

Triathlon forces a singular focus

After placing fourth at the Lake Placid Ironman, Mike Caiazzo has the focus yet no plan to turn pro.

By JENN MENENDEZ, Staff Writer

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Mike
Caiazzo

By day, Mike Caiazzo is a hedge fund accountant, husband and father of two young boys.

By light of the moon – either before 5 a.m. or after 9:30 at night – he squeezes in 10 hours of training a week. Running, cycling or swimming.

On Sunday, Caiazzo, 33, one of Maine's top triathletes, took his game to another level.

The Westbrook resident became the first American to cross the finish line in the Lake Placid Ironman in Lake Placid, N.Y. He was the fourth finisher overall, crossing the line in 8 hours, 59 minutes and 57 seconds.

He was one of 36 athletes from Maine who finished the event – a 2.4-mile swim and a 112-mile bike ride, followed by a 26.2 mile marathon.

Angela Bancroft of Paris and Kim Cole of Kennebunk were the top women finishes from Maine – putting up times of 10:46:24 and 11:49:06 respectively. Both qualified for the Ironman World Championships in Kona, Hawaii.

"My ultimate goal was to win," said Caiazzo, who raced in the pro division. "But the mistake I made was going out a little hard on the bike.

It left me not much in the last hour. The last six miles of the run were pretty painful."

Caiazzo was a cross country runner at Gorham High and he also ran while at Duke University. He didn't attempt his first triathlon until six years ago.

His motivation is simple: "Honestly I enjoy winning. I train to beat people," he said with a smile. "When I'm on my trainer in the basement at 9:30 at night I'm riding to beat other people."

With the physical makeup of a runner, Caiazzo had the running part down, and the biking came quickly.

Swimming was another story.

"The first tri I did I swam the backstroke," said Caiazzo. "I still have a fear of drowning. But for anyone out there intimidated by the swim, it's not as tough as you think."

At Lake Placid he completed the swim leg in 55:21, the bike in 5:03.42 and the run in 2:56.09.

Despite his strong finish at Lake Placid, Caiazzo turned down a chance to compete in Hawaii in October.

He also has no plans to start a full-time training regimen, like many of the country's top triathletes.

"Most of the guys who do this full time are single and live on people's couches," said Caiazzo. "I have a house, kids. Financially it would be tough to make that leap though I would definitely do it if I won the lottery.

"I think even training 20 to 25 hours a week I think I could be very competitive."

Caiazzo said he plans to compete in the Timberman Triathlon in New Hampshire in August, then race in the Pumpkinman in South Berwick and the Lobsterman in Freeport, both in September.

Bancroft, 39, is a stay-at-home mom and former college swimmer at Vermont.

She, too, got a late start in the sport, but with an athletic foundation has quickly risen.

"I'm thrilled with the way Lake Placid turned out," said Bancroft. "I had so many different ups and downs. It was not easy. But I did manage to keep the legs moving. It was an incredible feeling at the end."

Bancroft struggled initially by kicking a metal cord at the starting line, that took a chunk of skin off her foot.

"I absolutely got clobbered. Pushed, kicked, choked in water. I'm a swimmer and was panicked, ready to quit," she said. "I was dog paddling with my face above water and thinking about if I could swim to the left I could grab onto the boat and go home. It was very intense."

Eventually Bancroft found a clear lane.

She completed the swim phase in 57:47, the bike ride in 5:50.23, and the run in 3:49.01.

But it was never easy.

"I got to the point on the run when it was 100 percent mind over matter. My quads were seizing up," she said. "I was trying to make it to the next table, drink what you can. I felt like my brain stopped firing with my leg muscles. There was a disconnect and had to really will my legs to move."

At one point she began to walk a few steps.

A nearby competitor who knew she was trying to break four hours in the run and qualify for Hawaii gave her some encouragement.

"He said you're not going to get it if you walk, just keep moving," said Bancroft.

"He totally made me go. It was a huge struggle. But I was able to keep running. That's what makes it an Ironman. It's not easy. But what an incredible feeling at the end."

Staff Writer Jenn Menendez can be contacted at 791-6426 or at:

jmenendez@pressherald.com

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