

## The Graduation of Tin Foil Boy

On Saturday, January 12<sup>th</sup>, shortly after 9:00 pm, I ceased to be Tin Foil Boy and graduated to be IronMan. I can't recall when I committed to this lofty status. I had done three half-ironman distance events in the past. Two were in Clermont, FL and one in Panama City, FL. I do recall thinking, as I was finishing my second half in Clermont, that I could never imagine doing this twice! I was in amazement that anyone could go that distance, that anyone had the endurance to expend that amount of energy. Nevertheless, at some point, the idea of a full-distance ironman was planted in my cranium.

Roy and Angie Payne figured prominently in this affair. They are friends, but more than friends. I officiated at their wedding some four years ago. They are members of the church I pastor, Keys Presbyterian Church (OPC). Roy has been doing the Ironman events for years. At this point he has completed 13 full-distance triathlons. Angie is nipping at Roy's heels with 10 completed fulls. It may have been the Paynes who first told me of the inaugural run of the Bone Island Triathlon. When hearing it was on a Saturday, I began to give this event serious consideration (I eschew races on the Lord's Day). I began to pray about this massive undertaking, and then started planning.

Years ago, Roy gave me a "Softride" road bike. Once I committed to the event, Roy outfitted that bike with the loan of a better saddle. After Angie upgraded to the next Garmin GPS watch, she gave me her "old" one. Roy loaned me biking apparel. Things were falling into place. I took all of these as signs to press on.

Earlier in 2012, I had scheduled my vacation for the first three weeks of December; this proved providential as it was the very time I would be doing my longest rides and runs. Without seeking it, I got a very special deal on the entrance fee. Another providential blessing was my meeting a gal named Ashley Meuser.

I organize the Annual Swim Around Key West, and on October 11<sup>th</sup>, 2012, I received an email from Ashley. She stated that she was looking for an endurance swim event, and in her search she came across our swimaroundkeywest web site. She also told me a bit about the company she works for, Infnit Nutrition.

In my response to her email, I told her that I was training for the Bone Island Iron Distance Triathlon. She urged me to give her a phone call. Since Infnit custom blends their product for the uniqueness of each athlete, she wanted to know about my body and its personal needs. Ashley then sent me the bike-and-run formula unique to my chemistry.

I committed to training and racing exclusively with the Infinit powders in my sport bottles.

Roy would talk to me about the various substances he would consume during the Iron Distance races. Others told me how they would get sick and throw up, or how they got stomach/intestinal cramps because of bad food combinations. I've had similar experiences in my past half-iron events, that uncomfortable sensation of getting off my bike and feeling liquid sloshing in my gut as I tried to run.

Trying to sort out what to consume for an event this distance can be mind boggling. Ashley insisted that with Infinit, I needed no other food, no gels, no pretzels, no coke, no bars. She told me that consuming two scoops of the powder in 20-24 ounces of water per hour would be sufficient. This sounded too good to be true, but I figured it was worth a try. Upon receiving both the bike formula and the run formula, I started to experiment.

Any second thoughts about continuing my commitment to this major enterprise was silenced by the flow of providential happenings. If I ever had a doubt about continuing, another green light would flash. I forged forward.

Angie gave me a training plan. At first, I improvised that plan, but during the final few weeks, I followed it to the

letter. My improvisations proved fortuitous. Because I had exceeded her directions, when it came time to taper off, the regimen proved to have been just right.

Just before getting ready for our family vacation in Tampa, Roy offered me the use of a carbon-fiber Orbea, a most beautiful and faster bike. On my "Soft ride," I struggled to keep a speed of 15.5 miles per hour. With the Orbea, I saw my time move up immediately to 16.5 mph.

In Tampa, we stayed with my oldest daughter Bett and her husband Tony. During those 3 weeks, I spent long hours training in a wonderful park called Flatwoods, always using Infinit exclusively. I did a few six-hour bike rides and several two-hour runs. One day I ran a 20-mile run. I did my swims at the New Tampa YMCA. Thankfully, I still found time to take a few of my kids to Disney and Sea World!

After the three weeks of well-spent training in Tampa, I had one final week of long training, and then the most-welcome tapering period. Before I knew it, race day was looming on the horizon.

I had done my swims, my rides and my runs. Now it was time to put the pieces together. I began to seriously strategize in my head. I knew I needed a bottle of Infinit per hour, and I could pre-make a couple bottles in advance for my

bike's bottle holders; but what beyond that? I figured I needed at least 7 hours' worth of bike formula. I would need 5-6 hours of powder for my run.

I found snack baggies the answer. The two bottles on my bike would last me 2 hours, and I placed two scoops in each baggie for the remaining hours. I would only need water from the "Stations" along the course. The baggies would go into my Bento Box, and into the pockets of my bike shirt.

For the run, I borrowed Roy's fuel belt. It had two 10-ounce bottles. So I placed one scoop for each 30 minutes in a snack baggie, and filled up as many baggies as I expected to need on the run course. A few fit in the pouch on the belt. But I needed more cargo space, so I dug out my old Race Ready shorts and found that its many pockets provided me with the space needed. Since I planned to wear compression shorts under my Race Ready's, I cut out the lining of the running shorts.

On Thursday, January 10<sup>th</sup>, I went to my hotel to check in and pick up my bib number and chip. Then I volunteered a couple of hours checking in other entrants, both for the full- and half-distance events. Upon my return home, I filled baggies, prepared bottles, and got to bed early for a full night's sleep in my own bed. I anticipated that I might not sleep well the next night because of pre-event jitters.

On Friday morning, Roy outfitted the Orbea with “deep dish” wheels, the best tires, and finely tuned it. Inwardly, I prayed that I would not get a flat tire. Later that day, I went to the hotel again for the official course instructions and directions, then took my bike to the staging area, leaving as much paraphernalia as I could with it.

I was right about an interrupted sleep on Friday night. I found it hard to even fall asleep, and did not sleep well. Nevertheless, I jumped out of bed at 4:00 am, grabbed my wet suit (loaned to me from... yes, Roy), and threw some post-race clothing in the van.

Race time was 7:00 am. Since I wanted to be at the beach early, I arrived at the Finish Line parking area at 5:30. A shuttle was there to take us to the staging area, where I was marked with my number, 143, checked my bike, and made my visit to the Porta Potty. After returning to the bike area, I came across Roy and Angie. Together, we rode the shuttle to Smathers Beach, where the swim leg would commence. After donning our wet suits, we knelt in the sand and prayed together. About 6:50 am, the Key West Mayor addressed the athletes, welcoming them and their friends and families to the Island. As requested, I also took the microphone and offered a prayer of invocation. Then the national anthem was played, and race time had come.

We lined up on the shore for the beach start. On signal, there was a mad dash into the water. It was so shallow that people walked and ran for 100 yards or more. As soon as the water was deep enough, though, I began swimming, thinking this is to be a swim, not a stroll through the water. I figured I could swim faster than walk in knee-deep water.

As I swam, I felt exhilarated. These were my waters. I've swum around this Island 54 times. It was my element and my home turf! The ENE wind was blowing between 15 and 20 mph, and the water temperature was right at 76 degrees. I know that many triathletes cower at the swim. I loved it, rolling with the choppiness and soldiering on. The only difficult thing was seeing the buoys. I made it to the Reynolds Street Pier, and climbed the stairs. I ran the pier, and was stripped of my wet suits by the "strippers." Now I was set free to meet my bike. I had completed my 2.4 mile swim in 1:08:26.

My bike singlet was on under my wet suit, so I put on my cleats and helmet, walked my bike out of the staging area and hopped on it for my 112-mile ride. Riding up the Keys, we had the wind in our face. I tried to relax and find my pace. The sense of exhilaration continued. I had a good swim, and was out the water before the majority of triathletes, but soon they were catching up to me on their bikes. Many people were

passing me, but my thoughts urged me to ride my own race and not become unnerved. A full day lay ahead of me. The course stretched up US 1 for 28 miles; there we were required to turn around and ride back south to the overpass ramp at Boca Chica Naval Air Base ( mile marker 8 on US 1); then riders had to do that same round-trip lap a second time, then continuing on to return towards the staging area in Key West.

This ride was special for me. Everything I passed was familiar; I've lived in the lower Florida Keys for almost 27 years. While peddling, I passed our church facility, my daughter Abigail's home, the road that leads to my home on Sugarloaf Key and everything else that's a daily part of my life. And I would do so four times (up and back twice). It was challenging heading into the 20 mph winds, but nothing could compare to heading South with the winds at my back. Heading up the Niles Channel Bridge into a head wind, I struggled at 9 mph. On my way back, I went down that same bridge clocking 34 mph.

Things went well until I rode off US 1 onto Blimp Road. We were required to do two laps of that road (a total of about 8 miles). Once I completed those, I'd have only about 20 miles to complete my 112 miles. As I was finishing my first Blimp Road lap, I noted a gal stopped in the middle of the road

near the turnaround; she appeared to be talking with a young boy.

I passed her on the left, and was just beginning to turn left to complete my second lap when I found her riding on my left side, apparently going straight to US 1 to turn right to finish her last 20 miles. I stopped suddenly to avoid turning into her, and fell crashing to the earth. I hit the ground pretty hard, but I was only going about 2 mph. Looking up from the pavement, I saw her up at US 1. She looked back at me and then headed toward Key West. I picked myself up, did a quick exam while being both steamed and somewhat confused. I had some superficial abrasions on my left arm, but the bike was okay, so I pressed on to complete lap 2 of Blimp Road.

Before turning back onto US 1, I tried to get a bottle of water. My supply of Infinit was growing low, and I needed a drink of plain water. To my dismay, the bottle I grabbed was Hammer Heed and not water. Ashley cautioned me about mixing other products with the Infinit drink, so I tossed the Heed. At this point, I had 22 miles to ride to complete the bike course. I had only one bottle of Infinit left and it was my Run formula. Ashley had suggested I use this the last 30 minutes on my bike to clear out protein from my system to avoid cramps on the run. It was too early to begin this

formula as I had more than an hour to ride. I nevertheless drank it, but was getting insatiably thirsty. I just wanted a bottle of plain water. I wondered if I could make it with the last bottle. I had more bike formula powder in bags, but they were useless without water.

There was a water station at mile 5 from the finish. Here I made a colossal blunder. I saw three men standing on the side of the road, each holding out water. I tried to grab water out of the hand of the first man. My hand bounced off the bottle like I hit a solid wall. I tried again with the second man and had the same reaction. Well, they say three is a charm, but when my hand hit the third man's bottle, I started wobbling and then lost control of the bike, flipped off and went sliding down the highway on my back, feet first. When my forward momentum halted, I was looking up at the sky.

This made my previous crash seem like child's play. I slowly got up, once again taking inventory. Nothing seemed broken. There were more abrasions on my arms and back. A good gash on my left palm was bleeding. That palm must have been my initial point of contact with the earth, so no head injuries. My legs, feet and arms were bending.

Then I switched my attention to the bike. Oh no! It looked bad. The cross bar on this carbon-fiber gem was buckled. The derailleur was bent into the spokes and wouldn't

budge. It looked like I had totaled good old Roy's Orbea. I was still five miles from finishing the bike leg. Had I come this far for naught? Was my Ironman effort finished? What next? What now?

The guy who had given the course directions/instructions the day before the race mentioned that there would be a couple mechanics on the course, and that they would have a couple of loaner bikes if needed. I figured it was worth a shot! I spotted a police officer directing traffic several hundred yards from where I was, and walked over to him, asking if he would contact the race officials. He called and I waited. Would they come? How soon?

Standing along the side of US 1 holding the damaged, useless bike, I wondered how I was going to explain to Roy that I totaled his bike. Angie came by and stopped. She saw the mess and I waved her on, saying, "Angie, go finish, no sense you slowing down!"

The truck with the mechanics arrived. I could only guess how long it took, maybe 20-30 minutes. They confirmed my fears, the Orbea was finished. They pulled out another bike. They took my pedals off the Orbea and put them on the loaner. They lowered the seat. They recognized the wrecked bike as Roy Payne's, gave me my number 143 off the bike, and threw it into the back of their truck.

I couldn't believe it; I was back in motion and heading towards the staging area. The seat was too high; the bike was so inferior to the one I once rode, but I was back in the race and I praised God! I knew I had only 5 miles to cover, and then the run!

The adrenaline still coursed in my body after I racked my bike and walked to the changing tent. I wondered whether I was going to be able to run the marathon. My left palm was still bleeding, but not profusely. Noting a cut on the inside ankle of my right foot, I told myself I had to relax. I changed out of my biking outfit and into my running garb with the speed of a three toed sloth! It seemed like an eternity, but in reality my transition was 12:16. That would be added to my official bike time of 7:08:13. Now all I had left was a measly 26.2-mile run!

Leaving the tent not knowing what to expect, I was able to run, but slowly. I would soon find out that I had three speeds left in me, slow, slower and walk. The run course was three out-and-back laps along the Atlantic side of the Island. After completing the third lap, I would have to run a 5k through Key West to the Finish Line.

As I headed north I moved into a wind that was still a good 20 mph, but there was work to do; no sense complaining. Actually, I was amazed that I had the mobility I did. I was

astounded that after this last crash, I was still able to do what I was doing. I thanked my God and asked for grace and strength to complete the course. I also prayed to have a constructive attitude.

I ambled forward. Every step I strode was one closer to the Finish. I had two watches on me, the GPS on the left wrist and my regular watch on the right. One gave me the distance and pace I covered, and the other let me know the real time. I began my run just after 3:30 pm. The sun was still up, and it was near 80 degrees. I knew that as the sun grew low and eventually set, it would be cooler. That encouraged me. More relaxed now, I had about 8.5 hours to cover the 26.2 miles.

I watched my pace and found I was moving at about 12:30 minutes per mile. As I settled into this marathon, I made it my goal to cover 5 miles per hour. Sometimes I would go over, but I concluded, "At least I have a goal; aim at nothing and you will surely hit it!", impressed at how positively philosophical I was. I began to make it my goal to cross the Finish Line by 9:00 pm. I was in constant prayer.

My fueling was working out pretty well. Each snack baggie held one scoop of the Infinit powder, the dose for each 10 oz. bottle. As I approached the fueling stations, I would bite the corner of the baggie and let it run into the

bottle, like the sands of an hour glass. Then upon reaching the station I would get some water and quickly fill up an empty bottle, making sure that I drank my prescribed amount each hour. The only substance to enter my mouth in addition to the Infinit drink was plain water. I sensed no need to eat anything or experiment with some other substance, and didn't develop any cramps. In previous marathons, I would get cramping in my calves. Was I getting sore? Yes. Cramps? No!

When I made my first turn around, I encountered Angie. She wasn't feeling well. I felt inclined to walk with her, but she gave me the advice I had given her on the bike course, "Go on, don't wait for me, and keep moving." I took her counsel and trudged on, not very quickly but steadily.

It's funny how I kept coming upon the same people again and again. At one point I would be ahead of them, and then see them ahead of me. We would go back and forth that way, sometimes with words of encouragement exchanged. There was real camaraderie on the run course!

I appreciated the slight coolness as the sun set, but as it got dark on this new-moon night, it got real dark. There was a portion of South Roosevelt Blvd. where there were no lights whatsoever. At the turnaround at each lap, we acquired a rubber wrist band. Once we collected our third, we knew we had about 7 miles to the Finish Line. I so enjoyed leaving the

Atlantic side of the Island. I was finally out of the wind for good.

I seemed to pick up my pace as I headed into the last 5k. (which believe me was much longer than a 5k). With a renewed sense of energy, I ran farther before walking, and my walks were shorter between my runs.

That had me zigging and zagging through the streets of Bahama Village. It was so dark in the areas with no street lights, and the sidewalk was often very uneven due to tree roots pushing up the concrete. I thought the last thing I want at this point is to be prone on the ground a third time! There were helpers on the course directing me when to turn. If there was no helper, there were cones and/or arrows drawn on the ground. Oh how I longed for the Finish Line. As I strode forward, that last 5k seemed a whole lot longer than any 5k I had ever run before.

Then there was the big tease. I could see the Finish Line; in fact they had us run past the Finish Line, but there was still about a mile to go. How disappointing! I had to run onto Whitehead Street and down to Front Street. From Front Street, we ran up Duval. There were hordes of people on Duval, the main street of downtown Key West. I was so tired and so wanted to walk, but this was show time; this was prime time. The people in bars and on the streets were

cheering the triathletes on. I thought, "I will not walk until I get out of the bright lights of Duval and the cheering crowds." I kept thinking to myself as I ran Duval, "I am an Ironman, I am an Iron Man!" I knew nothing could keep me from finishing the course at that point. I would cross that Finish Line if I had to crawl across it.

When I turned the corner off Duval and entered into the dark of Eaton Street, I relaxed and walked a bit, knowing I was getting closer to my goal and being heartened by that fact. I ran up Whitehead and then made the turn onto Southard. I could hear the loud speaker and see all the bright lights at the Finish area, and there it was! There it was in full view! What a pretty sight, the Finish Line.

I sprinted, or so I thought. My sprint was probably a 10-minute-pace limp. My body ached; no cramps, but real soreness from my hips down. The announcer said, "Here comes number 143, Bill Welzien. He gave us such an encouraging invocation this morning."

And then I crossed the line. It was over. I had covered the course, covered it with more of my body at points than I had expected. By God's grace I had completed the course. I had gone the distance. A Finisher's medal was placed around my neck! I was no longer "Tin Foil Boy," but now an IronMan!

My wife, Sessie, was there at the Finish Line to greet me. I was sweaty and sore, and though I knew I needed to eat something, I had no appetite. We made our way to the medical tent. I didn't need an IV, but I wanted to get my left palm looked at and cleaned up. A sweet nurse gently scrubbed my wound and wrapped it. My official finish time was 14:04:01. And it was just after 9:00 pm.

That was good enough to secure a second place in my age group, 60-64. How I thank and praise my Lord and Master, Jesus Christ!

My official times:

Swim: 1:08:26

Transition #1: 3:58

Bike: 7:08:13

Transition #2: 12:16

Run: 5:31:28

Total: 14:04:01

**Post Script:** As I look back, I realize my foolishness in trying to grab the water while going as fast as I was. If you want to get a drink, slow way down. It was my stupidity that led to my big accident.

After my wife read over this account, she informed me that it was she who hung the Finisher Medal on my neck. I say informed me, because to this moment I have no recollection of this!

Roy Payne did exceptionally well. He was second overall. Angie struggled, apparently with a stomach virus. She persevered and crossed the Finish Line.

The report on the Orbea came back. It could be resurrected. A friend of Roy cut out the buckled section of the cross bar. He replaced it with a new section, and then repainted the area, a great job!

I was very impressed with the Infinit product. As mentioned, I consumed no solid food for the full 14 hours, only one bottle of Infinit per hour. That is, two scoops of powder in 20-24 oz. of water. I had no gastrointestinal issues and no leg cramps. It gave me the needed energy to get the job done. I wholeheartedly endorse this product!

My next big event is the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Swim Around Key West (12.5 miles) on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013. My exclusive source of nutrition during my swim will be Infinit!

In an email written to me, Ashley ended her letter with the following: **Please let me know if this is something you are interested in, or if you have any questions! We'd love to help you out! You can**

visit our website at [www.infinitnutrition.us](http://www.infinitnutrition.us) to learn more about the company and what we can offer.

Thank you,

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