

You already know about my attraction to the "road trip", well the weekend of June 30th, I took it one step further, deciding to drive to Columbus, Ohio for the Wendy's Midwest Triathlon/Biathlon Championships. What prompted me to head off on a nine plus hour journey to Ohio? Perhaps feeling of ultimate freedom ones gets when driving Americas byways. All alone with your bike, two dozen CDs, and several litres of Mountain Dew (the nectar of the gods). I ask, what could be better? Or perhaps the trip was motivated by a need for a change in venue and a new set of competitors, as one can only take so much of getting beat by the same faces every weekend.

Like in any sport, you will find pockets of elite competitors all over the country, and Ohio is no different. In the sport of duathlon, Ohio means the 'Hastings Gang'. Ben (now a first year Professional) and his younger brother Jonathan Hastings have been in the top tier of this sport for many years, usually ending the racing season ranked in the top 3 nationally. Joining this dynamic duo are a few of their friends; Rick Kattouf (ranked 3rd for 30-34yr olds), Nicholas Ciaccio (ranked 9th in 30-34yr div), Brain Barker (7th 40-44yr div), and Andrew Eschbach (16th in the 30-34yr div). The Midwest also boasts, Wisconsin's Edmond Hickey (ranked 2nd in the 30-34 division) and Marty Netzel (ranked 9th) - and I thought Dannon Boston was stacked! While Ohio may have this set of elite racers, I suspect the depth of the field is nothing like we are used to out East, where one can literally race every weekend and anyone of a dozen different athletes could win.

I departed for Ohio on Thursday night, hoping to break up the drive into two more manageable sections. For this particular road trip, I would be joined by my father and brother, who where travelling not only to see their flesh and blood kick some Ohio 'arse', but to partake in a few rounds of golf in sort of a Hanson mini-vacation. I arrived Friday and in an effort to keep my mind from the race, headed right to the golf course with my dad (I find that the more I train for biathlons, the worse my golf game becomes). Saturday morning was left open for some course re-con work (I confirmed it was in fact a flat bike course, which meant I will be using the DISC) and a few dozen practice transitions, as we all know how damaging a poor transition can be when stress levels are high. My brother Dave arrived that afternoon with his lovely bride, and after some quick catching up, we had a pre-race dinner to discuss strategy (not for Sunday's race, but for the Hanson golf tournament which was to follow).

I awoke Sunday morning knowing that I would be blessed with my own cheering section in today's race - perhaps the edge I needed to topple any part of the 'Hastings Gang'. The temperatures began to climb early, as the over 900 racers milled about the staging area (with the Tri attracting the majority). It was easy to pick out the leader of the 'Hastings Gang', the young Jonathan Hastings as he warmed up among his adoring fans and awestruck competitors. The man is something of a legend in the Midwest, and thus wears his arrogance like a badge of honor - but it is all warranted as he barely broke a sweat in today's victory (a feat he should duplicate at National's at the end of July).

The loud speaker called the triathletes to the beach and us duathletes to the grassy knoll. Only sixty seconds remain until the gun. I forced the butterflies down, and took a deep breath. This is what I have been training for so don't blow it in front of the family. The horn sounded and we were off. Mr. Hastings stayed with us for he first ¼ mile (long enough to stride pass the cheering crowds), before slipping off the front never to be seen again by us mere mortals. The battle for second was now on. Despite the building heat, I felt comfortable during

the first run, posting a 12:00 minute split, good enough for about 16th place. I began the bike section slowly, not finding my comfort level until about mile six, but still managing to pass about a dozen racers (triathletes and duathletes on the course at the same time). At the halfway point on the bike, I had caught up to a group of five others. After several attacks, it became clear to the six of us (and the USAT official watching our every move for nearly five miles), that no one was getting clear and the battle would have to be fought over the final 5K run. I drifted to the back of the group, a clear four bike lengths back, geared down, and took it easy over the final 4 miles, as I did not favor my odds in the final run (I did end up posting the 3rd fastest bike split).

We all entered T2 together, and headed up the grassy hill toward the dam. My legs felt surprisingly fresh (maybe there is something to be said for pacing?), and I quickly passed two of my four remaining companions, and settled in behind the others. We hit the mile marker at 6:20 and I was shocked to still be feeling so strong (listen, on the final run a sub 7-minute mile in the heat is rare for me). As we headed to the turn around, it was evident that only a few racers were in front of me – could this be true? With about one mile to go I was passed by the speedy Brian Barker (who I passed on the bike and is capable of running a 16:00 5K), but managed to stay near my other two companions. With ¼ mile to go, one of them grabbed his side, pulled up and pulled a 'Mike', heaving into the woods (did my own version at mile 15 on the bike). I carefully strode past thinking the entire time, where's the mental fortitude, but did offer a small bit of advice, 'Only a quarter-mile to go, suck it up buddy and finish this turkey'. I crossed the finished line, handed over my number, and much to my surprise, they reciprocated by handing me the 1st place 30-34 plaque. I stopped, looked at the prize and responded, 'for me?' Not so bad for a New York boy, 1st place 30-34, and 5th overall. In retrospect, days like today are why I compete. A single moment when all of the hours of training pays a truly unique dividend – one which can not be purchased but must be achieved! I will make Ohio a regular stop on my racing calendar!