

Debbie Johnson – Teva Big Day at the office 2009

The Highs and Lows of the Teva Big Day at the Office

I have been running and cycling for a couple of years now and paddling for 9 months so trying to string it all together in a longer event, seemed like my logical next step. With no reasonable excuses, I made the commitment, and filled in the entry form. For me this race was never going to be about my time or placing, it was about doing the individual sections as well as I could and hopefully learning a few things about myself and multi sporting along the way.

My goals were simply:

1. Complete my first individual multisport race
2. Practice transitions and test out my nutrition plan in preparation for Coast to Coast
3. Cross the finish line exhausted knowing I have given 100%

As the day approached I felt myself getting a little bit nervous, and I began to worry that I was being a bit overly ambitious even attempting it. My husband Dean (a fellow multisporter), my training partners and my coach - Richard – were all encouraging which helped a lot – thanks guys.

The Teva Big Day at the Office is a 40 km ride, a 24km mountain run, a 30km ride, 10km paddle and a 3km run to finish. It was a cold damp start but I got into a good bunch of about 7. We rotated well and shared the work and it seemed like no time at all to the first transition, so far so good. Dean, my husband, was ready for me, so it was a speedy transition and then out on to the run.

After a few minutes on the shingle road, I found my running legs and started to feel great. About that time Sam Evans from Complete Performance ran past me (he had had a puncture on the first ride). I decided to try to stay with him for as long as I could, and I kept him in my sights pretty much to Woolshed Creek Hut. Wow, I was going well and feeling good. I kept pushing hard and I passed more runners on the long uphill to the saddle. I'm not usually a particularly strong runner so I was having the run of my life – or so I thought. By the time I reached the saddle I was getting quite cold, but I ignored it. I also realized I probably hadn't eaten enough so I forced down another Gu.

The track down from the saddle to Pinnacles Hut gets more technical and the wet weather didn't help. I started out at a good pace, then I was over on my ankle. It didn't hurt too much but it was enough to slow me down. I then started to feel weak, and shaky, and by now plenty of other runners were passing me. I tried to keep up with them but I couldn't. As I approached Pinnacles Hut I was feeling pretty awful, I was weak and shaky and at my low point I even vomited.

It was tempting to stop, but I knew I should be tough and keep going. I pretty much walked/jogged for about the next 40mins. I put on more clothes and I made myself eat a sandwich and muesli bars, and little by little I started to feel better. Tania Hall caught me up and we stayed together for a while – having someone to run with and talk to really helped lift my spirits. By the time I reached Dukes Knob, I was feeling ok again and I started to run, although I had learnt my lesson about pacing and from now on I would go steady, getting to the finish line was the only aim.

After the run it was the 30 km ride, by now it was raining and there was a strong head wind. I'd lost so much time on the run there was nobody to ride with, so there was nothing for it, I had to grit my teeth and go it alone. The week before Richard suggested I read a book called The Game Plan by Steve Bull. This book is all about developing and utilizing mental toughness. It is an easy read with some useful tips, that were coming in really handy right now! Most importantly think positively and remember about all the times you have been mentally

tough and successful in the past. So I started talking to myself in the 3rd person “Keep pedaling Debbie, you are doing really well, keep it up”. It feels slightly nutty, but it works and before long I had reached the next transition and the kayak leg.

As previously explained I am new to kayaking so I had been a little nervous about this leg, but it actually turned out to be quite pleasant. If nothing more, because down in the irrigation canal I was out of the wind and the rain had eased off slightly. And what is more, there were people around me again – I felt back in the race. I had made up some time on the bike, all those spin classes over winter must have worked. So now I focused on trying to make up some places in the kayak. I passed 4 kayaks, (ok 2 of them were plastic boats), but still this was a major improvement over 2 hours ago, and maybe, just maybe I’m not as slow a paddler as I thought I was.

After the kayak it was a wee 3km run, or slow jog in my case, to the finish. My legs felt like lead, but I think I smiled the whole way as I was just so pleased to have finished my first individual multisport event – it felt great.