

## The Mighty Challenge Wanaka

4.30am on January 21<sup>st</sup> I am up and chucking down my Weety Bix Bites, trying to stay awake. Already I can hear the wind outside and it sounds even worse than 2011. I am getting ready to line up for my first Iron Distance race as a professional and the nerves were definitely there. Off down to transition and the wind was still blowing strong.



Not being a strong swimmer, I knew the swim would be tough. The professionals start 10m out in front of everyone. I was chuckling to myself wondering where to stand as I knew I would be way off the pace and looking behind me at the masses of people on the shore I could see my friends eyeing me up to charge me down. The lake was a lot lower than normal meaning a very shallow start with me trying to run and duck-dive through the water while trying not to laugh and swallow water. Lots of age groupers started to rush past me and over top of me. I kept thinking to myself just hold your breath and don't drown! By the second lap everyone had spread out a bit and I found some feet to follow. After a while I realised it was Glen - haha sorry Glen for all the feet tapping but thanks for dragging me around the swim.



(Photos taken by Phil Walter - Getty Images)

Off on the bike and I was excited. It is my favourite part of the race. I managed to come out of the water at the same time as Candice Hammond, who is a very strong cyclist. We were able to work together (legally, 7m apart!) to make up some time and catch some of the faster female swimmers. It was definitely nice not having to cycle completely on my own with no one in sight, which can be pretty daunting over 180km. Part way into the cycle we caught up with Julia Grant who was sitting in 2<sup>nd</sup> place. She joined our party so there were 3 of us in the fight to hunt Gina Crawford down. We came within 2mins 20sec of her but she was cycling so well and by the end she had extended her lead to over 3 minutes. In the last 50km of the race I noticed my headset was coming loose. I looked around to find which bolts were loose but they all seemed tight – it was those dam internal ones that I couldn't get to. With 20km to go it got really bad, I could pull my whole aero bars and wing up and down. I had no choice but to carry on, trying not to put any weight on them. Anyone who has done any variety of cycling will know that not putting any weight on your handlebars while riding is nearly impossible - it meant I could not get out of the seat to climb hills or go fast on the down hills. Not having any tools with me and noticing a bolt fly off my bike onto the road beneath me, I realised I had to do something to try and fix it! I had some cello tape taping my food on to the bike so I carefully peeled the small remains off and tried to tape my bars tight. Haha I didn't know whether to laugh or cry but it was certainly an experience I don't want to repeat! While this was happening, Britta Martin came out of nowhere and she and Julia busted a move up the last major hill, leaving Candice and I in their dust. I was just glad to make it off the bike in one piece☺.



My Patch up job on Trinity.



(Photo by Gavin Mason)

Through transition two I was thinking to myself right here we go, just the marathon left. Don't slow down. Also running through my head though was that I had only had 3 bottles to drink on the bike when I knew I should have had 7-8 bottles. This would cost me later! Starting off on the run I was feeling ok; the legs were not too bad. I was tucked in behind Candice, although I knew I needed to slow down as her pace was faster than I was capable of. 21km down and I had slipped into 6<sup>th</sup> place with Simone Maier steaming past me around the 20km mark. After a quick toilet stop (as I was starting to have major

stomach problems), I headed off for my final 21km. Things steadily went downhill in the second half. I ended up having to walk through each aid station, as well as other parts of the run. I was so thirsty and dizzy, trying to drink as much as I could but I was finding it hard to swallow anything. 10km from the end Nicole Ward passed me, now I had slipped to 7<sup>th</sup> place and thought just hold on...until I could finally see the finish line! Looking up at the clock I saw 10.16, a PB over the iron distance and 50mins faster than my 2010 effort at Challenge Wanaka. Things went even more drastically downhill after I crossed the finish line and I spent a couple of hours in the med tent, sucking back the oxygen and getting juiced up on the drip. Big thanks to the Red Cross team. They did an amazing job looking after everyone.



At awards brunch, top 10 female finishers

I have just had a recovery week and will start to get back in to some decent miles this week. At the moment I am not quite sure what races I will be competing in this year but definitely hoping to get to some overseas Challenge events. Thank you to Victoria Murray-Orr and her team for organising such a superb race, my family and supporters that were up in Wanaka with me and my sponsors who continue to help me reach my goals