

## Escape from Alcatraz - June 3rd 2007

By Cristiano Gloria



The day started early waking up 3:50 am and being lucky to have the support of my brother who drove me to the start area and I had the chance to have my banana and bagel on the way. Got into Transition around 4:40...on a misty, windy and cold morning in San Francisco...set my bike into transition, took my time organizing my things and went to check my Bag 1 with the shoes and my bandana I would run from the beach back to the transition, around ½ mile run. Got my wetsuit with my brother and on I went to the bus who took us to Pier 3 where we got body marked ... got into the cruise boat around 5:40 and had plenty of time to relax until the boat took off at 6:15 sharp...all the 2,000 + participants must be in at that time. I found some friends from San Francisco Tri Club and others who I have met on the train swim the day before and just enjoyed the ride.

I had been told that it was good to have some hot drink to warm up our body from the inside a little, but somehow all they had on the boats bar was ice water...luckily my Japanese friend Ukiko had a thermal bottle with boiled water...it felt good!!!

I bumped into another Brazilian from Rio de Janeiro who had come just for the race – Alberto and also saw this boy, who 12 years old was doing the race (I came to find out latter that there were a girl 11 years old who did it also) amazing to see their courage.

The boat got near the Alcatraz Island around 6:45 and they had the opening ceremony. I was a looking into the shore about 1.5 miles away and starting to remember all I read and hard about this swam, cold water, sharks, strong current, holding on to your goggles on the jump, and many other little things. I reviewed with my local friend what to spot for during the swim and when to change the object, (if you are not careful you may ended up way off the finish point). As I didn't want to get close to the Golden Gate Bridge so I wanted to go conservative and in the worse case get into shore early and have the help of the current to take me to the swim exit.

In 6 minutes all of the participants had to get into the water ... my wave was supposed to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> after the Pros...and I was strategically by the door...waited for the Pros to take off ... I was waiting for my “wave”, when I found out that there wasn't really waves ... just the volunteers screaming: “Let's go! Get out of the way.” So, down I went. I was so focused on what to aim and get it going that thank God “I forgot” to feel that the water was around 55 degrees. Around 10 minutes into the swim I found myself far from others, a kayak to my left on one of my breaths

waiving to me to change course to my right... So I did it ... I either took too long to change my object to be sighted or just got too much into what I had hard and forgot the important part: "Every time you swim from Alcatraz is a different swim, make changes along the way as needed". While swimming I flipped over on my back about 2 times to see the Alcatraz and enjoy, and figure out how far I had gone.

As the beach started to approach I was back together with a pack of swimmers, but people were well spread out and I start to aim for the flash lights of cameras taking pictures on the swim exit ... got out with 32 minutes in what supposedly was 2.4 km swim, not counting my big turns on the way. I saw my brother and went to the little transition where the volunteers had left our T1 Bags nice and organized. Found mine ... took my wetsuit off, and got the help of this nice volunteer who took care of putting my suit on the bag and on I went to Transition 1.

According to my brother, who watched from shore the start of the swim, the Professionals swam in a nice straight line guided by a motor boat ... the rest of us were all over the place, swimming on a big belly with a much wider lanes helped by kayakers.

The run into T1 was a good warm up to get back the sensibility on my foot from the cold. Got into T1 with my bandana and heard the race announcer saying on the mic "we have our first Brazilian coming, let me find his name ...I can't find it, he must have registered late." I guess he missed the part that I registered as a Connecticut guy.

Jumped into my bike and struggle a little to put my shoes while cruising, I am improving though ... got into a good pace and rode towards the Golden Gate Bridge, soon started the climbs, I did enjoyed them as I could warm up and get a good cadence ... at that time I was thankful for all my training and for having riding some "slight undulations", as my British Friend and hostess in southern Spain early in the year, would call the mountains there.

The course took us up in front of a Museum – Legion of Honor, passed the entrance to GGB where there was an aid station ran by SF Tri Club and I got some nice support. Then we descended and went up again to start another descent into South Beach, passing in front of the Cliff House. The course then flattened for a while by the beach and made a left turn into Golden Gate Park where we went up until around the middle of the Park and made a turn around to come back into the Marina ... so what was some fast descent on the way out, became some challenging climbs on the way back with the remark for a very steep part that gets people by surprise after you pass the Cliff House, make a left turn and then a quick right and you are faced by a "wall" and you have no option other than stand up and crank up. After this part I found myself going back and forth with another 3-5 guys and in one of the descents on the way back I was ahead of them a little and no one on my sight to follow and this nice volunteer on the middle of a Y intersection swinging both her arms to both sides, I got confused and didn't think to yell which way and took the wrong way, cranked my brakes quick and look back to see all my 3-5 fellow competitors taking the right way. Got back on course and managed to get back together with the group and leave them behind on another climb. As we finished the descents, we had another 2 flat miles back into Transition. This time I had no problem to remove my feet from the bike shoes while riding it and jump off quick into having a nice and quick transition...Finished the hilly 18 miles around 56 minutes.

I took off on the run. On the first stretch out I started to get myself on a good pace and saw my brother again, this time with a big sign saying "Go Cabeca". It gave me a good laugh, but kept my concentration. As soon as I started to really get into the run, we start going up a letter, climbing 2 steps at a time and then hilly trails that takes us up and under a tunnel that you must

watch your steps get into it and your head coming out then up again and under the GGB. The remark going up where the Pros coming flying down on opposite directions already on their way back, good thing I managed to stay out their way. Right after the GGB we go into an open path, near a cliff and there we can see one astonishing view of the Pacific Ocean and the Mountains on the other side in the Marin County. While enjoying the view, I took the time to give thanks to our Mother Nature for serving us and the opportunity to train and race within it. And off course ask for some more energy. I kept moving and the course took us up and back close to the road again where it merged a little with the bike course...I went by a water station and heard someone saying my name ... but I was so concentrated that I could not see who was it, same thing happened on the way back, I had a slight suspicion that it was my new friend Katy who was volunteering on the race. I came to find out latter that it was indeed her.

After we start a big descent that starts on the asphalt and get us back down on trail and then flying into Baker Beach (where many recent married couple go to take pictures with the GGB on the background). We ran up on the sand and turned around ... somewhere around 2 km total ... I tried to run fast into the hard sand and stay there as much as the waves allowed me. On the way back we are met with the most challenging part of the course: the famous Sand Ladder, the organizers even timed our start and exit, to give prizes to the fastest ones to climb it. It is very hard to climb it running and I knew we had 3-4 miles to the Finish line ... I couldn't kill myself either. I walked up on a good pace and heart rate way up, remembering some of the SF Tri friends tip to push my knee down with both hands to give it more friction and it worked. Trying to hold the rails and have the help of just one arm wasn't very effective for me. I climbed in 2:20 minutes. As soon as we finish we had more uphill before we went back the same way passing under the GGB again and just flying down ... this time I passed many other races going up and at some points it got confusing where should we stay left or right and I found myself slowing down at some points because of it. I could not pass the 2 guys right in front of me. I could not see a passing zone. I stayed behind them on the last stair.

As we got back into the last stretch of 2 miles or so I wanted to get into a nice pace to finish, I managed to pass those 2 guys and one of them stayed right on my heel for a while. A couple minutes later I started feeling stomach cramps, what my swim coach growing up called "Dor de Viado", also known as out-of-shape pain. I thought to myself: "how could it be with all my training?" And I got the answer that it could only be the hard terrain I have just been through but not trained on. I still think that was the reason ... at least I hoped it was. I slowed down a little and the guy immediately behind me passed. I took some deep breaths and managed the pain and kept the guy in sight and good pace ... on the last stretch we passed a few others but I didn't attempt to pass again I could see that he was on the 40-45 age group, believe it or not in the Triathlon World sometimes getting older means getting faster. So I had felt no shame in holding my position and finished the run around 54 minutes. My overall Finish was 64<sup>th</sup> place, and 13<sup>th</sup> in my age group, in a total of 2:30 hours.

Links for additional pictures:

<http://new.photos.yahoo.com/album?c=crisgloria&aid=576460762403820878&pid=&wtok=S1uorxWrZVervg9kBFQpJg--&ts=1181118215&.src=ph>

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/object/article?o=9&f=/c/a/2007/06/04/BAG67Q71QM1.DTL>