

## My Road to Kona

In 1999 I signed up for the inaugural Ironman USA in Lake Placid. I wasn't getting any younger and was looking for a new challenge. By this time I was an experienced athlete with countless 100 mile bike rides and 20 mile training runs. "Just add a long swim to a long bike and run - pack a lunch - plan for a long day - how hard could this be?" The answer was --- HARD!! On a picture perfect day with flat water, light winds and temps in the low 70's with low humidity I came off the bike trashed and was only able to run a handful of miles before walking to the finish in the dark. "Oh well, I thought - now I can cross that off my bucket list!"

In 2005 I retired from the Postal Service. Still relatively young with time to train I decided to try Ironman again at Madison. It was a hot day and by the 2<sup>nd</sup> lap of the run I was dizzy, lightheaded and starting to pass out walking. End result --- DQ. Seems my learning curve wasn't improving much! After announcing to everyone who would listen "I'll never do another!", two months later I swallowed my pride and paid \$1000 to sign up for 2006 with a community charity spot. This time I respected the distance, raced with caution and actually ran or shuffled the marathon to the finish. "Oh well, I thought- Redemption -now I got the monkey off my back!" The learning curve was starting to move. I was getting competitive at the shorter distances and began to dream of qualifying for Kona.

In 2007, thinking I could maybe snag a spot at one of the few qualifying ½ iron distance events where my chances were better, I signed up for St. Croix Virgin Islands 70.3... Surprise! So was everybody else from all over the world. What a race! I came out of the water behind but moved up through the field on the bike that was more of a road bike course with twists and turns and walls for hills. At the end of the bike I was informed I was in 2<sup>nd</sup> place in my AG with the defending champion a few minutes ahead on the run. I ran hard, caught the guy at the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> lap and ran for my life. I finished looking back at least 10 times over the last mile to make sure. I did it! I'm going to Kona! With tears of joy I lay in the medical tent packed with ice only to find out - NOT! Some Brit had finished ahead. From cloud 9 to having the rug pulled out from under. Like I said... "What a race!"

I came home and immediately signed up for the Buffalo Springs 70.3 for another try at a Kona spot. Who would go to Lubbock Texas to race in the summer? It's not a vacation destination. I began to believe I could actually qualify now. What a race! Out of the water behind I once more moved up through the field climbing out of canyons on both the bike and run. I see the leader at the turnaround and push hard to the finish. Dam! I'm out of real estate and no sign of the leader. Good but not good enough!

This year I signed up again. With experience and more confidence I will try again at Buffalo Springs. What a race! Out of the water behind (do you see a pattern here?) I move up through the field and spot the AG leader at the turnaround of the run. I run hard, skip the last 3 water stops and go for it. Dam! There's the leader standing at the finishing line waiting to congratulate me for my effort. He casually told me at the finish line he would be passing on the Kona slot and I could have it. My Dad always told me "If it sounds too good to be true it usually is" I held my emotions in check and awaited for the awards dinner and roll down that night. We both stood on the podium for our awards and when he was offered the Kona slot he passed and it rolled down to me. My emotions exploded! I gave him a big hug and a kiss on the cheek. The crowd went wild with laughter and applause. What a night! - I'll never forget it - drinking Shiner Bock Beer and celebrating with my trusted buddy Tommy Krenz and all my new friends from all over the country.

So here I am less than 2 weeks from Kona. I'm excited like a kid waiting for his 1<sup>st</sup> trip to Disneyland. Can't wait to touch down on the big Island and drink it all in. I hear the vibe is both magical and mystical. I had a little mishap at my last tune-up race and dinged up my knee so at this point I don't know if I will be able to run the marathon. I won't lie - I'm disappointed about the injury but have decided to look at this race as a victory lap or the icing on the cake to my endurance sports career. I really do feel honored to be competing at this level and at this race.

The Dream Lives! I'm going to Kona! Wow!

Mike Colaizy

