

2023 IM Philippines Race Report | Faith

After six 70.3s in Indonesia, Hawaii, Korea, Thailand, New Zealand and Taiwan, I continued onto the next stop and my first 140.6 in my world tour of triathlon - the Philippines!

I typically travel with close friends but this time, I was alone. To me this was not ideal - just the thought of crossing the finish line, then dragging all my gear and self to the Air BnB in solitude was pretty grim

However, I managed to wrangle my way into a swim and bike session with Mike Trees and his buddy, Steve.

In addition, I received a LOT of help from Jemerson with transport and logistics.

The triathlon community is real, and I'm very grateful for all of their support - this race would have been a much more complicated and frustrating endeavor without them.

So I signed up for IMPI in October 2019, to race in June 2020.

With the pandemic, 2020, 2021, 2022 passed by with cancellations and deferrals.

I was very lucky to have been able to defer for so long, but on June 11, 2023 I finally crossed the finish line to hear the words, "You are an IRONMAN!"

It was not a particularly spectacular time but with such a small field, I managed to take the age group win and come in 2nd amongst women overall.

Throughout the 11 hours and 44 minutes, I set out to be methodical and intentional - I didn't rush and I didn't stress myself out.

You only get one first IRONMAN experience and I didn't want my debut to be something I didn't enjoy, or worse.

Of course, it was mentally challenging and I wanted to walk (especially the last 10, 12k of the run when I had to start digging deep) but in the big picture, it was not physically painful.

I did not have blisters or significant chafing despite the constant rain, I never cramped (came close) and overall, I just hurt mentally and from general fatigue.

This year, there was no worse pain than at 70.3 New Zealand when I had to push through cramps in my quads.

I was careless about fueling in Taupo and paid a big price for it. Guess I was a little rusty going into my first 70.3 in three years!

TRAVEL & LOGISTICS

I flew Cebu Pacific between Manila and Narita - the flights were about 50,000 yen, then I added sports equipment and an extra bag, so altogether, I paid about 64,000 yen.

There are now flights between Clark and Narita, which is much closer to Subic Bay (this flight schedule had been cancelled during the pandemic and when I rebooked, it had not yet reconvened).

Jem booked me a van from Manila to Subic Bay, which was about 17,000 yen for the three hour drive.

On the way back to Manila, I split the cost of the ride with more people and thus, paid closer to 5,000.

Travel was by far the biggest chunk of cost at about 86,000 yen altogether.

When I signed up for IMPI, I paid USD 702 for entry.

Daily expenses were about 22,000 yen or about 3,000 yen a day.

I had a budget AirBnB apartment with kitchen, which was 26,000 yen for 6 nights, plus a hotel night in Manila was about 4,000 yen.

I arrived in Subic Bay late at night on Tuesday, June 6, raced on Sunday, June 11, and was back at Narita in the late morning of Tuesday, June 13.

For this 7D7N race, I gather I spent between 110,000-120,000 yen, not including race entry.

SWIM (1:19)

The full folks started at 0640, and I don't believe I'm the only one that watched alarmed as several 70.3 athletes starting at 0620 began waving frantically for help.

You could visibly see people struggling and it was quite honestly, concerning and horrifying.

Granted, the water was awful - murky, choppy with no pattern or rhythm, just...angry.

At the start, several people were just clinging on to the buoy or the "lane rope" - some were also moving forward using the rope -_- No comment.

One Japanese male athlete said he'd completed 12 IMs and this was his slowest swim and another Japanese female (with the fastest women's swim split) said she couldn't sight at all so she would breast stroke in attempts to sight.

Hearing them speak of the swim like this made me feel vindicated - like, "Ok, so that really was a choppy, tough swim for everyone, even for solid swimmers.

Later, I found multiple social media posts on people DNF-ing the swim or pulling out entirely.

The attrition rate in the swim (particularly for the 70.3) was something horrendous, and I know those lifeguards were busy.

The Aussie exit was a welcome break between the two 1.9km laps. But after two lake swims, the ocean felt really...gross.

But also the waters really were not great in that part of Subic Bay.

I had a grand time drafting a guy on my first lap and when I glanced at my watch, it was something like 37 minutes, which I was surprised about in those conditions.

Sadly, I lapped the guy on the second lap and had to swim alone - I didn't feel 5 minutes slower but that's how the dice rolled.

T1 (07:58)

I waddled out angrily (based on my race photos) for about...maybe 200 meters, grabbed my transition bag and...randomly bumped into a teammate from Singapore that I had not seen in six years.

He mentioned that his swim time was 10 minutes slower than usual and I just said this was my worst swim, too :-)

After stripping my swim skin and putting on my tri top, I waddled to my bike with my socks and shoes in hand, throwing the transition bag to the volunteers.

At the bike rack, I had a bottle of water (it's a clean transition but I had "accidentally" left a bottle of water by my bike) I used to rinse off (honestly, futile because...raining) from head to toe.

Put on my socks, shoes, immediately drenched in the soggy grass/carpeting. Waddled onwards to the mount line...and off I went.

Was it a fast T1? No, I took my sweet time, I chatted with Alex, and basically took a shower, but I was there to have a good time, not necessarily a fast time.

BIKE (6:19, 28.8kph avg, avg 2.7 w/kg, avg 138bpm, IF 0.75)

I know the common thing to say is, I never want to do that again, and I admit I said that a few times but honestly, I am so disappointed with my bike time that I would do another full just to improve the bike time.

My lengthy research had told me 1,100 to 1,200m of ascent but my data told me either 550m or about 1,700m. I am positive it was more than the former but the latter also sounds like well, a lot. However, leaving Subic Bay on Monday, I was able to view most of the bike course in the vehicle and I couldn't believe how long and steep those climbs were!?

Either way, I fell apart after about 140k and lost about 5 spots on the climbs back to T2.

I consider myself a good climber, so this was a bitter pill to swallow, but I knew I had to let them go and not do anything crazy - my hope was that I could catch them on the run because a lot can happen in 42km.

I knew almost immediately that I started the ride too aggressively - I was essentially riding with the kind of power I push out for an aggressive 70.3, averaging 135 to 133 for the first 3 hours or so.

For me, that's about 3.1w/kg and at my current abilities, not sustainable for give or take six hours. At the end, I averaged 119 watts which was in line with my target of 117 to 120.

But the point is that I started too strong and it's something I'll work on next time.

I wear pure road cycling shoes now and have felt better about them as they are stiffer than my previous pairs of triathlon cycling shoes.

However, in the pouring rain and as I peed on the bike, I realized the disadvantages of not having shoes that can drain.

I pulled over at the personal needs stop at 90km for a solid five minutes and change.

Here, I reloaded with five Gu, two mochi bars, and a variety of salt caps/tabs in small ziploc baggies - one baggy proportioned for every hour.

Then I refilled my bottle with a packet of powdered Pocari (I had a full water bottle from an aid station, and still had one of my bidons, so I poured a Pocari powder into the bidon, and topped it off using the water bottle).

I also stood there and inhaled the warabi mochi.

I like this as a carb source but it's hard to eat while actually riding because of the packaging and the sticky brown sugar syrup. I want to figure out a better way to eat this on the bike, perhaps open it and put it in a small ziploc baggie?

The mochi bars are about 27g carbs and can be found at 7-11 for 108 yen each - they are wrapped in an edible rice paper which is easy to handle...UNLESS it's raining.

I found this out the hard way on race day. It got very messy with the rice paper dissolving, but I still ate all four bars.

The way the course was set up with four laps, we were given the opportunity to visit personal needs at the 50k, 90k, 130k marks.

I had strategized to visit at the 90k mark because I needed to restock. This is something that I want to revisit next time - and maybe also not take so much time.

But again, I wanted to have a good time (not necessarily a fast time) and I wanted to be very intentional.

T2 (5:32)

Not a whole lot to say here. I pulled into T2 and saw there were more bikes than I wanted to see on the racks because after all, I'd been passed by several women in the last 40km or so on the bike.

I had another moderately full bottle of water from an aid station, which I used to rinse off my bottom half

Then I sat down to do all my T2 things.

With the remaining water, I filled my handheld water bottle which already had one PH 1,500 tablet in it.

I did not think I would change socks at T2, but I had put spare socks in my run bag anyways, and I'm glad I did because I know my bike socks and bike shoes were soaked in pee and rain.

Fresh socks were nice for the brief 45 seconds before I got up and almost immediately began having to step in giant puddles and also, running in blinding rain.

Unfortunately, the Omnis headband and all the other bells and whistles I had practiced with for the heat were rendered utterly useless.

I wore the Omnis headband regardless, because I "need" a headband to run with to keep hair out of my face (this annoys me greatly).

RUN (3:52 at 5:28 pace, avg 137bpm, 134 avg power)

The run felt pretty good up until about 30k. After this, I started to wander into unfamiliar territory, and also, the fourth loop was just daunting.

I started to get cranky with everyone and I knew my face was beginning to contort into Ugly Face. The HR was bang on and while I did slow down over the course of the marathon, I am really pleased with the way I executed the run.

Actually, I forgot, I did throw up while running. I blame it on the mini banana that I ate at an aid station pretty early on.

It was the most vile brown vomit in small quantities several times to my right side, where the lead bike guy was behind me (top three women and men had a bike lead each)

I gave him warnings not to stay too close as I felt it coming but I am not entirely sure he understood what I was saying until I threw up.

For a while after that, he stayed further away from me. I didn't hurt much, but I did wonder if I should stop to get it all out and recompose myself.

But I felt ok after throwing up and I was on a slight incline running slowly, so I carried on.

The first half was pretty tame otherwise. I felt in control and I was actually having a relatively good time.

The run was also flatter than I had expected and well, it was never hot since it was raining, drizzling or just gloomy the entire time so that really helped.

I knew the second half would be another beast to tame but I tried not to think too much, really the only thing I could think was to keep my legs moving, my shoulders relaxed, and that I can do hard things.

After the third loop and onto the fourth lap though, I was really over the running.

I wasn't cramping or aching, but overall, I was just...tired. Fatigue was setting in and everyone was annoying me.

It was about 1730 and things were starting to get a smidge darker so the sunglasses went up and now, everyone could see the uncertainty in my eyes and face haha I was NO LONGER HAVING A GOOD TIME.

My lap splits had started to slip into the 5:40 somethings and I just hoped really hard that I could hang on until the finish as #3.

In my defense, I also had a bit of pressure on me, having had the #3 lead bike guy with me since about the 5km mark when I passed about 4 ladies in quick succession.

With several u-turns, I glanced at the distance on my watch and then again when I passed the young Japanese woman who was hot on my tail.

Rena generally stayed within 550 to 600 meters behind me - which was not enough for me to feel comfortable slowing down at any point.

However, I also knew that with a rolling wave start, I was probably ahead of her time wise (since it was my first IM, I was shafted to the last swim start wave).

I managed to keep a relatively stable pace, but I never really noticed that I was veryyy slowly catching up to #2.

Eventually, my bike lead guy pointed out #2 in the distance and said, "Miss, you will be #2."

We were in the last 2k and quite honestly, I was not so confident in myself - there was a fairly good chance she would not let me go, find her last kick, or just start to pick up the pace, etc.

Well, he had a lot more faith in me than I did myself.

Bless his heart, I really wish I had remembered to say thank you but I exchanged lead bike guys when I overtook to become #2 and then the lead bike guys disappeared completely, so I never got to say thank you. I really regret that.

Imagine cycling 42km at an excruciatingly slow pace only to be barked at occasionally by a small human, thrown up at (on accident), then told to be quiet when you're trying to be encouraging.

I have no manners - this has literally kept me up at night.

At some point in those last 10, 11 minutes, I managed to have a quick chat with Victoria Hill, who is a familiar name from when I first started triathlon in Singapore six years ago.

A multiple Kona qualifier, she was an absolute triathlon powerhouse then and continues to be so today - I've admired her from afar but during the race, I did not realise that I was passing Vicki Hill (although I knew she was at IMPI as I had seen her name on the start list).

We talked about how this was my first IM and my first full marathon, we laughed a bit and then I started to pull ahead.

I must have found my final kick because those last 700 meters were a full minute per km faster than my overall average pace - guess I just really wanted it to end :-)

I waited for #3 and when I saw her name on the finish ticker, I realised I had beat Vicki Hill - and in a weird way, I kind of felt like things had come full circle?

This woman I had admired before I knew much about triathlon and whom I had guessed would win the whole race that day - I realised how far I had come in my triathlon journey and it definitely gave me some feels.

Ultimately, I knew I had a decent chance in my age group but at the same time - you just never know what's going to happen on race day.

Taking age group champion and 2nd overall female was beyond what I had hoped for but when the field is so small, everyone's got a pretty good chance at taking home hardware!

While I qualified for Kona, I did not take the slot - there were 25 slots for 32 female finishers so...I hope they did not go to waste!

Finally, I would be remiss not to mention my INTENSELY AWFUL hospital stay that ensued a couple of days after my return.

Long story short, my discharge papers said I had a "viral infection" - I understand this to mean the doctors were unsure what was actually wrong with me.

Starting on Wednesday (the day after my return), the diarrhea began. I rapidly deteriorated and by the following day, I was unable to keep anything down, including water and liquids.

After losing an alarming amount of weight in a few hours on Thursday, I realised I needed medical attention and went to the ER at the Shonan Kamakura General Hospital.

My symptoms were primarily classic severe dehydration and I did not display symptoms of say, hyponatremia or rhabdo.

Basically, hyperkalemia or high potassium levels (6.8), arrhythmia (which greatly alarmed the medical professionals), overall severe discomfort, body aches, some stomach pain, followed by bouts of fever up to 39.9 (this was the peak, after I hit this, I started to feel better).

After inhaling five IVs in about 8 hours, I tapered off and finished my 4D3N stay with about 7 blood draws from both arms and my left hip (my veins were not popping and my blood was...not right when I was first admitted), 11 IV bags, and a series of half eaten meals.

This whole ordeal was tougher than the IM - just being so WILDLY sick was...highly unpleasant.

The hospital stay was about 82,000 yen all together, and I guess I should include that in my race costs 🙄

FUELING

I knew I had nailed it in Taiwan, but was aware doubling the distance could present digestion issues over the several hours. In addition, it would be very hot in the Philippines, so I had to stay on top of electrolytes.

The way the weather turned out, I could have probably decreased the amount of electrolytes I was taking in, but I generally stuck with my plan as mid-race was not an ideal time to start picking apart my fueling plan and do complex math in my head while hurling myself down a tollway on two wheels.

My carb intake is pretty high and I will admit that I seem to naturally do ok with a high amount of carb intake.

For many people, this needs to be something they train their guts for.

PRE/SWIM

Breakfast: 150g microwave rice, miso soup, coffee at 0445

1x waffle at swim start watching 70.3 drown around 0620 (20g)

1x warabi mochi around 0600 (32g)

1x Gu 5 min before swim around 0635 (22g)

TOTAL: 74g carbs, mg sodium

BIKE (hourly target: 60g carb, 1500mg sodium -> for first half three hours: 180g carb, 4500mg sodium)

To start / first three hours:

1x 1L Pocari + 1 tab PH 1500 (72g, 2000mg)

1x bottle Skratch Super Fuel (100g, 300mg)

2x mochi walnut bars (54g)

5x Gu (about 110g, about 1,000mg)

1x Gu liquid (25g)

3x 140mg electrolyte caps (about 420mg)

4x 100mg electrolyte tabs (about 400mg)

TOTAL: 361g carb, 4,120mg sodium or about 120g carbs, 1,373mg sodium per hour

Definitely went a bit overboard on the carbs here - depending on the person, this could be good for 6 hours.

BIKE PERSONAL NEEDS at 90k (refill hourly target: about 60g carb, 1,500mg sodium -> for second half three hours: 180g carb, 4500mg sodium)

1x 1L Pocari + 2 tab PH 1500 (72 g, 2750mg)

1x warabi mochi on the spot (32g)

2x mochi walnut bars (54g)

5x Gu (about 110g, about 1,000mg)

1x Gu Liquid (25g)

3x 140mg sodium caps (420mg)

2x 100mg electrolyte tabs (about 200mg)

TOTAL: 293g carb, 3,750mg sodium or about 100g carbs, 1,250 mg sodium per hour

RUN (hourly target: 40 to 50g carb, 1500mg sodium)

To start

1x handheld bottle with 1 tab PH 1500 (750mg) [again, I had a water bottle from the last aid station to fill up the handheld and take a quick shower]

2x emergency Gu in my handheld (about 40g)

1x Gu liquid (25g)

3x 100mg electrolyte tabs

3x 250mg electrolyte caps

RUN PERSONAL NEEDS at 10.5k, 21k, 31.5k

I rubber banded two Gu and another source of carbs - either warabi mochi or a mochi stick - for each 10k stop/loop at PN.

However, I never ate either. Had I stopped for longer periods, I think I would have ate, but I paused for just a few seconds at PN to grab a rubber band "pack" and go my merry way.

Admittedly, the run is where my nutrition started to get blurry, but I aimed for about two Gu a lap, and copious refills of Gatorade and Coke into my (rather small) handheld.

It was easy to pour the little cups they handed out into my handheld. I also got frequent ice water "showers" - to their credit, it was ice cold and really put a pep in my step.

So there it is...the world's longest race report!