

Returning home for an Ironman challenge

By Tom Hulsey

Instructor for the Dallas Stars

On Sept. 9, I completed Ironman Wisconsin. This was a very special day for me. As a boy, I learned to skate on the lake where we swam Sunday. My family left Wisconsin when I was 15 and 38 years later I'm back in Madison! The venue, spectators, and the number of spectators are incredible – this was one of the most incredible experiences in my life.

IM Wisconsin is tough. The 2005 race had the highest drop-out rate of any Ironman since they have been keeping track – 20%. Three words describe the bike course – climb, descend, turn. You have no steady HRs on this bike course. There are over 80 turns – that's a turn every 1.4 miles. Because of the technical nature of the bike course, bikes (and bikers) take a beating. Your shifting has to be spot-on because you use every gear over and over, shifting literally hundreds of times.

Fans line the streets, in your face; à la Tour de France. The marathon is unique among Ironman runs. It is entirely urban. There are fans the entire way. While this is appealing to those who draw energy of the crowd, it can be maddening if you are having a bad day. It is like being in the Coliseum on the wrong end of the gladiator's sword. Everyone is watching and it just keeps getting harder. At least in Florida, Hawaii, Arizona and New Zealand you share your humiliation with the earth, sky and wind.

The best part is when you come back to the Capitol where the crowd is at full adrenalin – the finish line is intense. What made the finish line very memorable for me was getting to share/cross the line with my fantastically supportive wife, Lauren.

Wisconsin, more than any other Ironman, has become a phenomenon. It is more than just a Midwestern phenomenon. It's an Ironman event unique to the sport. It's also a paradox. It is among the most difficult Ironman Triathlons in the world with a crowded two-lap swim, difficult, technical bike course and animated run.

What a phenomenal day!!!!

The 2008 race sold out in 23 minutes!