

Olympic Distance 2024/5/26

15th Tateyama Wakashio Triathlon

Preparation Race for Suwako



Introduction

On May 26th, 2024, I participated in the 15th Tateyama Wakashio Triathlon held at Okinoshima Island. This event is part of the National Championship Series and attracted some strong competitors and newbies. It is famous for allowing triathletes to race on the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force Tateyama Air Base and clear water. No wonder it ranked 6th¹ amongst all Triathlon races in Japan last year.

¹ https://www.scsf.jp/triathlon/_userdata/raceranking2023.pdf

Pre-Race Preparation

Leading up to the race, major setbacks interrupted my training for about three months. For about three months, two sprained ankles and a severe hip flexor issue made running impossible. During this time, I also battled a persistent cold for three weeks, adding to my physical challenges. Two days before the race my eyes swell due to an allergic reaction. At that point, I threw all my expectations of a very good result overboard and wanted to make it to the start line.

Race Day

The morning of the race was clear and sunny with 26 degrees - perfect race conditions. We arrived a bit early and have been one of the first. I distracted my mind by chatting with club members and doing a photoshooting with Ai Ueda. The atmosphere was amazing. More and more people of the 800 expected competitors showed up, energizing the air with anticipation. I was so happy to be able to take part and wanted to have fun.

The Race

Swim

Rolling start, 10 people every 5 seconds in my wave of about 200 people. The warm-up swim felt pretty cold despite wearing a wetsuit. Standing in the 6th or 7th rows, I stunningly watched my competitors. They walked or dolphin jumped for about 30-50m until the water finally got deep enough to swim. Then it was my turn, the race had started. An instant later the "Just have fun" was already forgotten. I dolphin jumped through the shallow water. My heart rate skyrocket from normal to maximum in 10 seconds. Finally, in the water. I did not feel any cold, nor anything else. I told myself subconscious "Get the guys in front of you". The waves were pretty low, the water was super clean and beautiful. First time during a race that I could look down to the ground. I almost forgot about the race distracted by the beauty and the corals. The side waves hit me heavy swimming diagonal and brought me back into the race. 750m done, one more time. I fought most of the second lap with a competitor shoulder on shoulder. It felt great.

Everybody else slowly walked to the beach for the 30-50m shallow water. I ran out, pushing the water hip-high away, while thinking "Is this a race after all? What are these guys doing". I started to understand why they walked. My glutes burned and felt heavy... What a way to finish a swim.

Transition 1

I trained transition a couple of times because I lost a lot of time in the last couple of races. It is always different when pumped with adrenalin and max heart rate. Immediately after getting from the horizontal to the vertical. Storming into the Transition area, targeting my bike. I ripped off my wetsuit, put the helmet on, closed it, and took the bike from the rack. Barefoot running over gravel, covered by a carpet, but still painful. Some competitors that started later were still in transition preparing. I recognized that my swim must have been pretty fast. "Out of the way", "Out of the way", I screamed while running to the mounting line not feeling any stones tightly pushing my bike.

I was most scared about the mounting, which I had problems with when I practiced it. I placed my right foot directly into the shoe, jumped on the bike, and started spinning the left shoe on the pedal. With a bit of luck, I timed it perfectly and got my left foot in as well.

Bike

9 Laps inside the Japan Aircraft Base. The course was empty when I got on it. Even had to drive around a huge snake. The wind was pretty strong in one direction. The course was not too technical, but there have been some places where the road was not in the best state. One place was pretty bad with a huge bump. I tried to ride as aero as much as I could. With each finish lap, the course got more crowded and it was harder to ride strong and well without drafting. So most of the time i was riding on the right side taking over. I lost my nutrition in the third round due to the bump. This was probably one of my best rides, i was exhausted, but very satisfied.

Transition 2

Dismount went well, but I did not feel my legs. I had to look down to make sure that my feet were indeed hitting the ground. Again fastest time ever for racking the bike and putting shoes on and be on the way to the run course.

Run

Going out at an insane speed for me. Again, the run course was almost empty. I soon would see the official on the bike which marks the leader. I could not believe it, never ever had I been so close to the top. My pace got slower and slower, i grasped for air all the time and was not able to drink the water at the aid stations. Pushing myself to my absolute maximum. 2nd of 4 laps finished, just half. My motivation was at an extreme low. Just give up, you have had a great race so far, and nobody can blame you. That's not what I wanted. I needed to stop for a couple of seconds at the aid stations, to at least drink a bit of water. It also helped with the cramps in my hamstrings that started to show up. Finally the last 1km, I tried to speed up and get the last bit out of my legs. The pace was not much faster than before. Turning around 100m before the finish line, there was no one else, everybody else close behind me had to do more laps. Relief and pain mixed together after I crossed the finish line. I had to sit down to take my ankle band off and give it to the staff. I appreciate the cheers from the staff, officials, and the supporters. It helped me keep pushing and achieving a new personal best.