

The Virgin Islands Consortium

It's Over: Iron Man 70.3 Arrives At The Finish Line On St. Croix

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Racing to the finish line with an overall time of 04:41:07 -- 00:33:45 swim, 02:30:31 bike and 01:34:36 run -- Francky Favre of Martinique, with his hands spread open pretending to fly as he neared his goal, was the winner of the final Iron Man 70.3 on St. Croix, a race that had become a tradition here for 29 years.

After a ruling by the Iron Man organization that called for competitors looking to participate in the Hawaii Iron Man Championship and other races, qualify in Austria instead of St. Croix, the race here began to diminish. Adding to the pressure, multiple Iron Man events were established throughout the Caribbean, including Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland, further weakening St. Croix's position as an important stop.

A drop in sponsorship also contributed to what had become a perfect storm of circumstances, forcing local organizers to face a sad reality. "It's a sad thing," said a volunteer to The Consortium during the final competition on Saturday. "I can't believe it's ending."

But ended it has, and Saturday's race -- although it did not include professionals looking to qualify for the next round of races as it did in the past -- was still a thrilling experience for both spectators and participants.

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The competition, which saw hundreds of cyclists descending on Fort Christianvaern, included the traditional 1.2-mile (1.9 km) swim, a 56-mile (90 km) bike ride, and a 13.1-mile (21.1 km) run — covering locations on the east, west, north and south sides of the island. There are relay and sprint races as well.

The course has always been regarded as one of the more challenging Iron Man races, and that notion held true on Saturday, with Mr. Favre, a third-time participant besting his time last year by over two minutes -- noting the difficulty of the race.

"Today was more difficult than last year," Mr. Favre said, explaining why to the commentator. "It was difficult but I love that," he added. After being told that his time on Saturday bested his 2016 speed by over two times, Mr. Favre's said, "I'm getting old but I like the good wind," eliciting chuckles from the crowd. Mr. Favre's next confirmed race is the Iron Man competition in Nice, France in July, although he may participate in other races before then, he said.

Coming in second place was Chris Brands with an overall time of 04:50:58, with Jesus Andreas Cruz Gonzalez placing third with an overall time of 04:52:38. For full results, go [here](#).

The St. Croix Iron Man began in 1992, and was once one of the biggest annual events in the Virgin Islands, hosting thousands of professional athletes from around the world. Disgraced cyclist Lance Armstrong participated in the Iron Man event in 2012, winning the cycling portion of the race but finishing third overall.

The race cost over \$250,000 to put on, with multiple sponsors, including the Department of Tourism, pitching in to make the event possible. Other government agencies played major roles as well, including the V.I.P.D., whose officers assured that the roads were secure for cyclists.

Residents we spoke with on Saturday did not want the longstanding event to end, but with a throng of other Iron Man races springing up in various Caribbean islands and on the U.S. mainland, a revival of the once notable St. Croix race -- with its annual cost of half a million dollars -- is in doubt.

Feature Image: A rainbow forms minutes before St. Croix's final Iron Man 70.3 event began on Saturday. (Credit: Ernice Gilbert, VIC)

