

**PRE-RACE**

I had a good night's sleep the night before the race, and was already awake before the alarm when off at 4:10am. Ate some oatmeal, finished packing my gear, and headed out to the car. Dean drove me downtown so I could drop off my special needs bags at the capitol square, then I walked over to Monona Terrace for body marking and final bike preparation.

Got all of the above done by 5:30am, so I had lots of time to just relax inside Monona Terrace. Found a quiet spot to lay down, crank up the volume on the ipod, and review my plans for the day. I didn't want to get in the water too early, so I waited until close to 6:20 to put my wetsuit on, and slowly headed out the door. My "peeps" were waiting at the usual spot at the top of the helix, so spent some time getting last-minute well-wishes and pre-race photos. Then joined the herd of athletes making their way toward to the water.

Once in the water, I had less than 10 minutes to warm-up and then relax. Right before the start I looked up at the crowd and could see the "Iron M" banner that dean was holding, so that was a great way to start the morning. The canon went off at 7am, and the race was on! It was an absolutely gorgeous morning, with air temperature in the 50's at the race start, a very calm lake with water temp in the 70's, and clear skies. Much better than the cold and rainy weather I had all day in 2006!

SWIM – 2.4 miles

The Wisconsin IM swim is a 2-loop rectangular course, with an in-water start. During my first ironman in 2006, I knew to expect a very chaotic swim, but was still surprised by how crazy it was. I kinda figured this time around would be a little smoother, having a better idea of where to position myself and just knowing what to expect. But there's no way to get around the fact that a mass start of 2400 athletes in the water all at the same time is absolute chaos. It did not seem any easier to me this time, and in fact it seemed like the people around me were really unnecessarily aggressive and combative. It was so congested during most of the swim that it was a standstill at the turn buoys for every single turn until the very last one heading back to shore after the 2nd lap. Crazy.

I had decided to start toward the very inside of the starting area, and planned to swim inside the buoys on the straight sections (you just have to swim to the outside of the turn buoys), because I had heard from several people that it's much less congested there, and then you don't have to swim so far wide around the course to get an open space. Well, apparently everyone had gotten the same memo, because it was really crowded! But other than the congestion and aggressiveness, the swim went very well. I ended up getting out of the water about a minute ahead of my goal, and 6 minutes faster than last time.

At the swim exit, there are volunteers called "peelers", or strippers as we like to refer to them, who help you quickly get your wetsuit off. I was able to find my friend Jessica who was volunteering, and she did a great job stripping me!

TRANSITION - T1

As usual, the jog up the helix into the transition area was very exciting! There are lots of people cheering, and there was a huge group of friends waiting at the top. It was great to see everyone, and hear their words of encouragement. We're so spoiled competing in an Ironman, because there are so many spectators and volunteers that are SO helpful throughout the day. In the transition area, a volunteer handed me everything I needed, helped me put sunscreen on, and then packed up my swim gear as I headed out the door. Amazing.

BIKE – 112 miles

It was so awesome to see the sunny skies as I got on my bike! There was no wind in the early part of the day, and it was still pretty cool outside, which is a great way to start a long ride. The course starts with a 14 mile stretch from Madison to Verona, then two times around a 42-mile loop with some serious hills, then 14 miles back. I'm fortunate to be able to ride portions of the course over a dozen times a year, so I am very familiar with every inch of it. I was reminded of that many times throughout the day, when I saw people having to make sudden gear changes because they didn't know what was coming up, or staying in too high of a gear because they didn't know just how steep the hills are.

It was great to see so many friends out on the bike course, both those racing and those cheering. Dean, Jeff, and Jonnie were EVERYWHERE out on the course taking pictures and cheering. I think I saw them 5 times throughout the ride!

I felt so incredibly awesome on the first half of the bike ride. My strategy was to ride easy for the first 40-60 miles, then ride harder during the 2nd half if I felt good. The last time I rode the course loop, which was a week before the race with my friend Jonnie, I set a new PR of 2 hrs and 18 minutes on the 42-mile loop (thanks to drafting off Jonnie!). I remember talking to him that day, saying I wouldn't be riding nearly that fast on race day, since we only rode the 42 miles that day (with no swim before, or run after!), and race day would be so much longer and drafting is not allowed. Despite the fact that I felt like I was riding really easy on race day, I did that first loop in 2:20. Everything felt smooth, the hills were easier than usual, and I could do no wrong.

Of course, that all changed about 10 miles into the 2nd loop. I had already started getting a headache after the swim, probably from some dehydration after swimming for over an hour without being able to drink any fluids. I thought I was taking adequate fluids on the bike, but apparently I wasn't. It was also starting to get really hot (ok, in all fairness to the athletes who competed in the 95 degree temps in '05, it was only low/mid 80's this year, but for me that's really hot!). So the dehydration headache turned into a migraine, and then I didn't feel like I wanted to eat much. So dehydration + migraine + bonk doesn't look pretty. Around mile 70 I slowed way down, pounded the fluids and electrolytes, took my prescription migraine meds, and just tried to survive. But the strategy worked, and after 2 hours of feeling like crap I finally started to feel good again for the final stretch back to Madison. Good thing, because the wind had picked up, and there was a bit of a headwind. In the end, my bike split was still 12 minutes faster than my goal, and 40 minutes faster than in 2006.

TRANSITION - T2

No matter how good you feel on the bike ride, after 112 miles it is awesome to get off that bike seat! Just knowing that you get to hand off your bike to a volunteer at the top of the helix makes it really easy to get up that 2-story ramp! I had a smooth transition, getting out of my biking gear and into my running clothes, again with the help from one of the many great volunteers.

RUN – 26.2 miles

By the time I got started on the run, it was just plain hot and sunny. Luckily there's lots of water and ice on the course. Despite the heat, I felt surprisingly good for nearly all of the run. I started at a fast pace for the first 2 miles even though I didn't feel like I was going fast. Then I settled into a 10 - 11:00 min/mile pace for the rest of the marathon. Only one mile was really tough, around mile 9, but felt better after taking some calories.

There were so many GREAT spectators out on the run course, especially at the capitol square and along State Street. As always, so many great friends were out there cheering and/or volunteering on the run course. Our race numbers have our first name printed on them, so everyone cheers for you by name, whether they know you or not. That makes it so much easier to keep going!

Many people are surprised to learn that in addition to water and gatorade, warm flat cola is served at the aid stations on the run course. A LOT of athletes have told me how awesome it is to drink that stuff. I have always been skeptical, but I started drinking a little cola at every other aid station during the 2nd half of the run. It is absolutely amazing. It settled my stomach, gave me just enough calories (by then I couldn't even force myself to eat anything else), and tasted so so so good. My last 6 miles actually felt really good (well, painfully good), and I was ready to get it done.

The finish line of an Ironman is so full of energy and excitement, that words can't begin to describe it. The cheering fans are crazy, Mike Reilly's voice over the loudspeaker is awesome (even if he calls you Michael instead of Michele...), and knowing you're done with a 140.6 mile journey is such a great feeling. Definitely makes you feel like a rock star. This year didn't disappoint. Being able to cross that finish line made all the pain earlier in the day worth it, especially when it was 90 minutes faster than last time.

POST-RACE

After getting through the finish area, it was great to see Dean and Laurel & the tribe! Went to congratulate Katie on a great day, waited in line for a massage, and hung out to congratulate Bobby, Roy, and all the other friends racing that day. A lot of athletes had an unusually tough day. I think the hot weather had a lot to do with it, since it had been so cool for the past month until this week. It was very difficult to keep up with the fluid intake, and that got a lot of people into trouble. But it's all part of the game.

Overall, I had a fantastic day. I could not do this without all the super volunteers and great spectators. Having strangers help you and encourage you all day, with smiles on their faces, is such a great experience. And having familiar faces out there supporting you all day is really gratifying. I know how exhausting it is to be out there spectating and volunteering all day...my feet have been more sore from a day of spectating at an Ironman, than actually racing one. So a huge THANKS to all the friends, family, and other volunteers and spectators, and especially my Iron Sherpa, Dean. You all really do make the day worthwhile, and keep me going!

RESULTS:	<u>2009</u>	<u>2006</u>
Swim	1:19:26	1:25:08
T1	11:21	14:24
Bike	6:35:50 (17.0mph)	7:13:52 (15.5 mph)
T2	7:59	11:50
Run	4:39:56 (10:42 min/mi)	5:25:36 (12:26 min/mi)
OVERALL	12:54:30	14:30:48