



# Going the extra mile for Charlie Braveheart

Ironman 70.3 Zell am See 2023 from start to finish

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## Preparation

After some motivating and competitive discussions Johan and I registered on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January for the Ironman 70.3 in Zell am See on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023. Excitement! For me time to start training in two disciplines which I am not familiar with, swimming and running. "Regardless of how many participants there will be in our age group, I only have 2 competitors." Johan and myself. Johan did an Ironman 70.3 in Nice 2021 and a full Ironman in Frankfurt last year. I knew this would give him an advantage having experience racing in all the disciplines.

I feel comfortable with cycling. That's where I'm stronger, and I need to try to gain enough time so that I can afford to lose some time in swimming and running compared to Johan. "It shouldn't become an obsession right away, I think. Just start training and see where it takes me!"

On Monday morning, February 9, at 5:15 AM, my alarm goes off. Time for the first swim training in the 25-meter indoor pool in Uden. Of course, the swimming gear was already prepared, so after a pre-workout shake, I'm on my way to the pool. By 6:45, I'm ready. Swim cap on, goggles resting on my forehead. The door opens at 6:55. I feel a bit nervous to start a new sport.

Even though I have my swimming certificates, it feels like I'm a beginner. Nevertheless, I choose the far left lane because that's where the 'athletes' swim. After two laps, I hang over the edge with my upper arm, catching my breath from the effort. My goodness, this is quite an adjustment and it's tough!

2-3 days a week. Week after week. Early in the morning, the alarm rings to go swimming. In the evenings, I watch YouTube instructional videos. 'How to swim without getting tired,' '6 ways to go further without getting tired,' how to prevent sinking legs, and so on and so forth. But it works, I'm getting stronger, and swimming becomes more comfortable.

As the temperatures rise outside in May, I venture into open water. Here we go again, '9 Open water swimming tips,' 'Freestyle swimming techniques for open water swimming,' 'Still exhausted after 200 meters... Try this! It's a completely different world to swim in open water. No visibility, underwater plants, coots darting away, or a dog swimming towards you. Far from relaxing! But I mastered this too, and my training times and distances improved steadily, reaching a level where I could approach the race with full confidence. Not to win, but just not to lose time compared to my only competitor 😊

And now, for me, the biggest challenge: running. After my foot surgery, where several joints were fused and fixed, the advice was: no running, but do stay active. My rheumatoid arthritis doesn't help either, but I never let it hold me back.





In the meantime, Johan is doing his laps, completing his swimming sessions with what seems like playful ease. On Strava, we closely follow each other. Johan even spent a few days in Zell am See this summer as part of his preparation, getting used to the surroundings, the water, and training. What a nut!

Meanwhile, running is causing me some injuries in my foot. It's only logical, you might say. This race in Zell am See I will finish purely based on character.

I keep training, week after week. Monday morning 45 minutes of swimming, Monday evening to the gym, Tuesday evening a cycling training round of about 60km, Wednesday morning up early again for swimming. In the evening, back to the gym. Thursday evening again a training round of about 60km on the bike. Friday is a recovery day. On Saturday, I try not to exercise and focus on social activities. Sunday morning often a multidiscipline activity (swimming, cycling)  
I do the running during business trips, mostly abroad. It remains challenging, though.

On Sunday, June 25th, we participated together in a triathlon competition at the Willem-Alexander Rowing Course in Rotterdam. It's an Olympic distance (e.g., 1.5 km swim, 40 km bike, 10 km run). A good way to get used to the transitions and how it is to swim with hundreds of athletes. The result gives me hope. I crossed the finish line a few minutes ahead of Johan. Perhaps it would have been better to let Johan win that day. After all, he shifted into a higher gear in terms of preparation and training, working closely with his coach for the race in Zell am See.

Trainiacs. That's what we are.

On Sundays, I often engage in multi-discipline training. From 7 to 8, I swim in open water. Quickly back home, change, and then join the cycling group for a ride of about 100-120 km. After cycling, I quickly put on my running shoes and run about 4-5 km to get used to the transition.

Sunday afternoon is for recovery, and I can assure you, at our age, it doesn't happen very quickly.

It's now August, just a few more weeks to go before the race. The training intensity needs to decrease. Paying close attention to nutrition is crucial. Getting sick is not an option, especially not a few days before the race.

But the inevitable happens anyway. A cold and flu-like feeling after a silly boat trip during our vacation on Lago Maggiore. In the last few days before race day, I spend way too much money on cough syrups, hot Coldrex, anti-diarrhea pills, etc. On Saturday, 1 day before the race, I take a ride around the course to check and test my bike. I feel weak and devoid of energy. How is this going to turn out well tomorrow? Johan and Jane come to our campsite. Jane gives me a few sachets that I should take - Chinese medicines that are supposed to help with this overall discomfort.

Race day! I wake up, assess my condition. Adrenaline. The feeling is good... at least much better than yesterday. The sun is shining. Everyone is eager. Tension on the faces in the athlete's village. This is what we've trained for. Today is the day.



## The race

The day before the race is almost as important as the race itself. In the morning we went to the Athletes village in “das Rathaus” to collect the much-desired wrist band and our starters packages. The most important items in the starters package are your personalized start number and the red and blue bags for the transition zone. The Blue bag is for the bike gear and the Red bag is for the running gear. My number was 1304. This number is quite symbolic for me as my oldest daughter was born on April 13<sup>th</sup> and it is the day of my father’s service. Jane and Evelien went to the mountains while Casper and I returned to our “rooms” to pack our bags, prepare our bikes, eat and rest for a few hours. At the end of the afternoon we took our bikes and bags to the transition zone to check in our bikes and collect our Ironman GPS tracker. When entering the transition zone you need to wear your cycling helm with the chin strap closed, show your race number and demonstrate that your brakes are working. After finding our bike racks and locating our transition rack locations we quickly went to the swim start at the Zeller See to also check out the vibe and surroundings in this area before the race. Afterwards we met up with the girls and had good meal at an Italian restaurant in Zell am See. We returned to our “hotels” fairly early and were keen to enjoy a good nights rest.

I woke up nice and early after a decent night’s sleep. I started with my morning stretches followed by a good shower and preparing my water bottles for the cycling race. After that I went down for breakfast. On race day I usually take a few pieces of white bread with jam or honey and some pancakes. I also continue taking in extra fluids to help me stay hydrated. Last but not least one final check in the room to bring everything I need to the start of the race (wetsuit, goggles, swim cap and GPS tracker). We picked up Casper and Evelien and found a good parking spot close to the start. We walked with many other participants to the transition zone to check our bikes and put our water bottles in the holders on our bikes. We could also leave our streetwear for after the race in a white bag and present it to the organization. Now we could enter the start zone and have a quick swim to feel the water temperature. The water temperature was good and we were glad to be able to wear our wetsuits. The starting zone was separated in groups based on estimated swimming time. We joined the group of 35-40 minutes for the 1.9km swim. You could feel the energy and atmosphere changing as the start was approaching. We could first enjoy the starts of the Pro-men followed by the Pro-women. The start signal came from a small historic cannon 10 mins before the start I took my last energy-gel. At 11:24am it was our turn to start the race. We started in groups of four people with 2 second intervals. The first 100 meter the water was shallow, murky and a bit choppy because of all the swimmers but after that the water became calmer and you could see a few meters. My coach had recommended me to swim with a slightly faster group and try to catch someone’s feet so you can







effectively create a draft. Unfortunately, I did not find this person but I did develop a good rhythm and I managed to stay quite relaxed. My sighting went well so I was able to swim a fairly good line. Fortunately there was sufficient space in the water so no fights with other competitors 😊 I was still feeling good and relaxed at the half way point although I noticed sighting was more difficult on my way back as we were looking into the sun. The last 100 meter of the swim was similar to the first 100 meter. It was a great feeling to get out of the water although it always takes a few moments to find your balance after almost 40 minutes in a horizontal position. In the transition area I met Casper. He was only 30 seconds behind me on the swim. It took me 7 minutes to take off my wet-suit, put on my cycling gear and get out of the transition zone to start the bike ride.



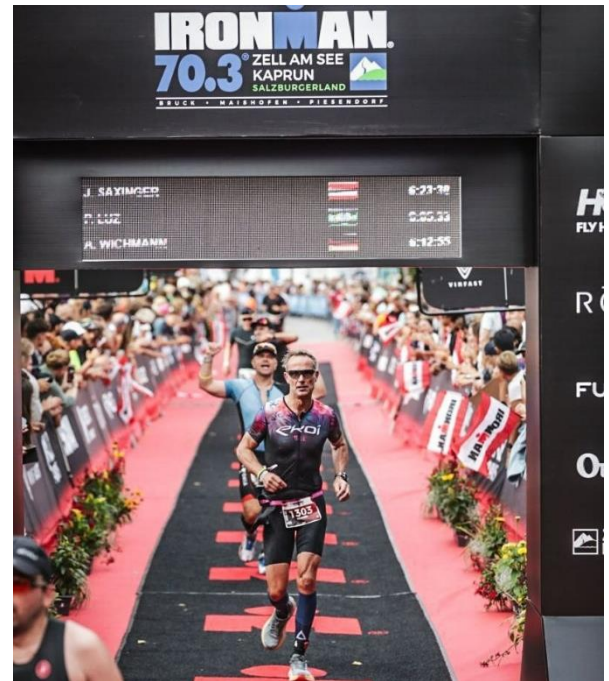
The bike ride is 90 km long and includes a 12km long climb with an average incline of 6-8% and the last two kilometers a bit steeper with an incline of > 10%. The plan was not to push too hard on the climb (max 250 watts & 70/80 rpm) and push a bit harder on the remainder of the course. My first 15 kilometers I averaged 36km per hour. It was exactly at 15km that Casper passed me on the bike. I was feeling good and looking forward to the climb. Most important was to remain hydrated and have a carbohydrate intake of 80/90grams per hour. I took one gel every hour and I was drinking every 20 minutes. At 25km the main climb to Hochkönig started. As I got out of the saddle to stand on my paddles my front disk brake started to rub against my brake pads and made a lot of noise. I kept going until we reached a mechanic on the top of the mountain. I felt very good on the bike and kept overtaking people especially after the climb. The scenery of the bike course was stunning and the weather was pretty good. To my surprise I was able to keep pushing even on the uphill parts and as the race went on, I noticed I was stronger than other contestants around me. Approximately 10-15km from the finish there was a loop near Kaprun where I saw Casper and I knew I was not far behind.



The last few kilometers were familiar territory as we rode past our hotel and we came close to the campsite where Casper and Evelien were staying. Evelien & Max cheered me on just before my final stretch to the finish of the bike course. When I arrived back in the transition zone I made a foolish mistake by not getting off my bike before the red line which resulted in a two minute penalty.



The second transition also took me 7 minutes. First I had to return my bike to the dedicated spot in the bike rack. After that a quick toilet stop before changing into my running gear. The plan for the run was simple to try and remain relaxed and run a flat race. Running is the last and hardest part of the triathlon as you come off the bike with a sore lower back and stiff hamstrings. I was feeling quite ok this time so I just tried to enjoy the course and made sure I would take sufficient water and sports drinks at the aid stations. Every 5 kilometers I would take a hydro powergel. Of course, I was curious how Casper was doing and when I would see him on the run course. The running course went through the center of Zell am See and contained a few nasty climbs. When I started my first lap through the city center I was overtaken by Lisa-Maria Dornauer, one of the local female pro's. I still had an hour and a half to go... The atmosphere in the city was great and it was very enjoyable to run alongside the lake. The aid stations were well organized with plenty of fluids and some healthy snacks and energy gels. Close to Thumersbach at around kilometer 7 was the first time I saw Casper. We had a brief chat before I moved on. I was still feeling reasonably well but was worried about my tight hamstrings and not prepared to take any unnecessary risks. It was a great feeling when I received my yellow bracelet for my 2<sup>nd</sup> and last lap. It was a nice to arrive back in the city for the last couple of kilometers and get underway to the red carpet. It was busy at the finish line and both Jane and Evelien were waiting for us. The last 200 meters was just a downhill trot to enjoy the end of another great Ironman journey! When crossing the finish line I realized I had broken the 6 hour barrier which was a significant improvement from my previous PB. Not long after me Casper came down the red carpet and finished in style. I have deep respect for the manner in which he prepared himself and completed this race. An example of iron discipline and perseverance and a true brave heart!



At this point we are not sure where and when the next adventure will take place. First priority is to recover physically and mentally from the rigorous regime that we followed during the past 8 months.

Last but not least we are absolutely thrilled to share with you we managed to raise Euro 5.300 for the Charlie Braveheart foundation and we thank each and everyone that contributed and those that supported us in any other way.

Since 2018 Charlie Braveheart has been supporting initiatives aimed at improving the care and treatment for children. Charlie Braveheart is committed to reducing pain, anxiety and stress in healthcare for children. For more info please visit [www.charliebraveheart.com](http://www.charliebraveheart.com)

