

## **The 1%, a small detail can make the difference**

*Nelly Becerra*

"Today is my day; this is going to be the race." After several years competing in triathlon and just a year after the debut in my first Ironman in New Zealand in 1998, dreaming of someday finish this distance among the top three in my age category. With nerves, stomach pain and a lump in the throat, I thought: "Today I'm going to start the road to the podium".

Well, at least that was the plan of the day. Maybe it will sound stupid. Perhaps you think that it is not so important. But it was something that since I started doing triathlon I wanted to experiment and that I did many times in Olympic triathlons. Now with a couple of years training for the Ironman I wanted to climb the podium, at least once. It was a dream in which I saw myself when I'm named at the awards dinner and I go with my Mexican flag to receive my reward in the middle of the admiration and applause of other triathletes. I love my sport. I enjoy this kind of life, it has become a passion. I love the thrill of getting up early one weekend morning to go to compete in a triathlon and give everything. That morning of 1999 in the Ironman Australia, I thought it would be incredible because at least I was trying and why not, maybe qualify for Hawaii.

I chose Australia because I had the dream to know more about the culture that had a reputation for its high performance in sport, because the Australians had a reputation for being the best in the world and I wanted to know what was competing with and against the best of the world. The Last year in my first Ironman in New Zealand I finished 8<sup>o</sup> of my age group. I thought it was not disappointing; at least I finished among the top eight of ten.

And there I was, I felt ready, better prepared than ever and eager to give everything. At the end I finished in the 5<sup>th</sup> place and to my surprise I got in reached enough to qualify for the Hawaii's Ironman. At that time I did not know the importance of what I got, Yes I was happy, I had improved, the 5<sup>th</sup> place was a lot better than a 8<sup>th</sup> place but I had not achieved my goal of being on the podium.

A couple of weeks later, back at home and happy to have known such a special place, excited to start preparing me for the new challenge: The long-distance World Championship in Kona, Hawaiian. I knew I had to take a difficult decision: to set up my training very well because I just had less than six months to do an Ironman again and I had not planned two Ironman's in one year or to go to Kona to enjoy the place and the world most famous event of long-distance. At the end I decided that I was in a stage of my athlete career in which I was not ready to play a good role in two Ironman in the same year. So I chose to just go there and participate.

In the year 2000 I decided to analyze the results of the Ironman Australia to set up my strategy for the competition of the season. That year I'd compete in the summer in the Austria's Ironman. I studied the results and seeing my name in 5<sup>th</sup> place I suddenly saw the time of the 3<sup>rd</sup> place. Something caught my attention. Although she was two places ahead of me she had only been 11 minutes faster than me. I made some calculations and to my surprise I discovered that it was only 1% faster than mine. Only 1%! I thought it was a revelation. I remember I

wondered "Can I be 1% faster?" I thought a couple of minutes and answered: "Of course I can."

The ideas began to invade my head: to register in a swimming clinic, go to a triathlon camp, take a course of running technique, look for the advice of a coach. I started by making a list:

- Make a routine of strength training gym or pilates.
- Look for counseling with a nutritionist to improve my diet.
- To devote several training sessions a week to work solely on improving the technique.

The idea of achieving my goal made me felt so much motivated. Suddenly I realized that, despite being several years practicing this sport, I had only touched the surface. There were many ways to be 1% faster, more than I could write in several hours.

Sometimes I dreamed that I won in Hawaii in my age category. It was fun but reminded me how ridiculous it was that distant dream. On the other hand, focus on achieving an improvement of 1% was a great motivator. It was something tangible, something that I could reach and was not ridiculously far from my reality. When you're in the valley, the peaks of the mountains seem very distant. It is better to forget the peaks and focus completely on the next climb.

Since I discovered the concept of 1% improvement more than ten years ago, I have applied it again and again to keep me focused and motivated. Once achieved this improvement of 1%, then and only then, my goal is to improve the other 1%. Invariably every time I make the question: "Can be 1% faster?" I have never had a lack of ideas to work on it and succeed. I have also learned over the years that the concept of 1% improvement of is not only confined to sport. Every victory starts with the first 1% improvement. Always ask you if you can be 1% better at work, 1% better father, 1% better partner, 1% better person. If the answer is "YES" to any of these questions, which usually is the case, I write a list of all the ways I can achieve a 1% improvement. Then I take a couple of points from the list and I start to work on them. Put yourself into action, If not It will be worthless.

I Got my goal of being in the podium at the Austria's Ironman in 2000. When a friend called at the hotel to tell me that she had just seen the list of results, she congratulated me because I was in the 2<sup>nd</sup> place, a big smile was drawn on my face, I couldn't believe it. It was an unforgettable day, being in the podium with my daughters and the Mexican flag made worth all the effort. The next year at Florida's Ironman in 2001, I won my age category with a time of 10 hours 4 min. So far, it has been my best result.

Many years have passed and many triathlons after that. During these years I've almost always finished within the first five places in my category in the Ironman events in which I've participated. I've qualified several times for Hawaii's Ironman and I've always taken it as the reward for having made the effort to be there among the best in the world. To this day I have never thought about the possibility of training to achieve a podium in Kona. Although I must admit that I love to dream about how special would be to win there in my age category. Imagine winning the biggest race of the world.

This year, 2009, 8 years after achieving my best record, my goal is to work to achieve an excellent result in the Cozumel's Ironman. If I succeed, and only then, I will see my numbers and I'll take an eye on the winners times of this year in Kona. I'll subtract mine from Cozumel. I will do calculations, and guess what? If I'm around 1% I will make the question required "Can I be 1% faster to go for biggest race, the World Championship in Hawaii, in 2010?"

No matter where you're now or what your goals are. I invite you to make some and to make yourself the same question. Can you be 1% faster to achieve your goal? I'm sure the answer is YES!