

# Zarnia Morrison – Ironman NZ 2010

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Lining up on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2010 for what would be my fourth IM race I was still a little nervous about the day ahead. In the days leading up I thought I was pretty cool, calm and collected about the whole thing. We headed up to Taupo on Wednesday morning after a hectic two days moving my office at work! Not good timing however I managed to avoid lifting any heavy boxes. We shared our accommodation with friends Chrissy and Brett and on arrival we headed to the supermarket to stock up on essential carbo loading foods and post race treats! Before heading to our little cottage out at Rainbow Point (just off the run course) to unpack and assemble our bikes.



Bikes assembled then it was off to check out the race expo. I had managed to leave my jandals at home (an essential piece of IM equipment) so was pleased to see that K-Swiss had produced some lovely pink and blue IM jandals ! Great first purchase completed. Then it was off to the (in)famous Orca shop sale and there were some bargains to be had there as well!

Phew, after all that shopping it was time for a coffee!

Thursday morning was a short swim scheduled to get the feel of the water having not swum in fresh water since Wanaka. Up at 6.30am to head down to the swim start and it was blowing a gale! HmMMMMMMMMM this could be interesting. Well we suited up and in we went, the water temperature was great! However it was a bit of a mission to even get out to the start buoy! Ok so I try and relax and go with the flow and try not to panic that it will be like this in two days time. Come Saturday if it was this windy it would either be a very short day (ie I am not the best of swimmers in calm water let alone in rough water! There could be the chance I don't make the swim cut off time 2hours 20mins) or a very long day!

Thursday was also registration day which involves getting weighed, (we decided we liked the scales across the road at the Blue Seventy shop weighing in at 2kg lighter than the registration tent!) and picking up transition bags, timing chip and sponsor goodies, and lo and behold you would not believe what we received in our bag, a bloomin' pair of jandals! At least they were a different colour!

Once we were all registered it was off for more coffee! Then back to the house to chill out before heading to the carbo loading party. Having been to Taupo twice already and really enjoying the Maori welcome I was looking forward to it, however this year it was really short! So I was very disappointed, there is nothing like a traditional Maori welcome to get the adrenaline going! I resisted the urge to tuck into the food keeping in mind the nutritional plan that Catherine had set me and the thought of Nadine getting sick post carbo loading in Wanaka. I think Iain ate my share anyway.

Friday morning we decided to avoid the hype of the race start and headed down to the lake just down the road from the house. We had to walk out quite a way before we were able to do any swimming but once out there it was just beautiful, a lovely calm lake, just what I was hoping for come Sat am. After race briefing and checking in our bikes and transition bags it was time to chill out and rest the legs. The weather report for Saturday was for gusty SW winds, hmMMMMMMMMM.

After a pretty terrible night's sleep tossing and turning and worrying if I had put my bike shoes in my T2 bag and my running shoes in my T1 bag I was up at 4:30am to eat breakfast and get the last of my nutrition ready. Breakfast went down ok which is a first and soon we were heading off to the race start. I was pleased to see the lake flat as a pancake, no wind yet! We went to body numbering first and our line was short so that was done in

record time, then it was off to the bikes to pump up tyres and put the nutrition on the bike. I had a quick look in my T1 bag just to check that my bike shoes were in there and not down the road in the T2 bag. Phew, they were, all that tossing and turning for nothing.

We headed off down to the lakeside, had one last toilet stop and watch the Maori welcome to the lake. Then it was time to head off into the water, it was nice and warm at 19 degrees and you could even stand up at the buoys. That is a first, the lake level is pretty low this year. I had lost Chrissy when we were getting into the wetsuits but spotted her just in front of me with 1 minute to go so I yelled out good luck and enjoy the day. Then the cannon went off and it was time to go.

In the past I have started at the back of the pack to stay out of trouble as I am not the best of swimmers, however this year I decided to start in the middle of the pack which was a challenge. I noticed when we got to the first orange buoy that this year they had numbered them all so I decided to count off how many meters to go. About halfway down I thought I must be doing ok as by this stage in past IM races I am normally swimming on my own and can see all the other swimmers way off in the distance. It was also very annoying that all these people swimming around me weren't swimming in a straight line! I kept getting boxed in between two people and had to stop and do some breast stroke to get out from between them and into clear water. Before I knew it we were at the turn buoy. On the return leg the crowd of swimmers seemed to spread out a bit more however there were a couple that kept swimming in front of me. It was also unusual not having my own personal life guard on a surfboard as I have had in the past. With about 500m to go I was a bit over the swim and my left shoulder started to hurt and I just wanted to get out. Finally the last buoy was there and it was time to head into the finish line. My goal time for the swim was 1 hour 30-35mins which would be a 7-12min PB, so I wish there had of been a camera there when I looked at my watch as I stood up out of the water to see I had done the swim in 1hr 25mins! Holy cow where had that come from, a 22min PB! On the run up to T1 I saw Nadine and she was yelling with great excitement about my swim time. I then ran past Iain and Brett and they were also surprised and excited to see me out so early.

In T1 there have never been so many people in there at the same time as me before so most of the helpers were busy so I pretty much got myself sorted and out onto the bike. On the hill out of Taupo I took it pretty easy however I was feeling great, not sure if that was the adrenaline from the excitement of the swim time or not. I spun up the hill in an easy gear passing one poor girl who had a puncture and was cursing herself, hope she managed to get back into the race.

By this time the wind had picked up and I knew it was going to be a pretty fast ride out to the first turn, coming out of the swim quicker than normal I was also faced with another new challenge, trying not to draft! There were so many people and it was a frustrating first lap as people would pass me then pull into the gap I had kept between myself and the rider in front of me. There are a lot of people out there that do not know what seven meters looks like.

On the way back into Taupo the wind was getting stronger and I was not feeling so flash the wind was mostly a side wind so made riding on the aerobars interesting as a few times I almost got swept across to the other side of the road. I was also having trouble peeing on the bike and had to have a few stops. The nutrition plan I had sorted out with Catherine was working ok however I had mixed the liquid nutrition a bit stronger than normal and had to stop and water that down as well. Once I had done that and was getting more fuel in I seemed to come right and had a bit more energy.

My plan had been to do the ride in 6hrs 30-40mins and I had gone through 90kms in 3hrs 15 so if the wind didn't get any stronger I was hopeful of being on target. At the special needs I stopped for my drink I had frozen overnight and it was still lovely and cool – highly recommend this on a hot day. Once back on the bike I was pleased I had stopped to get the special needs as I passed one girl on the climb back out of Taupo that had tried

to discard her bag and it had got blown by the wind and was now tangled in her cluster and chain, she was frantically trying to get it out.

Out to Reporoa for the second time the wind was picking up and again it was a fast ride out. I knew then it was going to be a hard ride back and sure enough it was. With 20km to go I was ready to get off my bike! The 10kms gradual climb up to the turn point where you have the last 10km downhill to Taupo was HARD! I have never been so happy to see the top of a hill before, and it is not even a very big hill! The last 10km seemed to take forever, but made it into T2 and handed my bike over to one of the helpers telling him he could have it! Bike time 6hrs 52mins, 7 mins of this was wasted time with toilet stops.

Finally on to the run! I walked over the bridge and then got myself focused for the final leg, once I started running I felt a few cramps, so eased back the pace a bit. Once I had been around the back of the finish line and was heading back out of town the wind was getting stronger, great, a headwind all the way out to the turnaround. My plan for the run was to do it under four hours, I knew when I was out on the bike that today was not going to be the day for a PB on the run and especially the one I had set myself. So I settled in and worked my way along the course running from aid station to aid station. My race plan was to walk the aid stations and get water and gels in then start running at the end and walk the hills if necessary. I hit the first hill and decided just to shorten my stride and kept running. I also tucked in behind some of the bigger guys to shelter me from the wind. The spray tent set up in Rainbow Drive was a welcome relief.

At the turn in Five Mile Bay there was Gene, a good friend from Wellington cheering everyone on. It was great to hear him cheering. The hill back up from FMB didn't feel that bad and I was able to run up that as well. I was feeling good and happy with the way I was running. Back in town and 21km down with 21km to go I was starting to tire and this is where I had stomach problems last year and was down to a walk/run for 10kms. I refused all the goodies at the aid stations this time and stuck to my plan with water and gels. I had a few extra walks on the way back out on the second lap mainly on the hills. At the final turn I was really starting to feel tired and was thinking about walking a lot more than I had been, but there was Gene cheering me on again so this perked me up and I was off again managing to run most of the hill back into town.

With about 5km to go I passed a woman sitting on the ground, she yelled out "Go Zarnia!" I had gotten used to this by now as our names are printed on the race numbers, however about 30 seconds later this woman was running alongside me yelling at me "Richard is here all the way from Christchurch to watch you" I was thinking, hey, Richard ??? my coach was the only Richard I could think of. I turned to look at this woman and discovered it was the wife of one of my old patients from work! What a surprise! I kept running as walking was not a good thing to do by this stage as I would get the head spins so I knew I was running on empty. But she kept on running beside me and I thanked her for coming to cheer me on, there were almost tears! And my voice was quavering. She stopped and I had to walk up that one last little hill before town, they passed me in the car cheering me on again so I start running again. Then they had parked the car with Richard waving and cheering me on so I kept running, and they drove past again tooting and yelling they would see me at the finish line.

The last km before the turn at the end of the park was great, there was so many people out cheering I got a real lift and then I was turning to enter the finish chute and there they were Richard and his wife and their daughter (who lives in Taupo) so I gave them all a high five and soaked up the atmosphere.

Iain and Brett were a bit further up cheering with great excitement so I gave them high fives as well before I looked up at the finish line to see the clock with a time of 12hrs 51mins, yahoo a PB!

Crossing the finish line, all I wanted was salt! I could not get that tomato soup down quick enough! I had two cups of it! And normally I hate tomato soup. After a massage and some more food I headed out to meet Iain and the others then it was off home to shower and more food before heading back down to the finish to bring in the final competitors.

My best race to date and I want to thank my lovely husband Iain who encourages me to be stronger. He has had a tough time not being able to race due to injury, hopefully he will be back out there racing again soon. Richard (the coach) for his training plans that have kept me interested in training for these long events and his encouragement during the tough times. John Ellis (for the swim drills I have practiced over and over again which I am sure has helped get that swim PB!) and the massage sessions! Catherine my nutritionist for her guidance and nutrition plans, And finally Richard my old patient from work, he has Parkinson's disease, has had cancer and is a real fighter, he inspired me in those last 5kms when all I wanted to do was stop and lie down.