

A Positive Spin on Injuries Part 2 (Confessions of a former self-proclaimed land lover)

by Mikael Hanson

When I last jotted my thoughts down, I was trying to maintain a smile while offering a positive outlook on injuries. But lets be honest, not being able to run or bike in the heart of the summer was killing me! Too much idle time on my hands soon resulted in a few extra pounds as the phrase, "Heck, I'm not riding tomorrow at 5:40am - another beer barkeep!" became all too familiar. Looking for help, I glanced from my balcony on East 77th Street and there it was staring back at me in all of its azure glory - the outdoor John Jay pool! I have lived next door to John Jay Park for over four years and have never once stepped into the cool waters of its nearly 50-yard pool. For that matter, the last time I swam a lap in a pool was my junior year of college, so I wasn't even sure I could even swim, let alone float! So what did this self proclaimed land lover do - he got off his butt and swam! Not being able to do any athletic endeavor 'just for fun', I hit the pool four times my first week out and was soon signing up for classes with swim guru Doug Stern. In my second week, we were going away for the weekend and instead of seeking favorable roads for biking, I was inquiring whether or not the hotel had a pool. And yes, I was there every morning at 7am sharp, doing countless laps in a 20yd lap pool before the rug-rats took over the waterways (which was just about 8am - don't these kids watch cartoons on Saturday mornings any more?).

After spending the month of August only in the water and logging not a single mile on the bike or with the feet, I slowly eased my way back into the land sports by September. The rides began as casual spins in the park with the three-speed crowd, while the runs took place on the treadmill where I could easily hide my speed with a strategically placed towel. My target was one more multi-sport event in October - and that event would be a Triathlon.

As October rolled around and my fitness level gradually improved to where I could make public appearances in the park, I had to access my goals for my first Triathlon, which ultimately looked like this:

- 1. What ever happens, don't drown.
- 2. Finish the race regardless of overall time or place.
- 3. And finally, have fun!

The event I picked was the Jones Beach Sprint Triathlon on October 4th. I would love to say I held my own on the modest ½ mile swim and even navigated T1 with razor like precision, but that would be a lie. Thanks to some 20mph winds, the ocean swim was moved to the bay, where the swells were only a foot or so. After seven weeks in the pool and only one open water swim (on very flat water), it did not take long for panic to set in. In the opening moments of the swim, I found myself unable to put my face into the dark, murky water and was swallowing (seemingly) gallons of seawater every time one of those white caps slapped me in the head. After about 100 yards, I stopped and began to tread water among the growing swells, while I tried to calm myself (there's no place like home, there's no place like home). After about 90 seconds of soul searching and a small amount of whimpering, I convinced myself that I would not drown. I started off again, eventually finding my courage, my stroke, and the much-coveted shore (Land, O beautiful Land!).

After some problems getting that darn wetsuit over my feet, I did manage to find some resemblance of my former self on the bike. After only two miles, I was literally flying. Never before have my legs felt so good! I wasn't just passing people - I was destroying them! Five, ten, twenty-some riders passed by the end of the bike leg (where I would post the 5th fastest split of the day!). I held my place on the final 5K, running one of my faster times of the year in a multi-sport event with a smile that spread from ear to ear (must be the deep water running - thanks Doug!). Without a whisper of my former injuries, I would finish in 1:17:20, good enough for 23rd overall and 6th in my 35-39 age-group. Not bad for the first time out. Looks like this former land lover can do more than just float, he can swim! Triathlon has just found its newest devotee! Now I just have to bide my time for six more months until the 2004 season starts!