

2011 Tall Texan Triathlon Race Report

-Christina Cruz-

I was really looking forward to this race. I have been building for an Ironman, and the thought of doing a half with this much volume under my belt made me feel certain I could snag a PR. Going under 6 hours in a half-ironman has been eluding me for a while, but my running has really improved recently so I was sure I could do it this time.

Since this was such a small race, less than 10 women in my age group, I cyber-stalked my fellow competitors on athlinks.com. Now I knew that I had a good shot at placing, and if I had an awesome day, of maybe even winning my age group. As a constant middle-of-the-pack placer, I was really excited about this prospect so I emailed my coach, Beth Lamie, and asked her for some last minute tips.

My friend and favorite training partner, Tina, and I stayed in the gorgeous guest house of Lisa Kelly just ten minutes away from the race start. I woke up before the alarm went off at 5 am and got started with my pre-race routine. I ate a bagel with peanut butter, got dressed, and re-checked my tri bag for all of my necessities. Tina and I were ready to go. The transition area only opened one hour before the race started so there wasn't a whole lot of extra time, which I liked. It was overcast that morning and was supposed to stay that way which meant we were in for a cool race. I got my transition area set-up, put my wetsuit on, and ate a Gu as I headed down to the water.

The water was 63° and with my wetsuit on it felt pretty refreshing. After the first wave with all of the men went off, I headed into the water to claim my starting position. I normally like to start an open water swim towards the front of the pack, but off to the side so that I can slowly work my way in towards the buoys while avoiding a lot of contact. All of the women were grouping together on the outside though, so I was able to line up on the inside with a straight shot to the first buoy. There were only 5 buoys marking the entire 1.2 mile swim course, so sighting was difficult at times, but overall I felt good. I concentrated on having strong arms and a light kick. My goal was to catch the men's wave that had started 5 minutes ahead of me. I caught several of them and could see that I was only a couple of minutes back from the lead pack as we exited the water. My swim time was 37:44 (1:57/100m) and according to the wetsuit strippers I was 8th out of the water. I sped through transition in 1:07 and hopped on my bike.

I was a little chilly on the bike until my clothes dried out and I already had to pee; bad news for trying to prevent people from catching up to you. My bike computer wasn't working properly right out of the gate and wouldn't accurately read MPH, but at least it still had my cadence. The course is very hilly and felt like it was more uphill than down and the entire stretch was varying degrees of rough chip seal. Right away people were losing things off their bikes due to all of the jostling and vibrating, I even saw a lost bottle cage. My private parts were unfortunately doing most of the shock absorption, so I was fairly miserable most of the time. I remembered Beth telling me to keep my cadence high to keep my legs fresh for the run, so I just concentrated on that. Then, for the first time ever, I was able to pee on my bike. At that point, I immediately declared the day a success! I have been trying to master that skill for ages and have been jealous of all of my friends who could do it. And apparently, after you break the seal, it just kind of keeps leaking out afterwards, which is great. Around mile 20-25 a girl in my age group passed me. I was disappointed but told myself to try to keep her in sight so I could catch her on the run. That lasted for about 10 miles until I finally lost her. I told myself that even though she was having a strong bike that her cadence was slow so she wasn't going to have a good run. No one else in

my age group passed me and my bike split was 3:25:54 (avg. 16.32 MPH). As I dismounted my bike, a volunteer working transition told me that there was only one girl in front of me and that I could catch her. As I put on my Newton's he yelled at me, "Get out of transition NOW!" I said, "Okay!" shot a snot rocket on the ground and took off, T2 was 0:58.

Immediately I notice that my Garmin isn't working. Why doesn't my technology want to work for me today? I figure it must be because of the cloud cover and keep it on to get an accurate run split. The run starts with a short but very steep uphill on caliche rock which I think is just mean. The off road portion only lasts for about .5 miles before we got on pavement. Shortly after the one mile marker is an out-and-back portion so I finally got a good look at who was in front of me. I checked the age of every female that went past me. First I see a blonde girl whose calf says 30 on it. Crap, she's been ahead of me the whole time! Then I see the girl who passed me on the bike. I make it my mission to pass her on the run. Again I have to pee, but I will not allow myself to stop when I'm in the hunt so I force myself to relax and I pee while I'm running! Double victory on the bladder front! The only bad things with this strategy is that your shoes and socks get wet which ultimately led to a little blister. The run is a two loop course with a lot of hills and false flats. It took almost 3 miles for me to settle into a good pace. I finished the first loop thinking it wasn't too bad, passed the volunteer who'd been rooting for me and said, "There are two girls in front of me. How far are they?" He said, "I think it's just one and she's right there at the top of the hill. You can see her."

I charged up the caliche hill for the last time and kind of saw someone far off in the distance who might be her, but everyone was wearing a black and white top that day and she had kind of a thick build, so I wasn't sure if it was her or not. Just before I got on the pavement I passed a guy who was walking and asked, "The person in black and white ahead, was it a girl? Did you notice?" He said yes, I thanked him and went after her. On the out and back, the first girl runs past me again, and this time I'm not sure if her calf says 30 or 36. Either way I'm thinking I'm running for first or second place. Then, right before the turnaround, I see the girl in black and white. I am close now. Beth had told me if I was going to make a pass on the run to do it definitively. To blow by her so she doesn't even think about trying to keep up with me. We were coming up to a long stretch that was slightly downhill and I had already noticed that she wasn't letting her legs go to let gravity do the work for her. I decided that that would be where I made my move. I let loose, we give each other a couple of "good job girl's" and I leave her behind. I was so happy in that moment. Then, probably around mile 10, I start falling apart. I feel terrible, I know I must be slowing down, and I just want it to be over with. Then it happens. Around 11.5 miles into the run she catches me. I was so upset and so mad at myself that I wanted to cry. Instead, I cursed at myself and kept repeating to stay with her. If she was going to take a place away from me, I was going to make her work for it. I asked her if her Garmin was working and how much we had to go. She told me and I thanked her. I managed to stay a couple of feet behind her, through much pain, up until the last aid station and then she made her mistake. She stopped! Instead of grabbing a cup and running through the station, she stops and walks through, slowly! Well here was my chance. I pick up the pace as much as my wasted body will allow me to. I know I have a mile to go and tell myself I can collapse at the finish line. We turn into the park towards the finish and I look behind me to see where she is. She's maybe 50 yards back and I know that if she can sprint, that she can overtake me. I let it all out. I run as hard as I possibly can and "sprint" for the finish line. I see Lisa cheering for me and try to muster up the energy to smile for my finish line picture. My run split was 1:48:49 (avg. 8:18 min/mile; faster than my recent open half marathon pace), which was the fastest run split in my age group, and I end up beating her by only 10 seconds.

The volunteers are saying "good job" and someone is trying to take my chip off my ankle. I have to put most of my body weight on him to keep from falling over and I immediately go sit in someone's chair. I have no idea whose it is and I don't care. Someone asks if I need to go to medical and I tell them I just need to sit down, so they pack a couple of towels full of ice and let me rest. Lisa comes over to talk to me and offers to walk to my car to go get my favorite post race drink for me, Mexico Coke. It takes me a long time and a couple of rest breaks to walk over to transition to even give her my car keys. I sit near the finish line to wait for her and chat to some of the other finishers hanging around the area about how hard the bike was. My Mexico Coke is refreshing and I get the volunteers to hide another one in the ice so Tina's will be super cold when she finishes, then Lisa and I head over to sit on her tailgate to wait for Tina and cheer for other racers. After Tina finishes, we load up our bikes and it's only 45 minutes until the awards ceremony starts so I hang around in the pavilion while Tina leaves with Lisa. For the first time in my life, several people come up to me to tell me how fast I was running. I was honestly shocked, but thanked them and told them that today was a new personal best for me and that I had been working really hard on my running. The awards ceremony starts and I end up being second in my age group after what I feel like was as epic battle!