**The Merchant of Venice- Ironman Race Report- Seán O Donaile-2018**

I cut my teeth in a part of Clare where even the dogs play hurling and running and cycling is for bad hurlers. The big difference between hurling and triathlon is you can wear the same gear for ever in hurling and the only nutrition is lemonade and custard cremes . Also your heroics and mistakes live with you for the rest of your life and so I had to leave home after missing an open goal in a county semi-final in 1986, though I did once stop a goal from Clarecastle by blocking the hurl with my head .

I fell into marathon running after a life changing event in 2000 and like Forest Gump I just kept on running, from Barcelona to Belfast,and from Rome to the back end of Connemara until my toenails disappeared and my hips wore out at 40. I’m not sure how I stopped drinking pints on a Saturday night, probably something to do with being a Daddy and the wise man says in life you eventually go back to doing what you did as a child and I used to love climbing trees and running around in the rain and dressing up in funny clothes so I fell into triathlon to avoid the Arthuritis in the back.

I gradually fell into 3D Tri and bought one of those Linford Christie outfits which I haven’t worn since Athy 2010 and should be banned for anyone that’s not a size 8. I was dragged kicking and screaming to a triathlon in Carlingford , where I was fished out after an hour and a half doing the doggy paddle and then stupidly agreed to do a TV documentary on brave Joe Bloggs taking on an Olympic Tri, six weeks after starting swimming lessons. Television never did me justice and it was the first time I realised I had moobs and wasn’t as fast as I thought and here I am ten years later and I’m not much faster or lighter but I’m an Ironman.

Before I start, whatever you do don’t bring a bike-box abroad unless you want a nervous breakdown the day before. Dragging a bike box around Venice probably wasn’t a great idea but after a few days a bike box becomes like your child - harder to pull around and more expensive and not as affectionate but I still felt sad leaving it back in the orphanage.

The hardest part of 3D training was always the smell of the Belvedere dressing room on a Monday evening and after ten years of endurance races I reckoned Ironman couldn’t be any worse than that or maybe being an accountant or selling insurance for 14 hours.

I signed up for IM Barcelona two years ago but started too far out and was mentally and physically fatigued by August . I also didn’t want it enough and made the mistake of going to Donegal for a two month training camp with my cousins , which usually ended up with a few pints and ended up putting on weight, despite training 20 hours a week.

I started training this time 22 weeks out and got the weight down pretty quickly like half the country in January and even went vegetarian and bought sandals and dungarees and had avocado and poached egg for breakfast with the hipsters in Stoneybatter. Ironman takes over your life and you have to really want it, otherwise you won’t peel yourself off the couch on a Friday night and swim 120 lengths in a lonely pool or run endless laps of the park in the rain or go to bed at 10 on a Saturday night and miss the Brendan O’ Connor show

Make sure your family are onboard or you’ll drive everyone daft talking about your sprocket and your reps though there’s nothing better than meeting a fellow Ironman and chatting about your favourite gel and latest session- it’s a bit like meeting up with a fellow war veteran minus the tequila.

I spent more time on the bike over the last six months than in my bed and I know every inch of that damn road to Dunboyne and Sexy Summerhill – the man who stands outside the bungalow in a hi vis vest with the chain smoking fingers, the Moynalvey Junior football team training, the bad turn at the railway bridge, the smell of shite at the farm with the blue roof out past the Hatchet, the house with the two traffic cones near Trim with the German shepherds who make you go faster and the bloody lights at the hill near the park you can never reach in time. I turned the psychology on it’s head and learned to love the road to Summerhill in the rain in Winter for six hours, sure where else would you want to be? Perhaps watching ‘90 Day Fiancee’ on TLC Channel eating a burger . I like to be chatting and there’s not much chatting when you’re on your tod for six hours and I found that tricky but sure it’s probably great for the ant-social types.

I didn’t sleep the night before Ironman as the adrenalin was racing through me and I felt like a soldier in the jungle waiting on an ambush- locked and loaded and ready for battle. The swim on the day was much tougher than expected but I put the head down and ploughed on and thought of the endless sessions with Mark and Sean over the years and reminded myself of the “bone deep” practice I had been through. The bike was hot-hot-hot and can suck the life out of you but my coach Neil had the pace and nutrition measured to a tee and was definitely the best Ironman eater on the day and drank about 30 litres of water and lots of salt in liquid and tablet form. As a result I had no issues with cramps, stomach pains etc and no injuries . One of the main reasons I took up triathlon and long distance cycling was the amount of food you can eat without getting fat. Sure the run was grand- I’ve ran plenty marathons and you can only go as fast as the legs allow. Just keep slogging and never give up. Stay resolute. One of the best things about an Ironman is that you learn so much about yourself and most of it is positive.

I enjoyed every minute of the race and six month process of living like a semi-pro, though the loneliness is the only downside . I had a very wise coach with unique psychology and was blessed with the support of Deirdre, who was so enthusiastic . The bottom line I guess is you have to really really want it and it’s no use saying you’re going to do it over a few pints on a Winter’s night. Everything else will follow and you will surprise yourself with your inner strength. My daughter had a very tough 18 months and I wanted to show her solidarity and to give her good example to keep going and never give up. I guess that’s why I really did it. She graduated yesterday with honours. Never ever give up. Just keep on going.

**IRONMAN 22 WEEK TRAINING PLAN Sean Ó Donaile 2018**

1. You need to be comfortable with triathlon and **build it up** over the years. If you’ve done a half-Ironman you’ll have no problem.
2. **Weight- get the weight sorted- the lighter the better**- good **nutrition essential.**I lost 21lbs but ideally should have been 10lbs lighter. I found motivation with food difficult in the last month.
3. **Plenty Sleep & rest** needed.I averaged 8 hrs every night. I didn’t go for 6 am starts as I didn’t want to cut back on time with family etc.
4. **Yoga and/or Strength & Conditioning** at least once a week . S&C is better for the body but yoga is great for the head and stretching and calves, hamstrings etc. I recommend S & C.
5. **Get a coach you trust**- Get advice from people who have done it before and are similar to you. I was very lucky- Neil was very accurate with nutrition, rest , injuries advice etc.
6. Read a few sports **psychology** and training books – it’s very important to have the head right. Push through the mental and physical fatigue .
7. Pick a triathlon abroad with **a flat course and not too hot** eg Copenhagen, Barcelona in October, UK ; It makes it a lot easier if ‘Ship my Tri bike’ are transporting bikes as it’s no joke bringing a bike on your own.
8. Make sure your **partner/friend and family** are behind you and have at least two of them with you over race weekend- it’ll make a huge difference.
9. Pencil in plenty trips to the physio.
10. Believe in yourself- I know it’s a cliché but it works.
11. If I did it again A- I’d be a stone lighter; B- more S & C; C- more turbo’s.

***Week 22****-* Yoga/S&C- 1 hr class & 3 x 20mins sessions; Bike- 1 x 3hr; 1 x 45 min turbo; Run 1x 50min; Swim 1 x 50min ( all Zone 2 HR) ; weight 2lb loss. Total- 6hrs

***Week 21***- Yoga, S&C-1hr class & 3 x 20mins at home; Bike- 1 x 3hr15min, 80k, 70 rpm; 25kph followed by 10min brick run; Run 1 x 70min- Lr Z2HR, 6.10kph; Swim- 1 club session , 1 2k swim; Weight 2lb loss; missed turbo due to tiredness. Total- 7hrs

***Week20***- Yoga- 1hr class & 3 x30mins sessions; Bike- 1 x 50min steady turbo ; 1 x 3hr 30min soin-90k, 25kph, Z2; Run- 1 x 85min , Z2; Swim 1 tough club session, missed 2nd swim due to funeral, Feeling tired in second half of week; weight loss 1lb. Total- 7hrs

***Week19***- Yoga- 1 x class & 3 x 20mins sessions; Bike- 1 x 45min turbo & 1 x 3.5hr- 90k, Z2 followed by 10min brick run; Swim- 1 tough club session & 1 x 2.5k breakthrough session in 50m pool, slow; Run- 1x 90 min slow run. Weight- 2lb loss. Total- 9hrs

***Week 18-*** Yoga- 2 classes ; Bike- 4hr10min-100k-86rpm & 10min brick run; 60 min turbo; Swim- Club swim & 2.5k swim; Run- 100min slow;Wgt loss- 2lbs Total- 10hrs

***Week 17***- Yoga- 1 class & 3 x 20min sessions; Bike- 1hr Turbo & 2.5hr turbo; Run- 1 x 100min session; Calf strain at end of long run in cold weather

Swim- Club session & 2.8k swim swim, 112 lengths ; Weight loss 2lbs Total-8hrs

***Week 16-*** Yoga- 1 class & 3 x 20min sessions; Swim- 1 x 3k in 50m pool, 1 min faster than last week & 1 club session; Bike- 1 x 60min turbo & 1 x 120km,Z2, 83 rpm; Run – none- calf injury- attending physio- weight loss 2lbs. Total- 8.5hrs

***Week 15***- Yoga as last week; Swim- 1 club session & 1 x3k – 3 mins quicker than last week;Bike- 5 turbo sessions- 3 x 1hr sessions & 2 x 2hr sessions; medial calf injury- no running, physio, weight loss – 2lbs. Total- 10hrs

***Week 14***- Yoga- as above; Swim 1 club session & 1 x 3k swim; Bike- ( snow outside) Turbo- 1 x 3hr, 1 x 2hr, 2 x 1hr intervals; Swim- 1 x 3k ; Walking/hiking- 3 x 2 hr hikes in the snow; Calf- will try a gentle jog this week; Weight loss- 1lb. Total- 10hrs

***Week 13***- Yoga- as above; Bike- 1 x 1hr turbo intervals; 5 hr 125k bike at 25kph- 85rpm- felt benefit of turbo but tired after 100k; Swim 1 x club session & 1x2.5k ; Run- 1 x 10k slow & 5k brick off the bike; doing plenty calf and yoga exercises; Weight loss 2lbs; Total – 11hrs

***Week12***- Yoga as above; Swim- 1 club session & 2.7k slow swim; Bike- 2 x 1hr turbos ; 1 x 5hr spin; 1 x hr easy spin- all at cadence of 85rpm-Z2 HR; Running- 10k; 12k; 3k brick; Weight loss 2lbs Total- 13.5hrs

***Week 11***- Yoga as above; Swim- Club swim & 1 x 3k slow; Bike- 1 x 1hr turbo& 6hr spin-120k, 14000 climbing, HR 137, RPM-76; Running- 1 x 15k, 6mink pace; 2 x 10k easy- Total 13hrs Weight loss- 1lb ( weight loss stopped after this, 21lbs loss since Xmas but no change after this) .

***Week 10-*** Yoga- as above ; Swim- 2 x 3k swims; Bike- 1 x 100k;1x 120k; 1x 140k; Running- 1x 18k; 2 x 8k, 1 x brick; Total – 24hrs

***Week 9***- Yoga as above; Swim- 1 x 3k,IM pace- 1.40; 1 x club session; Bike- 1 x 80k ( 3hrs), 1 x 120k (5hrs) & 1 x 150k ( 6hrs)- pace is 24kph, 86rpm- feeling good on bike; Running- 1 x 20k, 2 x 10k, 1 x 5k brick- 6mink pace, calves recovering well; weight not shifting- 7 lbs off target. Total- 22 hrs

***Week 8***- Neck injury- lots of physio- 1 x 1hr swim; 1 x 2 hr turbo; 1 x 1hr easy jog;

Finding it mentally tough; Total- 4hrs

***Week 7***- Yoga- lots of neck exercises & physio; Swim- 1 x 1hr swim, 1 x 90 min easy swim; Bike- 2 hr turbo, 1 hr turbo, 4 hr easy spin; Running – 2hr 20k run, 10k run;

Worried about swim pace; Total- 14hrs

***Week 6***- Yoga as above; back issues; lots of physio; Swim- 3.4k swim, 3.8k swim- 1:36 new PB, 100 lengths in 59 mins; Bike- 160k in 6hrs 20min, 25kph, practising nutrition; Running- 22k- 6,min k pace; mentally & physically tired. Total 13.5hrs

***Week 5***- Serious back pain- glutes not strong enough- should have done more S& C; Swim- 3.5k, 3.3k swim, 1 hr swim; Bike- 6hr spin & 5 hr spin; Running- 10k run , 5k brick; Total- 16hrs

***Week 4***- Yoga as above, plenty physio; Swim- 3.8k swim at 1:40 pace, 20 mins seaswim, 3k swim at 1:40 IM pace; Bike- 2hr spin, 182k spin at 26kph, 84rpm, tired for last 30k & brick- & swim- 9 hrs; Running- 15k run, 10k run;Total 18hrs

***Week 3-*** Yoga- as above & physio; Swim- 3rd & last full IM swim; 2 x Seapoint short; Bike- 4hr bike & easy turbo; Running- 15k, 5k run- Total 10hrs

***Week 2***- Swim- 1 x 2.5k- pace 1:33 IM, 1x 2k open water; Bike- 1 x 80K- 26kph, Z2; Run- 12k, 10k, 5k brick; Very tired -need rest; Total – 8hrs

***Week 1***- Swim- 2 x 2k swims; Bike- 1 x 60 min easy, 1 x 30mins easy; Run- 5k easy

Total – 3-4hrs. Last Day ***Ironman- Swim 2:01, Bike- 6:45; Run-5:20 Total – 14:29***