

My Ironman Louisville Experience - by Joel Sauer

On Sunday, August 26th, I participated in the Ford Ironman Louisville! It was an amazing experience filled with nervous anticipation, determination, struggles, and excitement all rolled into one race. Now that it is over - in reflecting back on the event, several thoughts have come to mind that I found relevant and wanted to share.

1. The Event itself was much “bigger” than any one of us in it.

I was but one of nearly 1,800 participants in Ford Ironman Louisville, and each person had their unique story as to why they entered and what they experienced going from an “Ironman Dream” to get to the starting line. The journey to the starting line for each person included ups and downs along the way, they had struggles where they questioned if they could even accomplish their goal, and they had times of discovering untapped potential they didn’t know they had.

This took me back to one of my early motivations for starting the Indianapolis Marathon and Half Marathon at Lawrence 12 years ago. I wanted to put on an event in Indianapolis that would be very challenging – thus the Marathon/Half Marathon Distances – that would provide an avenue for people to go beyond their comfort zones, to discover the potential within themselves that they perhaps didn’t know was there, and to accomplish something that perhaps they didn’t think was possible. For some it is completing a Full Marathon or Half Marathon distance race, for others it is breaking that time barrier that had not been thought achievable, or it may be having that perfect physical or mental race in which you know that you ran to your body’s maximum capability – regardless of what your time was.

In managing the event details over the years as race director of the Indianapolis Marathon and Half Marathon, and working to put on the best event possible, I had accidentally forgotten how really cool it was to put on an event that pushes people to new limits and provides opportunity for self discovery. Now that I have remembered this, I am having more fun than ever working with the race committee to enable all of our participants to have a fantastic experience. This event truly is bigger than any one of us – including the Race Director!

2. The participants enjoyed a great experience.

The more the participant can focus on their race, their plans, and their goals – the better experience they will have. I really enjoyed being a part of a “Bigger Experience” at Ford Ironman Louisville - the buzz, the enthusiasm, and the energy that was present was exciting! Like most participants (I suspect), I was very nervous in the days leading up to the event. I arrived in town, went to packet pickup, went to the pre-race meeting, went to bike and run gear check-in, went to the pasta dinner, worked out race day logistics with my family, and did final race morning prep – all before I ever started the race! I was thinking through what I had to do to be successful on race day. The day after the race, I was going to the post-race lunch when the thought struck me – everything that was advertised by the race organization happened smoothly, and I simply didn’t have to spend any time or energy worrying about the event logistics. It was a friendly, well-organized, high-energy event. They had done a great job!

This again took me back to our race committee’s goals for the Indianapolis Marathon and Half Marathon at Lawrence. We work tirelessly to put on a very well-organized event. We DO sweat the details. We want things to go so smoothly that you simply don’t notice them. We want you

to be focused on your race, on your logistics, on your family, on your experience. Going through the Ford Ironman Louisville event, then realizing AFTER the event how excellent the race was put on was the ultimate complement. That is what our race organization strives for – giving our participants a wonderful race experience by being friendly, paying attention to details, and providing what we promise so you can count on it. We are not perfect, and we make mistakes, but the beauty is that we are a group of family and friends and runners that genuinely desire to give you a very positive experience – before, during, and after the event.

3. Keep it fun.

As I said earlier, everyone has their own reason for doing an Ironman, a Marathon, a Half-Marathon, or a 5K. In May, I had a late-breaking opportunity to do the Ford Ironman Louisville event so I took advantage of it. I measure running courses for USATF Certification. Last May I was contacted by the Ironman Organization to measure the Ford Ironman Louisville marathon course so that it would be a certified marathon course. As a result I was able to get into the event itself. I had to go from “out of shape” to “Ironman shape” in three months. You can’t do that, so I made the most of the opportunity I had. My goals were simple – get into as good of Ironman shape as I could in three months (most people train 6 to 9 months), and totally enjoy the experience. I didn’t need to turn in my fastest Ironman time to be successful, I decided that I would enjoy the journey of the tough 5000 yard work-outs in the pool that leave you feeling so exhilarated afterwards, I would enjoy the journey of building my bike rides from 20 miles to 100 miles and focus on absorbing the awesome beauty of God’s creation on these 5 and 6 hour bike rides, and I would enjoy the journey of running with friends like fellow Ironman Dan Gehring to build my running miles and enthusiasm for the upcoming event. I knew I wouldn’t be able to train properly for the marathon, so I just did the best I could with the time I had.

At one point I started getting stressed out that I wasn’t going to be ready and that I didn’t have the miles that I had in years past. Then I saw the TV coverage of the 2006 Ironman and it reminded me what a really cool experience that I was privileged to be taking part in, and all of the workouts that I *was* doing were themselves a significant part of the total experience.

This same idea holds true for everyone participating in the Indianapolis Marathon and Half Marathon. Whether you are simply trying to cross the finish line to earn your finishers medal, or are pushing for a Personal Best or Boston Qualifier, take the time to reflect on your goals and enjoy the journey along the way. Don’t put all of your eggs in one basket and totally rely on race day to define success or failure. Reflect on how far you have come and the hard work you put into getting to the starting line. Think about the support and sacrifices made by your friends and family and honor that. Make sure you – and those supporting you – have fun along the way!

I had a fantastic experience at Ironman Louisville. I have great memories and experience that I will carry with me into the future. I also have a renewed enthusiasm for directing and making available the Indianapolis Marathon and Half Marathon experience. I hope you make plans to join us on October 20th, and you take the time to enjoy your journey leading up to the race.

Sincerely,
Joel Sauer
President and Race Director
Indianapolis Marathon Road Runners Club, Inc.
** a 501.c.3 non-profit organization **