

Fantastic day at Ironman 70.3 Swansea for the Bynea.

For the second running of the Ironman 70.3 Swansea, there was much anticipation and excitement from all of the Club's participating athletes. As well as experienced athletes, we also had some first timers at this distance and even first-time triathletes!

During the lead up to the event we were blessed with some amazing weather meaning lots of training miles could be done on the bike and run, but annoyingly our open water swim practice was curtailed due to North Dock being out of action. We managed to get a couple of swims at Port Eynon but nowhere near enough open water swimming practice needed for your first 70.3 swim. You really can't underestimate how daunting it is knowing the first time you will experience a rolling swim start with 2000 athletes will be on race day, something you simply cannot practice or even really prepare for so understandably it is going to be the main thing on your mind.

As we got closer to race day the weather started to take a turn, we managed to get our first bike course training day in which covered the main climbs and descents that you needed to be aware of for race day, and a good 5k run off afterwards. A few weeks later and the weather was getting a little worse and sadly it stopped our second bike course day so it was a case of getting out on Gower as and when you could just to get a little more familiar with the course.

Race week had arrived, and the buzz had started, "what time is everyone going to register", and "have you taken out a second mortgage before you go to the Ironman shop?". Time to double and triple check your kit for race day, taking photos of your kit layout and sending them to friends in case there is anything you've missed. "What do I need if the weather is as bad as the forecast?" was on everyone's mind with the addition of a gilet and a second pair of socks full of Vaseline ready for the run if it's wet being the popular additions.

Friday morning arrived and at 9am the queue was already forming at registration, once our forms etc had been checked we received the famous ruck sack with our race numbers, swim hat and set of stickers for the bike and transition bags. Once you have these in your hands it suddenly becomes real, and you realise you have no more training rides or runs, no more swims and it dawns on you that next time you get your goggles on you will be alongside the Dock and about to see what you are made of.

Saturday is racking day for the bike and your bags, hopefully placing a freshly washed and sparkling bike on the rack and going to hang your bags on the racks in the tent, time for another check – have you got all your bike kit in the blue bag and run in the red bag? Once this is all done it's off home to fill your belly and put your feet up for the rest of the day. We were however lucky enough to be able to go and watch some of the Para-Tri that was being held in SA1, it was absolutely amazing watching these athletes perform and would urge everyone to go and watch should it be in the calendar for 2024.

Race day arrives! The alarm was set for 3am (ish) and that all important race day breakfast that you had been carefully planning for days (peanut butter on toast and a whole stovetop espresso for me to get my going at that time of the morning), and time head off to try and park. The question on everyone's mind was the weather – was it going to be as bad as feared? yes, was the answer! I arrived at the Strand car park at 5am, and it has started to pick to rain. As others arrived and battled with the pay and display machine the rain was now getting a little heavier in short sharp showers, we were all thinking that if it stayed like this, we wouldn't be too unhappy.

Wetsuit half on, and bags full of drinks bottles and energy gels and bars ready to put on the bike we head over to Transition, the rain had stopped for now and all fingers were crossed for a dry race. After checking our tyres, loading the bike and then joining the queue for the inevitable nervous toilet stop we then walk through the tent and a final check of the bags and head over the swim start area. By now the vast majority of participants are congregating the other side of the white bridge near the lorry where we hand in our bags with our day clothes bag which we can then pick up after

the race. Constant checks of the watch as we feel the nerves ram up, and then the heavens opened! There was only one thing to do, get fully into our wetsuits and hand our day wear bags in and get wet. Time seemed to suddenly start flying by as we made our way over to the swim start area, as we approached the start area it was absolutely rammed with people which made it difficult to get to your desired swim start pen (there are self-seeding swim time pens – join the pen that represents your expected swim time). Suddenly, the Male Pro race was about to start which meant it was already 7am – where had the time gone? A few minutes later the Female Pro race starts, and what a sight it is to see these Elite athletes fly through the water. Next - it was time for Joanne the announcer to get our race under way with a bit of “Thunderstruuuuuuuck” as she says in her fabulous Irish accent.

The fast swimmers are entering the water, and us slower swimmers shuffle along as the queue moves towards the start pontoon, in no time at all and with a very unstylish flop I entered the water. As everyone knows, I get ever so excited at the start of races, but my thoughts were with our novices – Roxanne and Claire who were about to start what was obviously going to be a challenging day and not what you had hoped for on your first 70.3!

After the swim there is the ridiculous run down the road which absolutely kills your feet and over the bridge into the tent to get your bike gear on. The noise from the supporters is just incredible and really gets rid of any nerves you still have, but now is not the time to get carried away ~~there is still~~ the challenge of getting out of your wetsuit! Seeing legs and arms going everywhere and people falling on the floor after hopping and hopping with one leg stuck in their suit is not unusual and does re-assure you that everyone else is having the same problems as you and you are don't look daft.

Run to your bike, and once over the mount line you can climb on and get going trying to ignore the rain. By now it is really coming down which made the cobbles heading out past the Museum really slippery which almost made me slip off, but I managed not to hit the barrier. A gentle reminder to use your head and not get carried away.

By the time I got to Blackpill it was torrential, the roads flooding and visibility not being very good I guess everyone was praying they didn't hit a pothole that was now under water – keep saying to yourself: “stay away from the drains and the painted lines” - oh and check your brakes!!

Not long afterwards, as we approached Langland corner Nigel Morgan pulled alongside me and said his brakes were awful in the wet- not what you want when we are about to go down Caswell Hill!. The horrendous weather continued to batter us, with hail as we went over Parkmill I was looking all around at the sky and could not see a break in the clouds anywhere, I had resigned myself that this was going to be it for the day... a horrendous experience. But, as we turned at Reynoldston the rain stopped and it was evident that the worst of the rain had stayed near the coast, it was dry as we topped Cefn Bryn – happy days.

On to Welshmoor where we had the biggest tailwind and literally flew through there, but the joy was short lived as we then hit a monster head wind coming back over the common towards the Airport. Another blast down past the Gower Inn and time to get it in the Granny Cog in anticipation of “the climb”. Llundon climb was a Llundon walk for me, I had decided in training that I was going to walk it as I didn't have a third lung to help me breathe when I rode up it. It turned out to be the right decision for me, stayed calm and had a drink on the way up and listened to the noise of chains fighting to find a lower gear and people falling off as they couldn't go any further and the screams of the good climbers trying to get through the carnage. At the top I just hopped back on and zipped off passing lots of people searching for the elusive third lung!

Heading back through Kittle Quarry and back onto Oystermouth road it's time to spin up your legs and get them as fresh as they can be for the approaching run... well that's the theory, but – that monster tailwind had made its way to Oystermouth Road - it was amazing! I had run out of gears and was pedalling along at approx 28mph making the most of it. Approach the dismount line and hobble over to your racking spot remembering not to unclip your helmet until your bike is racked, then into the tent to get your daps on. With soaking wet feet, I went for the second socks full of

vaseline to try and avoid any blisters (which worked perfectly). As I was putting my daps on I saw my pal and neighbour Chris who had been training on the bike with me and then Nigel appeared as well, so we waited a minute or two so we could run together. We managed to get to the first feed station together chatting about the horrific experience we had just been through and how we planned to approach the run, it was clear that they both were running faster than I could keep up so I just dropped off the back and stuck to my pace. The supporters on the run course were absolutely crazy - literally a constant noise of people shouting either your name or shouts of "come on Bynea" - I was starting to enjoy myself, keeping strictly to my pace I was running better than I had run off the bike before and was now able to think of all the other Bynea athletes racing. Had they all got out of the swim, ok? Had they all made it off the bike, ok? Are they all safe and on the run? Approaching the furthest turn point at Backpill, still running well I knew I only had to run past the Bynea support crew (stop for a photo) and then we are home and dry I was feeling that good, but as I got onto Oystermouth Road and happened to look up at the footpath I saw Roxy- fantastic – she had made it off the bike and now running like the wind - as she does. The crunchy bridge was in sight, so time to do your zip up and look as good as possible or the finish line, but no matter how many times you do these kind of events nothing will feel as good as the finishing tunnel – it really is quite a special feeling seeing hundreds of strangers cheering for you, then I spotted Mam and Dad so had to stop for a hug and then run down that magic red carpet. You will never be so happy to be so knackered and sore I tell you!

After you cross the finish line and receiving your medal, the finish zone was incredibly well organised with plenty of food and drink as well as getting your finishers t-shirt and your day wear bag. Stuffed with pizza and fresh pineapple I went out into the supporter's zone to see Mam and Dad, and not long after I had been there Roxy appeared coming towards me – medal around her neck, arms in the air and shouted "Nic - I bloody done it!", just fantastic – but I wanted to know about Claire and as if by magic I spotted Julian and Arianna. I asked where she was and Julian said they had just watched her finish and she was on her way, moments later another beaming face and big cheers -everyone had finished which is all we could have hoped for.

We have to congratulate everyone for finishing what was possibly the worst conditions we are likely to experience at such an event. Our finishers: Daniel and Andrew Jenkins, Mark Bowen, Daniel Totterdale, Nigel Morgan, Jeff Partridge, Kevin Pullin, Roxanne Turner, Claire Protheroe and of your truly. A special mention goes to Bynea member racing for Tri Potential - Kyle James Davies on coming third in his age group once again.

Also, a huge thank you to everyone who braved the weather to come and support on the course – every shout is like a little push in the back helping us on towards the finish line and thank you to everyone who sent messages of support if you couldn't make it.

The big question: Who is in for 2024?????

If you have been inspired and fancy giving triathlon a go, then speak to any of our multi-sport members about how to get started or come along to a Friday dip in the Dock where we always have a coffee and a chat after the swim. You can come along to HQ on a Wednesday and have a chat with me or feel free to get in touch via messenger or WhatsApp.

Thanks for reading,

Nic Forbes