

Triathlon Beginner – Kurnell “Olympics” Sprint Triathlon – 28th Feb 2010.

A brief race report and story of how I completed my first Kurnell sprint triathlon after finally deciding, once and for all, to learn how to swim correctly. Over four months of hard effort eventually cumulating into a result at the end of February 2010.

Background: Oct/Nov 2009 swimming 50m for me(not sure if one would call it swimming) consisted of a what must have looked like a maniac in the pool , arm and legs flying everywhere, consuming about 8 gallons of water and ending with a 10 minute rest at the other end. Now I'm sure I probably still look like a maniac swimming today but at least I can do a few laps.

Decided to commit to getting lessons and stick at it knowing it was going to be hard and depending how I went, maybe, do a triathlon in six months or however long it took me. Thankfully due to the hard efforts of Coaches Spot , Michaela, Paul , Mermaid and the rest of the gang at Bondifit I can say I not only successfully completed a Kurnell sprint Tri but also managed to complete an Oceanswim a long the way ☺

I should introduce myself, my name is Darragh, 27yr old Irish male (hence the not being able to swim bit), I've played a lot of field sports in the past, tried a 5k run when I first came here about 2 years ago eventually going on to do a Half Marathon which I got on ok at, then had a go at a Marathon and nearly died but that's another story! I could always pick up sports fairly handy, but swimming is my nemesis...

Nov 09 – Feb 10:

Rocked up to the Ian Thorpe Centre for Bondifit's Saturday Beginner Stroke Correction session making sure I had my flippers! Met Michaela, "Hi , yeah I'm ok in water but I'll be half dead when I get down to the other end and there's not a chance of me attempting a return journey until I get 10mins rest"... "what, I didn't get that?" sorry, I repeated in Australian mode, remembering my strong Irish brogue hoping she at least picked up the "half dead" and "other end" bits of it. "Ok get in the water and we'll have a look, remember swim slow". I get and went as fast as I could, arms turning over at 100revs a min... got to the other end. Took a well deserved rest then backup 10mins later! "Ok your sinking and your swimming too fast", "I'm not, am I?"

And thus started four months of stroke correction trying to slow down my stroke and get my ass and legs up on top of the water because I'm a sinker! While I know I still sink and my stroke is still not great, I like to think that I've improved a bit but my freestyle stroke resembles that of when the Titanic is sinking... you know in the movie there's a point as its sinking it breaks in two with one half flat in the water with the other half under the water at 90 degrees pointing straight down, that's my swim stroke, upper body on top of the water with my ass and feet pointing straight down, I like to call it Titanic freestyle! Anyway, more stroke correction sessions along with squad sessions hanging to back of the pack in lane 8, I gradually began to improve, even taking off my flippers for some sets. After a few weeks I was really giving it a go, making 3 or 4 swim sessions a week improving slowly with the "encouraging words" from Spot. After a few weeks I said I'd go to one or two of the Bondifit Bike and Run sessions.

I got straight into the bike, learning all about the rules of bunch riding which I now appreciate a lot more after being out on the road. While I did it all wrong at the start, I eventually learned where do be in the pack and what to do, keep making calls, in Aussie English not pronouncing "r's" , "Caa Back, Ovaa etc etc"! All useful tips which everyone helped me learn along the way and if I had a question of course I asked the coach! Got a few punishments for making a few mistakes, I'll admit some due but some were questionable, but I know I won't do it again,well hopefully not! Went on a few of the long rides on Sundays mornings along with flat laps in centennial park soon learning about being dropped by the faster guys but that's always something to work on.

Also started doing a few of the run sessions which were a good with a mix of intervals and longer runs along the beaches trying to negative split the time.

So back to the swimming my main goal, while still working on trying to get to as many sessions a week during December, I had a look to see if there would be any Oceanswims on at the end of the summer, searched on the internet and sure enough there's one I could consider doing, the Cole Classic 1 km swim in Manly on 7th Feb, will I or won't I? "Mmmm better do it now or the summer will soon be over... feck it", I entered the 1km but with a plan to see how I would get on over the next few weeks and make a call on it as the day got closer. Did the beginner surf swim down in Clovelly for 3 consecutive Saturdays which was really good to learn the basics of Ocean swimming. Meanwhile, I was building up my distance in the pool, practicing drills, trying to get my body up in the water etc etc. I've had some embarrassing but hilarious moments trying to do a few of these drills, one was doing a drill to improve my body position. Heading down the pool breathing to the right, sinking and then gradually floating back up to take my next breathe, all the time looking at the window when I took a breath. Half way down, I'm floating back up, turn to look right towards the window for a breath, there's the window but what's this red thing in front of my eyes, ah Christ, it's the lane line. I had sunk so much that I ended up in the other lane, sinking under the lane line not even touching it!!

Anyway, I heard about a BRAT Club Tri on in Maroubra in December, "it's in a pool Darragh you should do it" coming from the rest of the Bondifit squad members, doing their best with the encouragement. Not sure what I was doing I entered it, and crawled my way through it just not wanting to drown. I'd say I was last or second last out of the pool then onto the bike where I bloody did 11 laps of the 10 lap bike circuit! Ah well, I finished it though. Right I thought, I'll enter a Kurnell in the February and hopefully I'll be able to do this ocean swimming.

Worked up the courage to do a few of the surf swims sessions in Bondi on Saturday mornings, bit daunting at first but I had done a few sessions in Clovelly with Michaela and the rest the rookies so I thought I should be alright. First session was fine, nice and flat, Mermaid and Spot giving us the instructions to keep ourselves alive, where to go where not to go. I was fine but my really slow pace meant I had to, and still do, have to be sharp and turn when the other guys further out turn to come back in, because for some reason by the time a reach the beach there all there standing around Spot or Mermaid listening to the next set of instructions. "how the hell do they get in so quick". Alas I've resigned to the fact that this is the way it's going to be! Another few weeks of practicing ocean swimming drills in the pool and on Saturday surf sessions the Cole classic was just around the corner.

So the morning of the Cole Classic 1km is absolutely dreadful weather wise, it had been raining the whole weekend. I got the ferry over to Manly and walked over toward the promenade and the beach, got there and stopped dead. All I see in front of me is wall after wall of huge 3 or 4m waves crashing towards the shore "ah what's this, I can't go in there, I'll drown". Remembering something on an email about if the conditions are bad they might change the course to end in Shelly beach, so I made my over to the start to see what going on. Ten minutes later, all good, its finishing in Shelly beach well away from the huge breaking surf over in Manly...Phew! Still raining soaked to the skin; I got changed ready for the start. As the first wave went off, I see Spot and Tori leading the charge down to the water, a lot a arms and legs flying as about 50 or more people hit the water together. My wave was up next, I was fairly confident I could keep going for the 1 km but sighting the buoys and getting kicked/hit by other people was going to be a tester. Remember to swim slow as Spot had said, off I went near the back while keeping my eye on the first bouy. Got through the flying arms and legs at the start and learned how to hit people in water, other people were doing it to me! After the first 100m or so I got into a rhyme and then it dawned on me that I actually wasn't the worst one out there. There were loads of people zig-zagging in front of me not able to sight the buoy. All those drills were paying off. I navigated around the buoys trying to keep a steady pace then to my surprise I actually passed someone in the water coming up to the last buoy. This was probably the first time I had ever passed anyone in the water,

almost worth stopping to take a picture to mark this momentous occasion! I was still swimming easy so these must be the "Usain Bolts" at the start that are all now dying off. Finally I reached the beach with a big smile on my face, happy out to have completed my first oceanswim, whahoo! As I stood letting my achievement settle in, Spot, Laura, Tori and a few of the other pros were starting the 2km, watching them head off I thought maybe I could do a 2km some day!

Later that day while enjoying a well deserved beer I heard there was another swim on in Bondi the week after the cole classic. On Monday I checked the internet and sure enough Bondi Classic 1km & 2 km were on the following weekend. Brimming from the day before I entered the two of them! The weather was forecast bad for it so if it was big surf I'd be going for a bike ride instead of the swim. I got down to Bondi on Sunday morning, lovely flat as a pancake. The plan was to do the 1km and see about the 2km, then I looked at the course and spot this buoy way out to the left, that's not a marker for the 2km is it, it is, yikes! Went and did the 1 km, again at a slow pace and eventually finished it. No amazing speed or that but I was happy to notch another success at surviving a 1 km oceanswim.

Back to the bags and the rest of Bondifit gang are warming up for the 2km. Michaela and Laura going "So Darragh are you doing the 2km" plying me with words of encouragement. "Give me 10mins I'm thinking about it", lets just say in those 10minutes a lot of thoughts flew threw my head but it ended with - ok its dead flat, conditions are perfect, plus there's plenty of surf life savers out there if you get tired and blow up you can a lift back in... it's now or never! Although feeling a bit tired I go to the starting line, "what the hell are you doing darragh", positive Darragh, you'll be fine just get into a nice steady rhythm and keep going at your own pace. And that's exactly what I did and I'm happy to say survived my first 2 km swim! Got through the arms and legs mayhem at the start, stuck to a nice steady pace as Spot warned me to do and finally reached the beach again, came out among the last few people out of the water but I was as proud as punch to have done it. Swim a 2km oceanswim... tick. The feeling of satisfaction was sweet!

Kurnell Triathlon- Feb 2010

Next up was to complete the Kurnell "Olympics" Sprint Triathlon. The swim was going to be in open water so I finally bought myself a wetsuit, I'd never worn one swimming before but I heard it's supposed to help with buoyancy so that will definitely help me. The day after I bought my wetsuit in the week prior I get an email from the race organisers saying there's a change in the temperature rules or something, basically meaning there probably won't be wetsuits in this race! Great, is this a sign that its going to be a disaster for me. I had in my head that I wouldn't be wearing it, so for the surf swim on the day before the race I didn't bother testing it out like I was going to. However after all the dramatic talk from the number one wetsuit lover Rita, earlier on in the morning, I said I'd bring it on race day just in case.

Morning of the race making my way down to Kurnell I first take a wrong turn then I get RBT'd by the police on the motorway delaying me even more, just what I wanted when I hadn't a clue where was supposed to be going when I got down to Kurnell. Eventually got there, registered and made my way into transition. I was trying to suss out where to set up but I hadn't a clue, then I recognised the familiar sound of Michaela and the rest of the Bondifit gang down to one end, they must know what they're doing so I headed down. Got set up thanks to a few tips from Beni, Richard and the rest. Rita still going on about if it's wetsuits or not, I sort of mentioned that I'd never worn one before, Cassie pops up and says "me either". At least I wasn't going to be the only rookie going to try and "wing it" if they called wetsuits. Ten minutes later they called wetsuits and Rita nearly performs some sort of salah to the race director. I was there dam I've got to try and get into this thing. Again, grateful for the tips, Richard lends me a plastic bag to help don the wetsuit. Down at the start line for the warm up with Spot, zip up and in I went... 10 metres out I stop and "float"... Whahoo cool, this

wetsuit is brilliant. It actually felt like my legs and ass were on top of the water for the first time ever, doubt if they are but it sure felt like it.

First wave went off and it becomes obvious that there's a current pushing everyone out to the left. Ok I'll stay to the left and on the way back in make sure to stay to the right. Final few words of advice from Spot, keep it slow and take breaststrokes if your heart rate goes off the charts Darragh. My wave got called out to the start line, a few tense minutes before the start gun I over heard someone say they'd never swam 750m before, lovely at least I won't be last in my age group out of the water. Off we went with the usual mayhem at the start but settled into a good line and eventually made the first buoy then the second. Sighted the final buoy remembering to keep it to my right because the current swept the first wave well left of it. I got about 30metres from the buoy when then suddenly appeared way over to my right, sh*te I'm gone way left with the current, a few power strokes look up, damn buoy is still on my right, tried again and again and finally got around it and headed straight for the finish. Excited the water after a long swim and took it easy jogging up to transition trying to get out of my wetsuit keeping my heart down.

Now for the bike and run which I could actually do, I got all my gear on and jogged out to the mounting area, this is my first good moment I had where I passed about 4 people who stopped to climb on top of their bikes while I powered on with the "leap of faith" and head down the road. The practice the day before at bike/run session paid off. Got into a good rhythm and tired not to go too fast holding a steady heart rate so I don't end up leaving it all on the bike. Actually past another few people, these are the ones who left me in their blazing trails in the swim. Got to the turn and the wind is with me so I picked it up a bit on the way back. Then about 50 metres from the roundabout on the way back, there's loads of cars and no other bikes in front me, panic, sh*t which way do I go, left or right? I could take a right the way I came out but then I didn't fully look race map before the race so I don't know. Surely it's the same way we came out, Darragh you ejet... ok have to make a call ... I'll go right... phew I see a cyclist way up in front. Back into transition again jumping off the bike passing a few people, eventually found my spot and went out on the run.

I knew it was 3 laps so I took it easy on the first one, went around solid enough for 2 laps, happy enough passing a few of the swimming speed demons along the way and then I kicked for home. Great to hear words of encouragement from the rest of the Bondifit gang as I went up the last hill passing through to the finish line. Stalling a minute to catch my breath, then the satisfaction kicks in as I met the other bondifit guys all happy with their times just like me, whahoo. Kurnell Triathlon... tick 😊