

BREAKING BOUNDRIES BECOMING AN IRONMAN

Completing an Ironman Triathlon is no mean feat. So it is no wonder that with no prior training, 38 year-old physiotherapist Rhys Chong believed he could never complete one. We asked Rhys to talk us through exactly how he challenged his own personal boundaries to successfully complete his first Ironman Triathlon in just 12 hours and 15 seconds.

THE 10 YEAR DECISION

The decision to enter an Ironman sparked a cascade of events that would end in one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. Finishing the Ironman – a 2.4-mile (3.86 kilometres) swim, a 112-mile (180.25 kilometres) bike ride and a marathon (26.2 miles or 42.195 kilometres) – in one day was a testimony to one year of careful planning and disciplined training. The physical and emotional experience along this incredible journey was unparalleled to anything I had ever achieved before.

For 10 years the thought of doing an Ironman had sat in the back of my mind. I had completed a Half Ironman in New Zealand 10 years ago and promised myself I would complete the full Ironman once in my lifetime. The Half Ironman was a tough race and afterwards I lost the desire to train again. I left New Zealand to live in London and thought my Ironman dream was over. My life in London seemed too busy and it was too dark and cold in winter to even consider training for an Ironman.

My Ironman dream was suddenly reignited 10 years after arriving in London. I started working in a gym in Fulham as a physiotherapist. In this gym were two personal trainers who lived and breathed Ironman. One was a professional Ironman athlete and the other had completed five Ironman races as an amateur. I saw them train in the gym, bring in their Tri bikes, and listened to the stories of each race they completed. I wanted what they had, I wanted to tell my story, and I wanted to be an Ironman.

I voiced my interest in doing an Ironman to Fran Campa, one of the Ironman athletes (amateur). For one year we bantered and for some reason I came up with excuses for not doing it. I told myself I did not have enough time, London was a difficult place to train and I suffered knee pain when running. What is more I had my own business to manage. Despite my excuses, Fran kept badgering me to do it. I knew I had a deep desire to complete an Ironman and a conflict raged in my subconscious mind.

I left work in the gym to start a business in South Kensington called Physical Edge Ltd. In the summer of that year I lay down in a park in Ealing and gathered my thoughts together. Would I enter an Ironman or not? I wanted to feel certain I was making the right decision. I had spent hours looking at websites on Ironman races and being inspired by Ironman athletes fighting pain and crossing the finish line.

The certainty I wanted to feel before making my decision to do the Ironman never came to me. I phoned Fran from the park and 'spilled my guts'. I knew I had to make a decision now and the time for thinking was over. I was getting older (37 years old) and my personal time had only got less with each passing year. If I had children my Ironman dream would need to wait again. I challenged Fran over the phone with questions: "Could I do it?" "Will I have the time?" "What is it really like?" My questions were a delaying tactic because I already knew the answers. I took one deep, long breath and made Fran promise he would coach and support me through the training; I could not do it without his help. He committed to making the Ironman happen with me. I breathed out a long, slow sigh and told Fran, "I will do it!" I was going to enter an Ironman and finally make my dream become a reality. I felt fear, excitement and relief all at once.

Fran stepped into his role as head coach with gusto. I had made up my mind but I had

FIRST TIME IRONMAN



RHYS CHONG

not entered an Ironman race yet. He told me to enter the Austria, Germany or Switzerland Ironman because they were ideal for first time Ironman athletes: semi-flat courses, beautiful scenery and professional organisation.

The entry for each Ironman race starts the day after the previous year's race. I watched for the finish of the Austria and Germany races but had trouble entering online. I left it 10 days and regrettably missed the registration deadlines. The Switzerland Ironman was next and I made sure I registered on time.

I drove to the gym in Fulham and on the public computer I entered the Switzerland Ironman website, paid £450 and registered as an official Ironman competitor. It was August 1st and the race was July 25th the following year. My decision to do an Ironman now felt real and life was about to change.

LIFE CHANGES AFTER IRONMAN

The Ironman has changed me in many ways because it constantly pushed me beyond my comfort zone and challenged me to grow in several areas of my life. I learned to always perform at my best and search to be better. I set higher standards in many areas of my life, including nutrition, exercise and goal-setting. I have a greater desire to experience success and I have zero tolerance for laziness. I like achieving outstanding results. I realise life is short and time is precious. If I want to do more in my life, I must get off my butt and do it. It is inspirational to know I can dream and make that dream a reality.

Since the Ironman I look after my nutrition and alkalise my body. I eat less processed food and red meat because it is acidic and requires enormous energy from the body to be digested. I strengthen my body against disease with an antioxidant (Monavie), Omega oils and multivitamins. I value rest and I understand how good quality sleep is so important for peak performance.

If I get injured I get treatment immediately to prevent the consequences of stiffness and weakness affecting my physical performance. I also invest time in mental conditioning to make recovery from injury a positive experience. Mental conditioning has also carried over to my work and personal life where clarity of what I want has made a significant difference to what actually happens.

I believe in using coaches and choosing those who have already done what I want. I employ coaches for work and for anything else I want to learn fast. My coaches become friends and talking openly

and honestly to them clears my mind to make better decisions for the future.

I have learned how I react under physical and mental stress and how to manage my life and emotions in empowering ways. I like goal-setting and having a clear plan of action. I get great satisfaction in being disciplined and taking small steps towards my goals. If my goals are exciting and desirable I can be doggedly determined to finish them and I enjoy seeing them completed.

I have become incredibly independent since the Ironman. Being responsible for my own training and racing created within me a 'Can Do' attitude. I am less patient and more direct with my language and actions. I have learned to trust my own instincts, use my own initiative and be accountable to my own high standards. I like making decisions and I have no time for people who complain or blame others before looking at themselves when things go wrong. If I make a mistake I take the lessons and aim to move forward.

All the learning I have taken from the Ironman has made my life richer. It has been one of the most powerful experiences of my life. If I think I cannot do something in my life it is begging for me to step up and do it. I suggest the Ironman is more than just a race.

MY SECRETS TO ACHIEVING GOALS

The Ironman was a daunting challenge but by completing it I have discovered my personal steps to achieving any goal I set in my life.

Once I have chosen what I want to do, the first step is to have faith and commit to it – commit to it in such a way that I cannot turn back. Pay a coach who has done what I want to do before and work together. Decide on other team members with complementary skills to further assist in achieving my goal. Select the appropriate team based on expertise and passion.

Get extreme clarity on each outcome necessary to achieve my goal and put time frames with them. Create a final plan. Have the discipline and focus to follow through with the plan. Visualise achieving my goal like a movie, with sound and colour as if it was real life.

Make sure I stay physically healthy to always perform at my best.

It is vital to have fun along the way and have family and friends involved in the process. Support a charity to create greater motivation and interest in what I am doing. Celebrate when the goal has been achieved and learn what I can do better next time. Finally, set a new goal before or as soon as the current goal has been achieved.

TIPS

1. Learn from the Ironman how to live a healthy lifestyle
2. Take the secrets of your success in Ironman to other areas of your life
3. Be an inspiration to those around you

Rhys has documented his journey to Ironman success in his book 'First Time Ironman' (£12.99, Ecademy Press). He now specialises in helping others who want to achieve similar success Ironman Triathlons. No experience necessary! For more information visit <http://physical-edge.com>

