

Rebecca's Race Diary – Lake Murray Sprint Triathlon:
(750 meters, 16 miles, 5K)

Sunday, June 1

It's 6:45am...roughly the time we are supposed to BE there...and we're flying down the road, running a bit behind the crowd as usual. I'm still prying my eyelids apart and mulling over some pre-race thoughts...primarily that (a) I need coffee and (b) it can't be as bad as last year. We're speeding towards Dreher Island State park...yours truly, my gently-used bicycle, and my professional bike technician/cheerleader, Liz. As the site of my first-ever triathlon last year (and the epicenter for a freak April cold front that made it 48 degrees at race time and left us battling fierce winds for most of the race), Dreher Island State Park holds a special place in my heart. Denial over my halfhearted training this Spring is in full-force, so all is well!

We finally pull into a gas station and I immediately locate the coffee and the local color. The gentleman with no front teeth and a nearly unintelligible accent is strangely comforting – he reminds me of a few random family members; my stress level decreases momentarily as we discuss the finer points of triathlon. As he tells me the route to the state park, I make a mental note that directions to the race site might be a good idea for the next time out. In addition I'm wondering why you would come out in public without your teeth (i.e., when I'm older, will I forget my teeth the way I forget my keys?). I'm also starting to worry about Liz...at this point, she has been behind the coffee counter for about five minutes. I yell over and she confirms that she's still conscious; since there were only three pots of coffee sitting out on the counter, I marvel at the sheer amount of time she is spending back there – and I'm thinking she needs the caffeine more than I do. A grand total of 10 quality minutes later, we're back on the road.

So we arrive...hmmm...25 minutes before race time? I leave Liz with the bike and the world's smallest and most inefficient air pump, as I rush over to be marked. (I have to say that having someone draw on your body for FREE is a pleasant "plus" to this triathlon thing.) With my coffee gone and my body appropriately altered by the magic marker, I actually have five minutes to putz around and show Liz the sights, prior to lining up on the dock for the start. This, of course, takes precedence over my second chore of filling up the water bottle on my bike. Pre-race instructions come down and then we're ready to go!

When it's almost time for our wave to start, we hop into the lake. Indulge me for a moment with a personal aside...and if you love Columbia or have fond childhood memories of Lake Murray, skip ahead to the next paragraph. Lake Murray is the state's biggest mud hole. Kids should BE so lucky as to grow up here...puddles in the yard could never compare to calf-deep red muck that serves as the lake's bottom...and the color of the water is...well...bright orange mud. The entirety of the swim was like some bizarre, surreal dream about triathlon in a 4-foot-deep mud puddle.

So the swim went without incident. I always suffer a panic attack in the first 2 minutes – and I enjoy the challenges of fighting through a panic attack as you continue to swim and

are devoid of most of your senses. Thank God for the breaststroke. At the turn-around point, my little “pod” of slow-swimming brethren and I took a breather and had a chat...and admired the serious triathlon swimmers who were already crawling up on shore. My last thought was, “At least it will be easy for Liz to find me and cheer!” If I ever actually learn to swim, I’ll never be able to identify myself in the midst of the crowd for my loyal followers. I felt great as I stepped onto the dock with intact feet!! That in itself was a miracle, as the aforementioned red muck was home to a plentiful number of shells and such. (Living in Charleston, shells in pluff mud always bring about a stress reaction, even when they don’t cut you.)

On to the bike.... This would be my first trip with my new computer, and Marshall’s last words to me were, “Your computer is calibrated for your bike...you’re all ready to go!” As we all know that Marshall is a deity of the bicycle kingdom, I hopped on my trusty steed and flew out of the gate. No...I don’t think you understand...I literally FLEW out of the gate. I never ride more than 14mph or so on the bike, but my first few minutes, I was averaging 24mph GOING UP THE HILLS!!! I’ve never known such elation – I laughed at myself for being worried about merely finishing the race...with some quick calculations, I figured that I would do the course in roughly half the time as last year! I wasn’t even upset when I reached down for my water bottle and realized that I never filled it up. At this point, who needs water?? I’ll be done so quickly, I’ll just drink it on the run!!!

20 minutes later, I’m still marveling at my own greatness...”I’m riding as fast as Rob!” went through my head a number of times...and then it occurred to me...that I wasn’t really passing anyone. Where was the throng of mountain bike riders that were only minutes ahead? Where were the fellows riding their daughters’ pink 10-speeds?? Nope, I never saw a one...and about halfway through the 16-mile course, I checked my total distance and realized I was reading roughly...hmmm....yep....15-miles down, one to go!

<<sigh>> I have to admit it...even though he made my mountain bike hum, and set me up on the most painless road bike ride in the world...yes...I did it...I cursed Marshall the Sage. Apparently, my computer was calibrated for mph on some extraterrestrial site, but certainly not for Columbia, SC (which is extraterrestrial in its own right, but that’s another story). I managed to come up on one sweet fellow and finish the bike ride with him...at that point, “Rebecca the Competitor” had faded away with all my KILOMETERS and “Rebecca the Extrovert” came back into play.

I finished the bike ride, stopped to tell Liz of my water bottle woes, and took off on the run...but I don’t have any great incidents to relay from that leg of the race. Halfway through, I found a wonderful guy who was already finished and looking for his buddy...so we chatted the rest of the way and thus ended my first triathlon of the 2003 season. He proceeded to boost my spirits by showing me his unattended-to (likely) broken arm...apparently his orthopedic MD/friend suggested he tough it out and do the race, before he sought medical attention.... It put my griping and complaining about the bike ride into perspective...I piped down my mental chatter and just headed for the finish line.

In retrospect, it's funny...the illusion/feeling of being FAST on the bike actually makes me think I might train to try and BE fast on the bike, one of these days. Not that I've ever cared about speed before, but it was quite a rush to think I was Queen of the Bike for a moment! In the meantime, though, let me say that...since Lake Murray last year...I've gained 15 pounds and took 13 minutes off my race time. WooHoo! I harbor illusions of actually showing up in a prepared state for a race, one of these days...but then I wonder...what kind of stories would I tell when it's over???

(Notes from Finch: Rebecca is THE MOST RELAXED person I have ever seen at a tri. Late for the start? No problem. She STOPS to chat during the run—in a SPRINT??—no problem!)