



St. Croix Ironman 70.3 2010

St. Croix Race Report - May 2, 2010 – Beth Lamie

THE WEEK BEFORE



We arrived in St. Croix on Sunday, April 25 – a week before the race. We flew American Airlines through Miami and although they made us check our carry-on bags (\$20 ea), we were “only” charged \$100 per bike to get to St. Croix. We arrived at the Henry Ralston Airport about 15 minutes early and were pleasantly surprised to find that our bike and luggage had arrived on the same flight we did, and our driver – Rudy – was waiting to take us to our hotel. We were actually staying on an island OFF the island of St. Croix, so we took the cab to the ferry and took a ferry 400 yards to Hotel on the Cay (pronounced ‘key’). Our check-in was relatively simple – except for carrying the luggage and bike boxes up 2 flights of stairs in 90 degree heat, and checked into our room which was so close to the water you thought you were on a houseboat.

We were completely unpacked by 4pm so we took the ferry back across to Christianstead and had a fantastic dinner at Rum Runners on the Boardwalk. I had fresh Wahoo (white, flakey fish) with organic locally grown vegetables and watermelon salsa and Mike had grass fed beef with the same vegetables. We headed back to the hotel and got to bed early as we had been on the go since 3:30 that morning.

The next day we decided to get as much done as we could. Our plan was to rent a car, pick up groceries, get the bikes put together, and ride about 90 mins on the course. We’ve traveled enough times to island resorts to know that you need to check you “stateside attitude” at Logan Airport unless you want to be in a constant state of frustration by the lack of hustle demonstrated by the people you will be depending on. But it’s not an easy attitude to slip into, and we were challenged right from the beginning. Our first tip for those traveling to St. Croix is DO NOT try to rent a car from Budget – even if they do advertise the most locations. This is our second year in a row here, and they either don’t have cars, or don’t show up to meet you to rent the car, or give you an attitude that says “you NOT going to make me work” when you show up at the rental counter.

Mike actually had the rental agent hang up on him this year when he wouldn't stop at the first "no". Instead, we arranged a 2-day rental from Centerline Car Rental so we could get everything done, and then planned to chill until the race. We quickly put our bikes together so that we could ferry over to meet the rental agent and it all went fairly smoothly – EXCEPT that the headset on my Guru had come apart during the flight over (hard to imagine, since they handle the bikes so carefully – NOT!). So, what's the big deal – put it back together, right? Turns out, the Guru headset is proprietary, and doesn't screw into the frame (despite the screw). It actually expands inside the frame. So after a call to Brian Hughes and about an hour's worth of working the headset puzzle, we had the bike held-together enough to get over to the mainland.



By noon-time we had completed the paperwork for the car, and had done our grocery shopping – which was a little challenging in itself – surprisingly, fresh fruit is not as plentiful on tropical islands as you would imagine, but then again, it's probably actually fresher than the beautiful of array of fruit one sees stateside...

Anyway, we still needed to get air in the tires and I needed to have my headset looked at. You could contemplate doing this insanely hilly course without a climbing cassette or even without brakes, but without the ability to STEER? Not happening. There was only one bike shop listed in the yellow pages and it was on the other side of the island. I was hoping a dive shop might have CO2, but the owner of one of the shops told me they use something other than what I was looking for to inflate the buoyancy compensators. The race "expo" (one room with a few race t-shirts) wouldn't be open until Thursday, and that was looking like our only hope to get air in the tires and for me to get my headset looked at. I was seriously wondering if I was going to be able to even do the race!

You don't see anyone cycling around St. Croix - it's not like there is a huge cycling community there - so we had to get really resourceful. We decided to check at the info center for a place renting bikes, thinking they might have some tools, and we really lucked out. First of all, the woman working there was originally from New Hampshire, and secondly, she had the number for the race director on her speed-dial! Within minutes she was directing us to the "official" bike shop for the race. We hurried over to the tiny shop and knew we were in luck when we saw CO2 cartridges, Power Bars, inner tubes and the accessories we most associate with triathlon. Unfortunately, the owner had a bike on the stand that was stripped apart and he seemed completely overwhelmed. The owner of the bike, a young triathlete named Timo, seemed very at ease with the fact that a week before the race the local St. Croix bike shop was trying to build him a bike because his had been destroyed by the airlines. He was more than happy to help us reposition the headset so that it was doing its job safely. Good Karma, and I saw him after the race with a big smile, so I hope he got what he wanted out of the race.

The athletes were asked not to ride in the downtown area, so Mike and I made a plan to ride a part of the course that would get us out of Dodge quickly. We parked the car just at the edge of the downtown area, hopped on the bikes and started pedaling north. We were still in a fairly congested area with no shoulder when the heavens opened. OK –great. Now I was testing my headset in the pouring rain, riding on the "wrong" side of a road (left) with no shoulder and potholes that were now hidden by puddles. Every time I get myself in

a 'situation' on the swim, bike or run, I think of 3 people – my mother and my kids. That is, when I haven't been WITH Cait for those situations. (the solo Hawaii swim, the New Hampshire bike ride after the sun set, the long run in Walpole where we got really lost



I always get this feeling that if I get out of this unscathed, I'm going to have some explaining to do! Anyway, I was with Mike for this one, and thinking quickly, he ducked into the Buccaneer resort where we found cover until the rain passed. He didn't consider that the way this day was going a sign that we shouldn't continue, and I'm so glad. Once the rain passed we had the most wonderful bike ride on some of the hilliest and most scenic roads we've ever seen. The traffic on this part of the course was very light and we'd managed to find the only 3 miles of fresh pavement on the entire island! We loved it so

much, we went back the next day, this time taking in the 2 mile stretch up to the easternmost part of the United States – Point Udall. It was a very steep ride, but you never felt like you might not make it. At the top we were the only ones there and we were rewarded with unbelievable views and then a crazy fast ride back to where we turned off. We could ride that part all out, because we knew no one was going to come up behind us. Each of these rides was just under 90 mins and helped us acclimate to the weather and test the bikes without taking too much out of us this close to the race.



Mike had severely strained a calf muscle just a week before the race (likely due to new running shoes) so was not running at all the week leading up to the race. He was wearing his compression socks, icing and elevating it. I did a few short runs, avoiding the hottest part of the day (105 degrees) and keeping it to mostly flat sections of the course, which means doing repeats, since nothing is flat there.

We had done the practice swim every day and as you may have heard, had gotten a chance to get used to the E-Coli in the water!

Apparently, the St. Croix water department had recently been fined for dumping raw sewage into the water near the course and several beaches were still closed. Mike and I had missed that little article so we were swimming there every day. Maggie and Duffy came to the swim Thursday morning and asked us if the water had been making us sick. We told them that we had been sick every day (but only for a few hours in the mornings) but we hadn't been drinking the water. That's when we found out about the Associated Press article Maggie saw. Oh well. I have to say, the water sure LOOKED beautiful and was exactly the right temperature for a "no wetsuit" swim.



My report on St. Croix wouldn't be complete without a mention of this guy. We met Kamal (the driver) when we were in St. Croix last year. Mike saw him with another guy walking up and down the boardwalk. Kamal was always carrying heavy boxes and his buddy always had an empty dolly. Mike couldn't let that go, so the second time he saw them, he stopped them and made a joke about Kamal always doing the heavy lifting and what was his buddy doing. Of course, we saw them three times a day after that – he was at packet pick-up and at the official bike support office. Turns out Kamal works for Sports Stats, which is one of the race management companies for St. Croix. We were almost buddies by the end of the week.

Two and a half months later, we were at the swim start in Lake Placid and as Mike was waiting to go in the water, a golf cart went by with a couple of guys hanging off the back. Instantly I recognized Kamal and said, "Hey! Isn't that?" Mike and Kamal were already pointing at each other with looks of amazement on their faces. We ended up seeing Kamal several times in Lake Placid that weekend too. So, of course, we were looking for him in St. Croix this time around. Sure enough, day 2 we walked by a van with a bunch of bikes leaning against it. In the distance, Mike could see Kamal coming towards him to pick up one of the bikes, but Mike recognized him first, so he made like he was going to steal the bike! Great fun. Of course, we saw Kamal all week, and this picture was taken on the run course where I saw him during the race. He stopped his golf cart and asked if everything was ok and if I was going to make it.



Anyway, the Friday before the race Mike had his hair cut at his 'usual' place – the oldest barbershop in St. Croix. That night, Christianstead had a street party called Jump Up and Mike and I went over early. We took in the street vendors quickly, but then went to the Strand section of downtown where a lot of the artists had little shops. Mike made friends with the son of one of the shop owners, and they bonded over basketball while I picked out a small hand-painted clock. This kid was 12 years old and he told Mike he could name the best player on every team. He told us he wanted to play for the Celtics, but first he wanted to go to college. We made it a pretty early night and started to get into "race mode". Going to be early and waking up early so Sunday morning wouldn't be a shock.

Saturday, we attended the mandatory race meeting (where they denied that the water was unsafe, claiming it was a rumor), and then spent the rest of the day off our feet in the lobby of the King Christian Hotel – the only place on the island that we could get internet service. Cait was racing the St. George Ironman that day, and I had a 3-way connection going across the northern hemisphere with my mother on the laptop in Massachusetts, me in St. Croix, and Mikaela calling and texting from St. George! This was the first time Cait had done an Ironman when I wasn't there, and it was very difficult for me to relax, but as always, Cait made us unbelievably proud and Mikaela's excitement, and my mother's reaction to Cait's race made us feel like we were there. We had a great dinner with Maggie and Duffy back at the restaurant at their condo, and then

headed back to our place where we finalized laying everything out for the race. We were in bed by 8:30 with two alarms set for 3:30 am.



Fortunately, we were able to fall right to sleep and woke up bright and early Sunday morning. I was feeling under the weather, but I was still excited to race, and although Mike and I had our bikes and race bags packed, we began the race prep that I've been doing for the last 14 years. Cait phoned at 5 am (3 am her time) to wish us luck and then Mike and I hopped on the ferry with our bikes and bags and set out for the transition area. It was still dark when we began setting up, so our headlamps came in handy. By 6 am we were set up and ready to but we had another hour before our waves went off. The

swim starts back on the island where we were staying, so we hopped the ferry over and went back to the room to chill for 30 minutes. At 6:30, the pros went in the water and Mike and I swam around to get loose and get the heart rate up. Mike's calf was still an unknown, but other than that he was feeling good and ready to go. Mike and I were in different waves (he was about 20 mins ahead of me) but by 7:15 all the half iron waves we in the water and the race had begun.

Now I'll tell you, I've never believed that you would pull something off on race day that you hadn't done in training. I had spent a lot of time on the bike, but not enough time on the run and in the water to 'race' either. Also, I really didn't want to be in the middle of a no-wetsuit swim and have my legs cramp up, so I definitely took my time on the swim. My plan was to use this race, and my upcoming Eagleman Half as (very expensive) training weekends. What would I get out of this that would make it worthwhile to spend several hundred dollars to travel to and participate in these 2 races? It's great fun, the races are well done, often the locations are beautiful, and although I'm undertrained to race the distance, if I pace them correctly they are very well supported training venues. The best part is, I get valuable first-hand experience on race courses that enables me to recommend a race or not, and gives me great insight to pass on to athletes who chose to do these races.

Mike on the other hand, came out of the water side by side with Jeff Cuddabeck, a former pro triathlete who ended up winning Mike's age group. He had a quick transition and was out on the course right behind the pros. My first transition was very quick and before I knew it I was on the bike heading out of town. Triathletes from the early waves were already coming back into town, as the course heads out and then back into town before heading out to the hills. That part of the race went by very quickly. I came back through town, around the hot corner and out of town again towards the hills. I reminded myself to keep drinking even though the heat didn't seem unbearable at that point (it was only about 9 am). As it started to get hot, however, I found it difficult to eat, and in these situations, I find liquid nutrition to be the easiest for me to handle.



I can't even describe how beautiful this course is, and yeah, it's hilly and windy and the roads haven't been repaved in years, but the course is closed and because only ~500 people do this race and it's one 56-mile loop, it really spreads out. Except for the sections downtown where the course overlaps, you ride by yourself quite a bit. I could see people ahead of me and behind me, but they were never very close, and even as I passed people, there was plenty of room, so there was no excuse for drafting. (In my opinion, there never is, but some people get confused on a crowded course).

Before I knew it I was at the infamous "Beast". It comes at mile 20 on the course after a slight downhill and hard left. The hill is just under a mile and each 10th of a mile is marked with various markings on the hill indicating the grade at that point (24%, 28%, etc). Although a fair amount of participants don't even attempt to ride it, I was determined to climb The Beast! As Cait said, she would fall over before she put a foot down. I never felt that I would fall over, but I did consider the possibility that I might have a heart attack. By the time I got there, everyone was walking their bikes up, so the spectators were all watching me. It had warmed up to the mid 90s and there was no breeze. My heart was pounding and sweat was dripping onto my top tube as I slowly tacked my way to the top. At the very top there was an aid station where I refilled my water bottle, nodded to the angel-faced woman on the bike beside me with a "60" on her calf who filled her bottles quicker than me and took off. I had heard that coming back down The Beast was hairy, so I started down with caution, but honestly didn't find the descent to be too bad. As I opened it up I caught the woman who had just left the top of the hill ahead of me. As I got closer, I noticed that it wasn't a '60' on her calf; it was an '80'!

"Good morning, Sister" I said as I passed Sister Madonna Buder, the famous Roman Catholic nun who has been participating in triathlon at least as long as I. So, I will tell you that climbing The Beast was the hardest 10 minutes I've ever spent on a bike, but the next 36 miles of the bike course is spectacular beyond belief. Overall, I was really happy with my ride, my time was better than I thought it would be and I pulled into transition 2H 50M after I left, feeling pretty good.

I noticed the guy in front of me was covered with salt and thought, "wow – he needs to take some salt tablets". Then I looked down at myself and noticed my own clothes were completely covered with salt stains!

T2 was almost 15 minutes long because as I came running in with my bike, I heard the announcer saying, "Mike Lamie, from Duxbury Mass!!!!" I was so excited that Mike had been able to run and if my calculations were right, he was under 5 hours! I racked my bike and ran around looking for him. I ran to the finish line and couldn't see him, then looked where they were giving out medals and taking off chips and he wasn't there. I looked in the medical tent, food and water area, and didn't see him and then ran over to where his bike was racked. No Mike. Turns out he had come in and had gone to the medical tent but might have been laying down and I couldn't see him.

I decided to continue my 'workout', and ran back out on the course. By now it was a sizzling 98 degrees out and the course has no shade. I had not done enough running to run the entire half marathon – especially in this heat – so my plan was to run the downhills and flats and power walk the uphill. It turned out to be a good

plan, and I ended up passing people who, by now, were walking the whole thing. The aid stations were great and the townspeople of St. Croix stay out all day to cheer everyone on.



I drank everything I could get my hands on, tucked ice in my hat and stuck ice cold sponges under the straps of my top. At one point, I saw what looked like goose bumps on my skin but realized that my skin was blistering from the sun and the heat. Oh, Good Lord! Note to self: Blue Lizard. It worked well and Hawaii and I shouldn't have used something else today. I finally reached the Buccaneer resort, where 3 miles of the run course (each loop) take place. How bad can a golf course be, right? Let me just say this, I don't know how the golfers can play that course. Maybe there are no holes on the hills.....I went up and up and up, then back down to town.

As I was heading back to town I could hear Mike and Duffy yelling for me and it was great to see them. I asked Mike if he could run with me for a while so I could ask him about his race. Funny thing was, he was really banged up from running through the pain of his knotted calf so I was running faster than he was. Mike told me to keep going and we'd talk later, but as we parted he looked down and said, "Hey ... where's your chip?"

"What?!" Oh no. As it turns out, the chip had come off somewhere in T1. I remember thinking that the strap was so big it could almost wrap around my ankle twice. I thought it would NEVER come off. Another note to self: Next time, safety pin the chip strap. Mike went back to tell the official what happened with my chip and to give them my number. I went back out for the final 7 miles of the run and saw a woman in my age group who was walking. I encouraged her to join me for the walk /run. Turns out she was on her first loop, but she stayed with me for a while. She said her husband was going to join her for the second loop of the run. I left her at the Buccaneer and finished the final part of the race. It's amazing that even when you are this spent, if you know you are close to the finish line you can pick it up. At the end of the run of the St. Croix Half, they make you turn left at what would be the finish line and run another block. So cruel! You are almost there!

I remembered that last year Cait had forgotten that part of the run and she had dug deep into the tank to pass all but 2 competitors. When they told her to turn rather than go straight on to the finish, she thought, "holy crap!" She wasn't sure that she could take another step, so she had to give it everything she had to keep the pace for another quarter mile (it's just a lap around the track, right?)..... I kept her in mind as I pushed as hard as I could, each tiny rise in the pavement seeming like one more insult. I crossed the finish line hot and tired but feeling great and happy to have been able to participate in the race.

Tying up a couple of loose ends, Craig Alexander had crashed out of the race. Mirinda Carfrae had dropped out. Nina Craft had dropped out. Sr. Madonna Buder had dropped out. The woman in my age group who had hung with me for a bit on the run had apparently stopped after the first loop but accepted that as her finish time (not cool). Even though the people at the finish line had my finish time, start time and time for my first loop of the run, they never posted any of my times. I think they still have me as a DNF. I can assure you – I did every inch of the race.

AFTER ST. CROIX AND LEADING UP TO EAGLEMAN

Mike had finished 4th in his age group. There were 2 slots for Kona and Mike talked to Jeff Cuddabeck and the second-place finisher who both said they were taking their slots. We went back to the hotel with our bikes and were grateful to have stayed so close. We showered up, napped, ate dinner and went to bed. We got up the next day and took the seaplane to St. Thomas to see the island and celebrate my birthday. Mike could barely walk, so we took a brief walk of the waterfront and then rented a car to see the island. St. Thomas makes St. Croix look like Kansas. It was so hilly!!!! We went to Magan's Beach for a couple of hours and then drove to the other side of the island. We had a great day in St. Thomas and had an uneventful flight home to Massachusetts the next day.

Back home, Mike took a week off from running, and went back to his old style of running shoes when he was able to run again. He had one session of physical therapy in between to help the leg heal. It's been 5 weeks since we did the St. Croix half and Mike is feeling 100% recovered. We both been very consistent with our training and while I am still under the volume for swim and run I need to race Eagleman – my long run has been 9 miles – I've been able to get a bit more running in without the need for serious recovery time and we've gotten a few open water swims in. I've only been swimming a couple of hours a week, but Mike is right where he needs to be. We've both had some great training rides and have been taking advantage of the unusually warm New England spring to get ready for this race.

We leave tomorrow to drive to Maryland. Mike hopes to be able to break one open and I'll have another great training weekend! Tim Walsh, Dan Martin and Chuck Buckley are also driving down, and if nothing else, we'll have lots of great stories. We'll keep you posted.