

Race Report for Pan Am Games

It has been exactly one week since I returned home from the Pan Am Games in Santo Domingo. The week has flown by. Last Tuesday, I was welcomed at the Penticton Airport by a small group of close friends and of course, my husband Aaron. As we touched down I looked out the window to see a couple of crazy people (husband and friend) running along side the runway with a Canadian flag. They also had made a little poster with some of the newspaper articles and pictures. My friends and training partners from Penticton signed the poster with words of congratulations. I was almost on the verge of tears after a long trip back and the emotional race I had just completed.

I really enjoyed my short stay in Dominican Republic. I had a chance to see what it was like to be at a Games event, meeting other athletes from completely different sports. I had badminton players and a modern pent athlete staying with me in our room. The food!.. I gorged myself on tropical fruit (I already miss it).

The triathlon was well organized and took place at a nice venue - the local Naval Base. Considering some of the other horror stories I had heard from other athletes about their venues, we were for the most part satisfied with the way the race was put together. We had to get up at 4:15 AM so we could catch a bus at 5 AM and be ready to race by 7:30 AM. I didn't have a problem because it felt like we were getting up for an Ironman race - lucky for us we didn't have to do an Ironman.

I was really calm race morning as it was my 5th race in 5 weeks. Race preparation becomes second nature after doing race after race. We were at the venue with plenty of time to spare and were able to watch the sun rise over Santo Domingo.



Fast forward to race start. There was quite a big wave break that we needed to get past before we could start swimming. I figured this technical aspect of the swim was an added bonus to split up the group early. The horn sounded and off we went. I sprinted down the beach and into the water as fast as I could. I tried to run out as far as I could without getting knocked over by the waves. I noticed a big wave about to knock me back so I dove straight through the centre and then started doing a few dolphin dives to get out

past the breaking waves. As I began taking my first few real swim strokes, I glanced to the left and to right and noticed only one other swimmer near me. I was so pleased, I nailed the start. I was now swimming beside the best swimmer in the race, Sheila Taoromina from USA. This fast start really set the tone for the rest of the race. Sheila quickly set the pace and I followed. I could feel someone else touching my toes occasionally so I knew there were more than just the 2 of us. But I wasn't sure how many other girls we were towing behind us, or I should say Sheila was towing. After completing 2 loops in the nice rolling swells, we exited the water up the beach and into transition. With a quick look around I noticed it was just 3 of us. Becky Gibbs-Lavelle was the one on my feet but after that there was a gap. We jumped on our bikes and as we were exiting transition, you could hear the announcer calling out the names of the Brazilian women who were trailing 15 to 20 seconds back.

The 3 of us got organized really quickly and started taking turns pulling through in an organized pace line. The course was generally flat with a small hill in and out of transition. In the initial 2 or 3 laps I was very cautious not to overextend myself when I was leading our little group. I had to be careful that these two Americans didn't try to drop me on a corner or something crazy like that. As the bike portion progressed we were putting time into the second pack and it also became evident that we were going to work together to put the 3 of us in contention for the 3 podium positions. By the end of the six lap bike we had almost a 3 minute lead and we had even purposely slowed down a little to conserve energy for the run.

Through transition 2, Sheila was in and out in a flash determined to win. I was out second probably 10 meters back. Even though it was early in the morning it was hot out and my legs were tired from the bike portion. I tried my best to catch up to Sheila but she took it out so quickly. In this heat I needed to pace myself because I knew it would be as much a race of attrition as it would be speed and tactics. The run was 4 loops on the same road as the bike ride. Sheila held the lead for the first loop and I just kept her in striking distance. As we started our second lap I felt my legs coming back to me and my leg turnover picking up. By the end of the second lap I decided to make my move. Once I passed Sheila, I wasn't celebrating yet as we still had 5 km left and it was stinking hot and humid. So I just focused on staying cool and hydrated. Sometimes when you take the lead it becomes easy because you get this boost of adrenaline just because you are leading (which is always exciting) but in this race I knew anything could still happen. I took advantage of all the aid stations to cool myself and hydrate. Slowly but surely the km's clicked by and with one km to go I knew I was going to win. Isabelle, our team leader let me know that a boy had a Canadian Flag and would be standing at the top of the small hill before the finish line. I could grab the flag and run with it across the finish line. Sure enough, the boy who I later found out was from Calgary was standing there ready to pass me the flag. I grabbed it with a smile and practically bounced the rest of the way home. I was so excited to cross the finish line. It was such an emotional moment; I was honoured to not only represent my country but also my family and community. It was very exciting!!!

After the win, during interviews I was feeling good and under emotional control; that was until the CBC interviewer asked me, "What does this race mean to you?". This is when the tears started to roll down my face. I have so many memories of watching the Olympics, the Pan Am Games, the Commonwealth Games and other great sporting events on TV throughout my whole life. I was always so inspired by these great athletes. Now here it was me giving my winning interview, it was something that seemed so unbelievable at one time in my life but after a lot of hard work and focusing on smaller short term goals it really was me. Wow!