



## JIMMY TYLER – 2022 IRONMAN WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

What an incredible experience the Ironman World Champs in Hawaii proved to be, well worth the 7 year journey to get here.

So I thought I'd put together a bit of a recap of race day, and what it was like to be part of that experience. It's a bit of a story, so the short version before swiping next is: fun lead up, swam, rode, ran, heat exhaustion, managed to finish, thanks.

Race week itself was an awesome yet hectic build towards the big day, with registration, various check-ins, a fun cultural event, Aus/NZ team morning tea, pre-race banquet, swim to the coffee boat, charity undie run, and more. All of these added to the feeling we were about to do something special and it was great to be able to share these moments with Megs and Greg, Janine and Michael from our TA family.

Pros, celebrities and previous world champs mingled amongst the age-groupers, and I was fortunate enough to meet and chat with Jan Frodino, Tim Van Berkel, Dave Scott, Mark Allen, Mirinda Carfrae, Tony Kanaan (from Indycar fame), Mike Reilly, and personal favourite (and one of the nicest athletes you'd meet) Craig Alexander. It was pretty special to have access to these guys and get their hints and tips for race day.

Race morning began with a 4am alarm. Down at the race venue at Kailua Beach, we joined the long queues of athletes making their way through the mandatory athlete checks, bag drops, and final bike preps. My bike was located at the far end of the pier, and on finally reaching it after a long wait in the queue, the announcer advised that the far end of transition would now close 10 mins earlier than scheduled, resulting in a flurry of activity amongst athletes. Seconds later, a loud bang heralded the popping of someone's over-inflated tyre in the rising heat, as athletes still in transition rushed back to their bikes to check if they were the victim. After completing a rapid bike prep, it was then time to change into swim gear and join the age group swim wave queues above the beach.

Suddenly, after 15 months of heavy training, and days of packing, travel and preparation, and then hours of

morning checks and prep, we finally came to a stop. We were crammed together in long barricaded holding pens, thousands of supporters surrounded us on both sides, blocking our vision of the water, while music blared and Mike Reilly instructed each age group in turn to make their way to the buoys ready for the deep water start a few hundred metres out.

There are constant reminders around Hawaii of the US role in the Pacific during WWII. Although this was just a sporting event, it made me reflect on what it must have been like for those WWII marines couped up in hot crowded landing craft, surrounded by noise, nervously waiting for the ramp to drop before assaulting the beach with a surge of adrenaline. Kinda put things into perspective.

It was at this point that realisation hit about what I, and my fellow competitors from 90 odd countries, were about to do. I couldn't help but feel a bit emotional, especially as Megs fought her way through the crowds and arrived to say a final goodbye. Seconds later my age group was called to make our way in to the water. Once there, with about a minute to go until the siren, I swivelled round in the water and looked back at the shore and just took in that moment, seeing the crowds, hearing the race announcer and appreciating this unique experience. The siren blared, and the water became a salty, effervescent wrestle of writhing arms and legs.

Knowing my body's limitations in the heat, racing in Kona's high 30+ degree temps, high humidity, driving winds and searing sun was always going to be extra challenging. My plan for the day was to race conservatively, particularly given my wave would be the second last to leave for the day, meaning less time in the earlier calmer and cooler conditions. My training had been focussed on replacing my normal heavy sweat losses in hot conditions - for the run, and the bike, and even during a swim in warm waters like Palm Cove, or now at Kailua Bay.

Despite my nerves about the 'no wetsuit' mandate, swimming in the warm and clear Kailua Bay water was a real pleasure - I was even able to take in the scenery and enjoy the coral and fish. It was however still very physical, and this only started to ease up near the Coast Guard boat at the 1.9km turnaround. The severe cramp I'd experienced 3 days before in the practise swim didn't repeat, thanks to a preventative pickle juice before the start! Heading back toward shore seemed to take forever as the currents were working against us, and having the rear zip on my swimskin peel open and create drag didn't help matters either (although a short diversion for assistance soon resolved that).

Finally reaching the beach, I could hear the announcer again as we climbed the stairs and made our way into a packed T1 change tent. This first transition was quite slow, not only due to the length of the compound, but also from the need to apply so much sunscreen from 6+ little sachets. I also had a problem trying to clamp my bike shoe closed, and ended up having to manually wrap the wire around the boa dial to get the shoe to stay put. Every race presents a few unforeseen challenges.

Out onto the bike course, and through the crowds of many thousands, we eventually headed away from the cheering supporters in town and onto the quieter Queen K highway. My primary goals here were to not over-exert and to adhere to the nutrition targets I'd been relentlessly training on, forcing down 1.4L per hour, while also spraying water over myself. This can prove a bit of a logistical challenge i.e. to ensure you collect and store up to 3 water bottles at each aid station. Although the heat was starting to rise, I was able to appreciate my surroundings - the barren lava fields, mountains and sparse scrub that lined the course were pretty spectacular. Near the 70km mark, I had a close encounter with a taxi that was trying to cross over the course - he was not a fan of the race and had no intention of letting me past until a police officer forced him to stop.

The long climb up the Kohala volcano into Hawi brought rougher roads, high and random winds, and a now searing sun directly overhead. Turning around at 95km brought some downhill respite, but the swirling hot winds often worked against us. Despite applying sunscreen in T1 and topping up several times while riding, I could see I was getting badly sunburnt with no shade to come. Starting later in the day also meant cold water was now scarce. Athletes including myself were now coming to a complete stop at the latter aid stations to get top ups as the volunteers were overwhelmed with riders all trying to fish out cold water rather than the default 36+ degree bottles.

The final few kms into town and back amongst the crowds were a huge relief, especially dismounting the bike and entering the crowded T2 tent. From here on, no mechanical issues could spoil my day. Another round of sunscreen and nutrition, and it was time to head back (past Megs cheering from the VIP stand) out into the sun.

Without the breeze on the bike, the heat was now much more oppressive. It took 10km for a sharp pain in my right foot (from scrunching it to hold my loose bike shoe) to ease. Up the steep hill onto the Queen K again, I started to settle into a steady run pace and began overtaking people - many who were clearly suffering from the heat too. I kept topping up the nutrition at every aid station in line with my plan of taking on 1litre per hour. And kept my eye out for the drop down into the infamous Energy Lab heat trap. It lived up to its reputation with the valley capturing heat from overhead as well as radiating it back up from the road surface.

I was now taking a bit longer at aid stations to force fluid down, and as I made my way back up the hill to the highway again, was somewhat relieved to see the sun had finally started to drop.

At around the 32km mark though, an excruciating cramp took hold of both sides of my abdomen. Given a good time target was still within reach, I chose to keep pushing on, so let Janine (who was out there supporting us on her new Walmart bike) know that all was well.

It didn't last though, and by the 35km mark, things had deteriorated. Despite the aggressive fluid intake, the constant heat had taken its toll and I was now feeling nauseous and my head had started spinning. At around 37km and with only 5km to go, I realised that if I kept pushing and then fell over, a medic may end the race for me ... 7 years of dreaming and 15 months of training would be for nothing. My goal became just making it to the next aid station, even if that now meant walking. I wasn't entirely sure how far it was and it was now completely dark.

It felt like an eternity, but at exactly 39.2km the aid station emerged in front of me like an oasis in the desert. Fearing dehydration sickness like previous races, I took on some more fluids and decided I had to wait for these to take effect. Minutes later though, I felt worse. At 223km into the 226km race, I really feared the dream was done. I spent the next 20 minutes hiding behind a truck vomiting on the side of the road, out of sight of any officials in case someone pulled the pin on my day. My stomach must have shut down in the heat, as nutrition I'd taken way back at 21km also came back up! Severe hydration plus a stomach that no longer accepts fluids is typically a one-way street to the medical tent. I looked out into the dark beyond the aid station and it felt like a deep black abyss.

I stood leaning against a barricade for what Megs (who was glued to the online tracker) tells me it was about 25 mins... and gradually started to feel better. Although I still wasn't able to have any fluids, it felt like a positive sign. Instead of dehydration, this suggested it was heat exhaustion, meaning just stopping and cooling down was resetting my body. With nausea and head spins abating, I was able to venture out into the dark. After walking a few hundred metres, I then tested a jog/shuffle, and found I could now keep moving slowly despite the painful side cramps which lingered. Just under 3km now to the finish and I was going to make it even if it meant walking or heaven forbid, crawling.

The final couple of hundred metres to the finish chute is unlike anything I've ever experienced. The illuminated signs, red carpet, bright pulsating lights, pumping music and thousands of supporters on either side cheering us all to the finish. Jogging down that finishers chute through that crowd I just felt a massive flood of relief compared with the fear of not finishing an hour earlier. I trailed the Aussie flag that I had been carrying with me as I crossed the line to hear Mike Reilly announce "James Tyler from Melbourne, Australia, You are an Ironman" I took a few seconds to relish the moment before leaving the finish line arch, then looked for Megs who was there with my medal, and fell in to her arms in collective joy and relief.

I cannot thank Megs enough for the constant love and support she provides me in this crazy, all-consuming sport. She is as deserving of a finishers medal as I am. Coach Greg also got me here, and it was an absolute privilege to share the build-up and to race alongside him on the same day.

The Tri-Alliance crew with coach Ollie have been an endless source of encouragement, and having Janine and

Michael come along to support us, along with Dan G, on the ground was incredible. Thanks also to the guys at Monash and Lakeside for getting my body as ready as possible for such tough conditions, and many thanks to Megs family and those friends who sent messages of support and congratulations.