



Half Ironman Distance

The following notes are designed to give you some pointers for race day for a half Ironman. Depending on your individual goals you can alter your effort. Always keep in mind that race day conditions (typically wind, heat and humidity) will affect the manner in which you pace yourself. Always gauge the weather conditions on race day and adjust your pre race goals accordingly. A 75 degree day with little humidity or will it be 95, windy and humidity in the 80's. Both of these conditions should have different race day effort. Athletes often miss this component of racing until after the race. A good athlete recognizes and adjusts.

The Week before the Race:

Rest, proper nutrition and hydration are essential before any big race. It is better to go into any race well rested than 1% over trained. Don't force any last minute hard efforts. Follow your plan exactly as your coach has designed and never add any efforts without consulting your coach. The week of a race is no time to panic and start worrying about not having done enough training. Hydrate with both water and sports replacement drinks to ensure you are properly hydrated going into the race. You never want to enter a half Ironman race dehydrated. You should be urinating several times throughout the day. If you find yourself running to the bathroom every 30 minutes then chances are you are over hydrating. Assuming you eat a well balanced diet there should be no need to change the manner in which you eat race week. Well balanced meals with Carbohydrates, Protein and a little fat. If the weather will be hot and humid you can salt your food a bit more than normal.

Begin to mentally prepare for the race. It is common to start to question your training and or ability. I've seen many athletes lower their goals and expectations on race week. When you catch yourself doubting or negative thoughts enter your mind, quickly replace them with strong positive affirmations. If you have consistently put in the training then what often stands between you and reaching your goal is your mental capacity to deal with what I call "Mind Chatter". Learn to not listen to the little voice in your head that questions your ability or wants to talk to you all day during the race. The goal is to quiet your mind. Every night before you go to bed spend 15 minutes envisioning the race. See a positive outcome develop in your mind and develop some key phrases you can tell

yourself if your mind wanders to the dark side. Words like STAY STRONG, BE EFFICIENT, RELAX, BREATHE, FOCUS are all words that can bring you back to center. Race day is about performing not evaluating your performance. If you work on being efficient and smooth in your effort then the results will fall where they should. You can't force an effort or result in a half Ironman like you can in a shorter race.

The week before the race is a great time to prepare your equipment. Don't wait until the last minute to prepare your bags or get your bike ready. This includes planning out what you will eat and drink on race day and making sure you have enough.

Race Day Strategy:

Goals

Everyone has different goals and aspirations but the following advice is one that I feel can apply to all ability levels doing the half Ironman distance race. I understand the importance of having time goals but they must be realistic and based on your abilities. Your goal should not be based on beating someone else. If you have never raced this distance before then your only goal should be to finish the race. If you have completed the race before then your goal should be a combination of the time you put in previously (assuming the course is the same) and the quality and quantity of training you have put in this year. I like to have three goals when I race. One goal is if I have the perfect day of racing and weather conditions cooperate. I call this goal my stretch goal. I then give myself a 10 -15 minute gap and call this my realistic goal. It is what I should probably do giving my ability level, training and the race course. I give myself a 10-15 minute window for this goal. The final goal is my "oh well I was just her to have fun" goal. More than likely something didn't go right for me on race day. In the big picture, crossing the finish line should always be the most important goal for any of us, especially when the day doesn't go well. Keep things in perspective and you should judge your day not by what a clock says but by internally analyzing if you gave a consistent effort all day long. Did you work through the difficult times or did you quit?

Swim:

The Half I-Man swim is just a little longer than the Olympic distance swim. I give the same effort for this distance as I would the Olympic distance race. You should always try and catch a draft from a person going slightly faster than you to conserve energy. In the swim always strive for a long and efficient stroke.

Bike:

The goal when you get out of the water is to allow your heart rate to settle back down. Exiting the water and rushing through transition typically causes a jump

in your heart rate. Take the first 3-5 miles of the bike to ride in a smaller gear and focus on getting your breathing calm. I typically sit up on the bike during this time to allow my diaphragm to settle back into place and find it easier to control my breathing. My perceived effort on the bike is based on two factors (none of which are tied to a heart rate monitor but one in which you should have developed during training). Number one, if I hear myself breathing I'm going harder than I should. Keep your breathing under control. Number two, I ask myself, can I hold this pace for all 56 miles. Someone who has raced the distance several times and is shooting for a particular goal may push the effort slightly but the pacing is still a high zone 2 effort. Nutrition on the bike is crucial and I cover in detail in my nutrition article on the web site a basic plan which can be adapted for this distance. Waiting until race week to finalize your nutrition is never a good idea. This should have been fine tuned during your training leading up to the race. Remember to adjust your hydration and electrolyte intake to the elements.

I typically break the race down into several parts and this varies from race to race. I use the first 5 miles to settle in. From miles 5-25 I work on establishing my pedaling cadence for the day and maintaining an even pace. At mile 26 you should be well established in your pace for the day and your goal should be to maintain where you are through mile 52. If you are tired then break the race down mentally into 5 mile increments. At mile 52 I will sit up periodically to give my back a rest and spin a little higher to get my legs ready for the run. I mentally prepare for the run and do a quick calculation of where my bike split will be in relation to my goal. I start to think about a quick transition and my running form.

Run:

Break the run down into 3 mile segments. The first 3 miles you should work to get your breathing under control and concentrate on your form. Keep your pacing regulated as your goal is to have the last 3 miles be your fastest not your first 3. At mile 3 you should be settled into a pacing and rhythm that you want to maintain through mile 6. From miles 7-9 push the pace a little bit and mile 10 to the finish line is gut check time. Make sure you are getting in plenty of fluids at the rest area. If this means you need to walk quickly while you drink then do it. Take your GU just before you reach the aide station and drink as you walk through. Once again, electrolyte consumption should be based on the weather but I typically take one an hour on a moderate day and adjust accordingly.

Conclusion:

The half Ironman distance race is about proper pacing and nutrition. If you are racing for the first time then you should look at this day as a long slow training day. After you have completed a couple races you can gauge your effort a little higher. Have fun, enjoy the day and keep in perspective that the goal is to always finish.

