

32 PAGES OF BUSINESS INSPIRATION

# THE ENTREPRENEUR

PACKED WITH INTERVIEWS, REVIEWS, ADVICE & FEATURES

# IRONMAN

*THE SKILLS NEEDED TO SUCCEED FROM AN ELITE ATHLETE*





# RHYS CHONG

Completing an Ironman Triathlon is no mean feat. Consisting of a series of long-distance triathlon races organised by the World Triathlon Corporation (WTC), competitors face a 2.4-mile (3.86km) swim, a 112-mile (180.25km) bike ride and a marathon 26.2-mile (42.2km) run - raced in that order, without a break. What's more, most Ironman events have a strict time limit of 17 hours.

So it's no wonder, that with no prior training, physiotherapist Rhys Chong believed he could never complete one. However, after training consistently for a year and working with a team of experienced professionals, Rhys eventually

enjoyed the sweet success of crossing the finish line of his first Ironman in Switzerland, in just 12 hours 55 seconds.

To celebrate achieving this life ambition Rhys wrote the book 'First Time Ironman,' to provide a glimpse into the training required for such an event and to inspire people who may have similar sports ambitions but are limited by their belief that they can't succeed. Also, Rhys wants to encourage anyone facing a challenge in their life with the message that, by "having the guts to confront their fears and prepare for the unknown, they could be at the start of an incredible life-changing journey."

## BECOMING AN IRONMAN...

**First things first, completing an Ironman Triathlon is no New Year's resolution. With no prior training, when did you suddenly realise you wanted to become an Ironman?**

Well, the Ironman challenge had been a dream of mine for ten years. The distances seemed impossible, but this just made it more exciting for me. Surprisingly, I saw athletes in their '70s and '80s complete the race, athletes with half a functioning kidney fight to the end and even amputee athletes limp over the finish line. I've got videos of them on my website ([www.physical-edge.com](http://www.physical-edge.com)) - they are heroes! They all inspired me and I decided it was time for me to step up and stop thinking about it. I had a friend who became my coach and he promised to help me. Knowing I had his support, I made the decision to do the Ironman and entered.

**What do you think planted the seed of the challenge in your mind?**

I worked in a gym as a physiotherapist and there were two personal trainers who did Ironman. I already wanted to do the challenge, but with their coaxing and hearing their stories the idea grew more and more vivid. The more questions I asked them the more I got excited about the idea.

**Why did the Ironman challenge draw you in?**

It was a challenge beyond my comprehension. It seemed totally irrational and inhuman to do, but watching the videos of all those people completing it - old or disabled - really inspired me. On top of this, I was really encaptured by the enormity of the challenge. Watching Ironman athletes cross the finish line in total euphoria was incredible. I wanted to do that and I wanted to be an Ironman.

**You've had - and still have - an amazing career in physiotherapy and started your own physiotherapy business in 2007. Why that line of work?**

I believe people are gifted with certain natural talents which do or do not fit with their chosen careers. If you can find out what you do best and choose a career which matches your talent, then every day you wake up excited about going to work. I had wanted to be a physiotherapist since I was 12-years-old. I naturally enjoy being around people and hearing how well they are doing in life. I have a good sense of touch, which is important in physiotherapy, and I love sport. The Olympics is dangerous and I find myself glued to the television all day! I enjoy helping others and having my own business allows me to be creative in how I work as a physiotherapist. I was going to go into art as a career before physiotherapy, so having a creative outlet is even more

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fulfilling. You can see a video on [www.physical-edge.com](http://www.physical-edge.com) that gives more insight into my passion for physiotherapy.

## **How did your line of work influence your decision (and success) to complete the Swiss Ironman?**

I have treated professional athletes and work with amateur athletes as well. I have a passion for endurance events like Ironman and the Tour de France. In these events, there are loads of injuries. I like the ‘buzz’ of having an injury to heal in a tight time schedule, which happens when an event is coming up. Endurance athletes often get injured when they are doing their longest training sessions. This can mean 3-4 weeks away from a big race. And that’s when the pressure is on to perform as a physiotherapist. My contact with endurance athletes excited me and I think this increased my desire to race an Ironman.

## **How did you stay focused and commit to the challenge once it had been finalised?**

The best way to commit to anything is to ‘burn the bridge behind you.’ Once I had made the decision to do Ironman, I entered online immediately. The commitment was made by paying £450 - the bridge was burned and I could not go back. Once I was committed, all I could do was look forward and find a way to make it all happen. I think the greatest drive that kept me focussed was the fear of not finishing. Every time I thought about the race it frightened me and spurred me on to train and stay focussed.

## **What drove you to complete the challenge?**

Every Ironman believes he/she will do anything to finish the race. I was 100% committed to getting to the finish line, no matter what happened. The pain was bad in the last 20km of the race but I was not going to stop running. I think this belief developed with long hours of solo training in the cold and wet months of winter. I forced myself to train hard in these conditions and because I had made this sacrifice, I was going to get to the finish line.

## **What were you thinking from one stage to the next? Did your mind wonder what you were going to have for dinner, or did it focus on the pain?**

My mind was focussed on my race plan. I had worked with a mental conditioning coach prior to the race. I had created a visualisation of my entire race, including breakfast and celebrating at the end. It is a type of hypnosis and I knew exactly what I had to do for each stage of the race. I only focussed on what I had to do next - so very short term. If I did have a moment to relax, e.g. on the bike leg, I took the opportunity to enjoy the moment and really appreciate the fact that I was actually racing Ironman. I wanted to enjoy the race and capturing the scenery in Switzerland was breathtaking.

## **Your words when you crossed the finish line?**

‘YES!!!!!!’ I was euphoric. I sounded like I was about to charge the enemy. The crowds were cheering and I was ecstatic. I screamed a war cry all the way down the finishers shoot to the finish line.

## **Was there ever a moment during the challenge when you worried about the lengths you were stretching your body?**

At one stage on the bike my left knee kept subluxing, as the muscles

on the outside of my leg had got so tight it was pulling my knee cap laterally with each stroke of the pedal. It was a sharp pain and I had to keep my leg moving in a straight line to control the knee cap. I was worried about running the marathon next.

## **Your book ‘First Time Ironman’ launched this month. Is that a tick in the box, a lifelong ambition, or did you write it just because?**

I wrote the book because I now help businessmen and women, entrepreneurs and celebrities train and complete an Ironman in one year. The book was designed to give first time Ironman athletes an appreciation of training for the race and for the race itself. I wanted to know what it was like to train and race an Ironman and I know others would too.

## **What would you like your readers to gain from it?**

I want readers to see that racing an Ironman is achievable, even if you’re running your own business and having relationships. If you commit to racing Ironman, the rest will fall into place. It is key to have a great team of coaches and medical staff to help you. The book gives you an insight into how I used my team, not only to have a great race but also a fantastic experience.

## **How did you find running your business whilst simultaneously writing your book?**

It was tough at times but being super planned made all the difference. I worked with my coach on a weekly basis to get the timing right and when my work got too much we altered it.

## **It’s a pretty intense life you seem to lead! Hows the social life?**

My social life did take a backseat, but when I did go out everyone wanted to hear about my training and was inspired by my plan. They wanted to donate to the charity I supported and, in some ways, I met people I never would have met without doing Ironman. My coaching team and I are now great friends and they all came to my wedding.

## **What do you do to unwind in the evenings, or is unwinding unnecessary?**

I watch television or a movie and eat good food. I enjoy life, so I actually like doing things to relax. I find working on my business, being creative or cycling for 3-4 hours relaxing.

## **Your Ironman team helped Diccon Driver finish his Ironman challenge despite awaiting a kidney transplant. How did it feel to be a part of that monumental achievement?**

Diccon is an inspiration to us all. His story is immense. I am proud to say I trained with Diccon and I think he will be the first Ironman who has had a kidney transplant. I am honoured to help Diccon and I am excited about his future race plans.

## **What are your plans for the future? Any more challenges?**

I have just had a baby, so my new Ironman is taking care of her. This is an Ironman for life. I still go for bike rides and race team triathlons but my days of racing long distances have to take a backseat.

I would love to do another Ironman with my children one day.

Maybe when I am really old I will inspire them to race an Ironman.

# My day...

6.50am - I wake up and begin my day with a big breakfast to keep my energy levels up until lunch

8am - 4pm - I start work as a physiotherapist and treat patients continuously whilst running my business

4pm - 4.30pm - I scoot home on my moped

4.30pm - 6.30pm - As soon as I get home, I change into my cycle kit, pump up my tyres and head straight to Richmond Park for an intense training session, including a time trial

6.30pm - 8pm - I leave Richmond Park and head home to shower and eat

8pm - 10pm - I sit down to start work on administration for my business

10pm - 11pm - I switch on my laptop, write emails and prepare for my next day's training

11pm - 11.30pm - I chat and spend time with my partner

11.30pm - I get into bed and enjoy a quality sleep