

## **The Ironman's dream: To be a Finisher**

*By: Nelly Becerra*

It's estimated that more than 25,000 people will compete in an IRONMAN event this year. This number is rapidly increasing and more and more competitors from all over the globe are becoming part of these competitions.

The World Triathlon Corporation (WTC), who owns the world famous Hawaii's Ironman World Championship, licenses each year more than 20 Ironman events around the world. In most WTC's races the 2,000 entries are sold out within a few days of registration period even though it's opened with a year in advance. Ironman Cozumel is no exception, and it has been sold out since November 2008.

Competing in an Ironman has become the personal goal of many triathletes and, by achieving it, they'll become and Ironman finisher forever.

I finished my first Ironman in New Zealand in 1998, and I instantly knew that I'd been hooked up to the distance. The experience was so rewarding that it became a passion. I learned not only the challenge of increasing my knowledge and skills, but I committed to help others to achieve this dream. I've competed in more than 13 Ironman around the world and I've been a mentor of more than 100 athletes, many of them have also attained the Ironman Title.

The purpose of writing these articles for the Ironman Cozumel website is to guide all the triathletes who are ready to take the challenge of completing the distance for the first time.

It is very possible that some of you athletes who will compete in Cozumel this November 09 have already taken part in any Olympic triathlon or an Ironman 70.3 event. For you, the most important is to follow step by step all the advice given to you and get to know everything that is necessary to prepare and finalize a successful Ironman. It is also possible that many of you have already completed this distance, yet these articles will be a guide of how to train better and achieve better results. The important thing is to face the next Cozumel's challenge with an optimal and especially rewarding performance.

And the question required: How to manage work and family life and still find time to be an ironman athlete?

For many years I've been working with athletes from many different professions and with different lifestyles, from a bank executive who works ten hours a day, spends two to three hours daily in traffic, has a wife, two sons and soccer games on weekends, up to the physical therapist with the same time consuming commitments, but with a grueling physical work that consumes energy to train. The Bank executive and the Physical Therapist have something in common: both have a busy schedule; both have completed an Ironman.

The demands of my work are very similar. Therefore taking care of my two daughters, my home and deal with the usual family duties has been a challenge in my life.

I realized that to compete in triathlon I should learn how to train effectively using the time efficiently. I started to study and learn many of the most successful training skills from the best coaches and athletes like Mark Allen, Troy Jacobson, Paula Newby Fraser, Roch Frey, Terry Laughlin, Nicholas Romanov, among others.

Over time I developed my own variations of these techniques through my experiences and my experimentation and I have combined all the feedback I've had from my clients for over a decade. I have found a good strategy for both training and competition for long distance events.

I discovered that "more" does not mean "better." In fact, sometimes more is just more and worse, sometimes more means less. I have learned to work with my body and not against it. And I have gotten performance levels I never thought were possible. As I like to get personally involved with my trainees, I currently coach no more than 80 athletes. But through these articles and the Ironman Cozumel website, I hope to have the opportunity to help many more of you to be successful and to realize your own Ironman dream.

The important thing is to learn how to achieve the objective by having a good time. It is very important to have fun on the road. After all, swimming, cycling and running should be fun, or shouldn't they? Definitely, when they're practiced with intelligence and a positive approach, they are.

You need to know which are the key elements: how to train, how to manage your own time, give priorities, select your tune up races, competition strategies, gear and equipment, techniques for mental preparation, motivation, nutrition, food and hydration, among others.

I am surprised of how many people have the dream of completing an Ironman. Individuals from all lifestyles feel attracted to this incredible sporting challenge. The Ironman is an emotional magnet for many.

Now after more than ten years competing in many Ironman and working to help others do the same, I've realized that there are only two types of triathletes: those who admit that their ultimate goal is to complete an Ironman and the ones that do not admit it, but secretly wish the same. The Ironman has become the heart and soul of triathlon for age group competitors.

What is the attraction? Why completing an Ironman becomes so attractive to many athletes?

The first stage is the incredulity. The first thing we think of when we're watching and Ironman on TV is that it's "impossible." Swim 2.4 mi, bike 112 miles and then run a full 26.2 mi marathon? Who can do that? Perhaps you had always thought that a marathon was the highest test of endurance. It is clear that something longer and harder is not tolerable by the human body.

The second phase is to assume that it is possible. Still watching the Ironman's broadcast on TV, You see the athletes and their heroic efforts. And you feel attracted. The impossible is beginning to be possible ... at least for those people coming out on TV.

The third phase is curiosity. You start to ask questions. How do they do it? What motivates them? How do they train?

And then, the final stage. The dream. You make the big question: Would I be able to do so? Could I achieve the title of Ironman Finisher? The answer: Anything is possible!

And there it is. You're here, already registered to achieve the dream to be amongst the first group of finishers of the very first edition of Ironman Cozumel. Here's the fascination with the Ironman and the reason why so many people have the dream to participate, to be part of. In a short period, you change your mind proving that something you thought was impossible is

something that comes up now and it's possible. Maybe other "impossibilities" of our lives are so much more possible than we thought before.

Now the good news: For those who strive for the dream in Cozumel, the reward will be better than you'd thought. Those of you who compete on November 29th, will remember when they crossed the finish line as one of the most important and impacting moments in your lives. Not only that: the majority of Ironman finishers also believe that the odyssey of getting the title of Ironman is one of the most rewarding periods of their lives. And it will. Training is a process that will require much dedication and discipline, but should not be a painful and exhausting process. If you know what to do and have the appropriate training program, every day of the trip is exciting and rewarding.

I'm currently living in Cancun, Quintana Roo, and I have a group of athletes from Cozumel and Cancun. This year we have been training together on the route of the Ironman. During our swim workouts in the beautiful waters of the Marine National Park Chankanaab, we strolled admiring the crystal clear coral scenery, full of exotic colors and marine life of this remarkable island in the Mexican Caribbean. We also ran along the boardwalk of the town, next to the sea, all the way to the Golf course and back to the Municipal Plaza where the finish line will be. We are very happy to share with the world this incredible setting. We're in the process of preparing us to wear with pride the Ironman Finisher t-shirt of the first WTC's Ironman held in our country.

We, like many of you, have marked on the calendar the 29<sup>th</sup> November 2009 as the big day and we get up every day eager to fulfill the plan that will make our dream come true. I wish you luck on the road, you'll see that the wonder is not just the excitement of crossing the finish line. The wonder begins when you commit to compete. It is an amazing journey of self discovery that will last forever. If someone asks you: What are the most extraordinary things that you've done? The Ironman will be present on the list of achievements of your life.