

Racing (and crashing) in a Foreign Country

This weekend while racing in San Juan (not really a foreign country), a friend of Cait and Tim, and a fellow triathlete was involved in a bad bike crash. He was trying to negotiate a hairpin turn on the course and couldn't cut the wheel hard enough. He went down. Hard. And because he wasn't traveling at a fast speed, he didn't slide.

Sometimes that's a good thing – you escape the dreaded road rash. But in this case, sliding would have been good. He ended up breaking his femur almost at the hip – a Femoral Shaft Fracture. We found out about this after the race and as the day turned into night, little by little more pieces of the story came out. The way a Femoral Shaft Fracture is repaired is by inserting a rod the length of the femur and because they were afraid of a blood clot, our athlete couldn't be transported to the States for surgery. His wife was flying in the next day so she could be there for the surgery and his after-care, and Cait and Tim planned to pick her up.

It's a long story, but the entire gang ended up bringing her to the hospital, and everyone wanted to make sure they were ok before leaving. Unfortunately, the hospital was a nightmare. Cait took pictures and even a video, because one would think the story was an exaggeration without photographic evidence.



This is a trash can overflowing with medical waste.



This is a picture of the 'Do Not Enter' sign.



This is Pedro going in.



This is a picture of the outdoor waiting room with pigeon shit on the floor.



This is where you discuss your hospital business.



These are the professionals taking care of your loved ones.

The rest of the story is that nearly 24 hours after the crash they got our athlete out of his uniform and started surgery. They asked for his consent while he was drugged with morphine. The first attempt to place the rod was unsuccessful, so they told his family that they would have to pay for another one.

During the time that they were attempting a second surgery, friends and family waited in the outdoor waiting room that was absolutely filthy and watched as people in all states of sickness and even death were wheeled out and left in the halls. Nine hours after they attempted the first surgery, he was sent to his room and his friends and family could go see him. But before they went in, they had to go buy his supplies: pillows, blankets and a bed pan.

It will be seven days before he can fly, so he will be in the hospital on blood thinners until then. Although USAT seems to be covering most of the expenses right now, the type of care that's available in San Juan is deplorable.

This isn't the first time an athlete we know has had to go to the hospital due to a race-related injury, but this is the first time the reality of the consequences of being ill or injured in a foreign country with a sub-par medical system hit home.

The reason I'm writing this is that for many of us, the idea of racing in a foreign country is exciting. I know the races that are still on my bucket list are in Thailand and the Canary Islands. But the truth is, what we do is dangerous, and while we are checking to see if the race is wetsuit-legal or if they have Gatorade on the course, I'm thinking it's not a bad idea to check the state of the medical system at our race destination.