LoPorto](#), [Marty Miserandino](#) and [Ronald Gainer](#) at [Fit Werx NJ](#) are a massive support for all things cycling for me from fittings to equipment to tuneups. Top-notch customer service from top-notch guys

[Nicci Schock](#) at [Elevate by Nicci](#) helps me to continue to experiment with the magic of [Bob Seebohar](#)'s Metabolic Efficiency Training ([#MET](#)).

[Varun Sriram](#) at [Generation UCAN](#) - thank you for your amazing product that has revolutionized nutrition for me and so many others.

[Joshua Grahman](#) at [Clutch Physical Therapy](#) - wow, another injury-free year of training! [#AthleteMechanic](#)
[#injuryFreeWithClutchPT](#)

Thank you [Marc-andre Perron](#), [Gilles Cantin](#) and [Tanaka Ceepo Nobuyuki](#) at [CEEPO Triathlon Bikes](#) for an excellent first year on my speedy [#CEEPO](#) Viper

Thank you [Smith Optics](#) for perfect vision through my sporty sunglasses in our first year together

A final thank you to Todd Schragen at [All-Pro Health](#) for a couple last minute tuneups in Kona.

I'll be writing a full Race Report (PDF) as well that I'll be happy to share with those who request. Feel free to contact me with any questions or comments, and thank you all for your support this season!!

[#RoadToKona](#)

Further Notes:

- I beat 9 of the 58 pros, not including the 20 who DNF'd. I would have placed 30th in the pro race.
- I got beat by 5 women
- I was the 38th amateur
- I beat Kyle Buckingham by 3 minutes, Nathan Rickman (2nd at IMMD) by 20 minutes, Sam Gyde (perennial top amateur) by 14 minutes, Rafael Chieza Fortes Garcia (3rd at IMMD) by 47 minutes, Daniel Szajta (4th at IMMD) by 1hr 37 minutes and James Capparell (2nd amateur at Eagleman) by 18 minutes

