

Lake Tahoe Triathlon Recap

The Lake Tahoe Triathlon should be considered the most demanding Olympic Distance Triathlon out there. It also must be the most scenic. Set on the West Shore of Lake Tahoe at Sugar Pine Point Park, every discipline takes you through an equal balance of challenge and beauty. This year I had high hopes of competing on the Pro Circuit of Ironman Triathlon, but injuries, age and my real job kept me from seeing all my goals through. I decided to pull the plug on everything back in May with hopes of being healthy enough to return to some fun local competition (Donner Lake Tri & Lake Tahoe Tri). Luck would have it that I was just on the mend for Donner Lake and ready to roll for Lake Tahoe.

My first ever Triathlon was the Lake Tahoe Tri back in 2015, when I decided to give the sport a try. I had swum through my early years in life through college and spent the last 6 years racing road bikes, so I figured I could do OK. Unfortunately, I wasn't much of a runner and blew a 12-minute lead by running 9 minute mile pace. I did however have a lot of fun racing, and that spurred me to start training for other Triathlons. Going into the race this year, I was a bit nervous that I would have the same experience of being caught in the run by the young Pro Xterra stud from Incline Village, JP Donovan. Although I was nervous, I still reminded myself why I do this, it's for fun. You don't have to win to have a good time...right?

I woke up the morning of race day at 3:45AM. Got my food and coffee together and made the drive from my home in Reno. I arrived just in time to get everything setup and get a quick warm up run and head down to the water. You have to see the setting to really appreciate it. Sugar Pine Point State Park is amazing. I had plenty of swim warm up time and was ready to go. The water was typical late summer temps and clear as can be...Perfect in my eyes!

Knowing I have a good swim, I staged to the very left of the Under 50 Men's mass start. Knowing I would have some clear water in 50 meters and could just focus on my own pace without being part of the scrum. I have had my fair share of aggressive pack swims in the pro ranks and it's exhausting. I prefer to make my own pace and clear water. It's easier to keep my heart rate down and that comes into play when you hit transition. Our group got the count down and we were off. I took the first 100 meters out hard to insure I was free and clear from the group. The first turn buoy is only 200 meters so that came quick. Once around I settled into a slower pace that I could sustain for the next 15 or so minutes. I had trouble sighting the far buoy and had to make a couple corrections on my line. All was good though and I made the rest of the swim without much to report. I was out of the water in under 18 minutes and running for transition. Then you hit the 100 meter grass hill climb...ooof. I think I even walked a few steps.

My Swim/Bike Transition went well and I set off for the 26.2 mile 2400' elevation gain bike leg! I turned left onto HWY 89 and settled into a good pace quick. My power was coming much easier than my previous race at Donner Lake, and I was pushing pedaling avg of 350 without killing myself. The course twists and turns around Meeks and Rubicon Bay with some glimpses of the lake before you hit the first big climb up to DL Bliss and into the Emerald Bay descent. I kept my power in check to make sure I didn't over cook it and started ripping the descent. I think I hit 53, which is technically speeding! After climbing out of the other side of Emerald bay you hit the most scenic spot and the very technical, dangerous descent...take caution folks, it's not worth it. Once you are at the bottom you hit the half way point and it's time to turn around and head back up again! This course never seems to flatten! I saw JP Donovan at 3:30 minutes from my turnaround and knew I was putting time into him....would it be

enough? I just needed to focus and keep pushing. The return speed on this course seems like it's usually a little faster but there is still plenty of ups and downs. I made the turn onto the walking path just before entering transition and made sure not to overcook the last corner before heading into transition. Bike/Run Transition went off smoothly and I was off on the run.

Immediately you run down a steep path which is brutal on the legs that just came off the bike. After that you hit the beach loop portion of the run which is a mix of single track dirt and some sand. The first time I raced, I didn't realize how much of the course was dirt. My first mile was a sluggish 7:30+ pace and I knew I couldn't hold a lead on JP with that speed. Mile two finishes the dirt loop and hits the walking path up to the other side of HWY 89 and into the campsites. Some twists and turns to keep your mind off the uphill suffering. Mile two was a bit faster and I was feeling ok, just kept telling myself pace yourself to mile 4...that's the top of the course and it's mostly downhill from there. Miles 3 and 4 were pretty fast at 7:00 which surprised me. I'm not a fan of uphill running but my body was giving me what I needed. The run course is mostly shaded as you wind up the dirt fire road. I got some quick water handoffs and took on some gel to make sure I had enough to finish strong. I hit mile 4 and started heading back down the course and downhill. My mile speed picked up to sub 6:30 pace, and I was chugging along pretty good. Still nervous about the footsteps I was hearing behind me (In my head) because last time I was caught at mile 5. I powered through the downhill and into the single track of mile 6 which skirts the outside of the campground. I was asking people along the course..."anyone behind me" Kept getting the positive reinforcement of "Nope, no one" I ran across HWY 89, gave the CHP officer a high five and sprinted for home. Across the wood bridge, up that brutal finish climb and across the finish line. A little redemption felt good. Good way to end my season.

After the race, I immediately headed for the beer tent for a post-race ritual. I said hello to some friends that came up to watch, listened to some good live music and congratulated JP after he finished. I grabbed some food and just took in the awesome setting that is the Lake Tahoe Triathlon while waiting for awards. All in all, it was a great day. Got to push my body, enjoy the scenery and chat with other likeminded people.

