

Beijing ITU Junior World Championship

Australians, especially the elite females, have an amazing history at World Championship event, last year alone we managed to take out honours in juniors, U23 and elite races, talk about raising the bar high... With this in mind, I knew I had some big shoes to fill and I was quietly confident I wouldn't disappoint, and coupled with a speech and suit presentation from Olympic Gold Medallist, Emma Snowsill, I don't think anyone could have gone into a race with a more motivating send off.

As I awoke on race morning, the famously hot and humid Beijing had decided overnight that it had had enough of the choking smog and decided to welcome the athletes with cold and wet conditions, perfect for some technical racing.

The weather did not scare me at all as I knew that it simply meant that the more caution would need to be taken on the downhills and corners of the course, and of course, reiterating the basic principles such as more weight on the outside.

After the hated and daunting drumbeat music that is played on the pontoon before any ITU race the junior girls were off. I had chosen to position myself on the far left near Lucy Hall, the now famously good British swimmer and as anticipated, it was a fantastic position to start in. It was a huge battle around the first buoy and I have never been more punched, pulled and drowned in a swim before. Once around that first buoy I quickly established a good rhythm and found that I was well positioned in the front pack that was sucking me along nicely. As I exited the water I confirmed that I was in a good position not too far down from the small group of breakaway athletes and I knew that I would have to work hard on the bike to bridge that small gap.



As I rode the only thing going through my head was to be on the front of the pack as much as possible as I knew from watching the other athlete's that their skills on the bike were worrying to say the least. I have never been more fearful on the bike then in this race, especially when not even 1km in and a Canadian athlete came off her bike right next to me. It was then that I knew it was going to be a long 20km. To be on the front around the tightest corner on the course meant that I had to ride hard up the main hill and situate myself in first. As discussed pre-race, my tactic was to go up the first hill hard so I could get a real



feel for my opposition and play the role of villain rather than the victim. This worked almost too well and I quickly dropped the pack of girls that I had come out of T1 with and was faced with a solo ride for the 1st lap, but as I began the 2nd lap I had caught the next pack of two and saw that the gap to the leading duo had stayed the same. As the ride progressed, I could see the pack behind me catching and I was stuck in the dilemma of whether I should sit up and wait for them or keep the chase on to try and catch the leading two girls. My decision was made for me when I rounded the corner and found one of the leading two girls on the ground after coming off her bike whilst her partner had already begun easing up, so I knew that it would be smart to sit up and reap the benefit from the large pack of 15 that were behind me. I had discussed

with my coach earlier, Jamie Turner, that if I were to make a break on the bike I would be more advantaged to do it at a later stage than an earlier one.

As we entered the transition zone I knew ride positioning was important as I had made the decision that I would not attack on the bike and instead back myself in the run for strong 5km off the bike. Out of T2 was a sprint, however, I was convinced and confident that many of the girls would be unable to keep up with the pace that had been set and sure enough, one by one the girls began dropping. It was a New Zealand athlete that attacked early on the run and I was unable to react quick enough to get onto her feet. She only pulled a 5 second lead on me but could not extend it, yet it was big enough that I could not reduce it even with a Hungarian and German athlete running on my feet and forcing me to continue pushing me forward. As I began the second and final lap I was told by the numerous Australian coaches that the Hungarian athlete had a 15 second penalty to serve which meant all that was left was the fight for the podium placing order. In the final downhill section the German athlete overtook me but I fought back and I overtook her again at the top of the next climb. By now I knew that if I was going to catch the New Zealander this was my chance. The last 200m sprint from the turn around to the finish seemed to take an eternity and although the gap came down to 3 seconds I was never able to bridge that gap that the New Zealander had created early on.

I crossed in a thrilling 2nd place and easily cemented one of the proudest moments in my sporting career thus far. I still do not think that it has actually sunk in and the feeling is very surreal. The first thing I wanted to do was find my mother to share the moment, but I made the mistake of running away from the anti-doping crew and guards to find her, meaning I forced the little entourage to chase me through the crowds to find my mother. I soon found her and was not at all surprised to find her in a very emotional and blubbering state. The next person I saw was my notoriously unaffectionate coach Jamie Turner, where I received none other than big hug from him!!!! Knew I had done well then!

When asked what I expected from the race, I actually never really went in with a specific goal. I never even looked at the start list to work out who I was racing against. Not that I did not care, it was a simple case of the only person I was racing that day was myself. On the day I wanted to make sure that I had a strong swim, ride and run and whatever the outcome I would be happy with it. I have worked so hard for this day and made many sacrifices to get here so I knew that if I put in 100% I would be rewarded. The race turned out perfectly and although I tried so hard to get that gold medal I am still so happy with my silver and I am never, ever going to forget the journey and the experience of my 2011 Triathlon season.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those that made this race a possibility. If I were told 1 year ago that I would be 2nd in the World for juniors I would have probably laughed, but I have always had supporters that have believed that I can do it. The support and belief from my family and friends has been unbelievable. Thank you to those back in Western Australia; TWA, TEP, SWEAT, Nick Ciffolilli and Jo Moore, and for the support I received from DSR and SWAS as a country girl. Honourable mentions go to Azzurri, Rob Hall and Bunbury City Cycles for equipping me with my beautiful bike and of course my coach Jamie Turner and Triathlon Australia for turning my dream into reality.

Regards, 2011 World Junior Silver Medallist,

Ashlee Emma Bailie

