

# How to be an Ironman?

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Triathlon is an Olympic sport that consist of doing three sports disciplines: swimming, cycling and running. That should be made continuous between one and the next, connecting by what is called transitions. There are different theories and legends about when triathlon started, the most famous ones place its origin in France. Nowadays, triathlon is growing faster becoming into such a known sport event, having different modalities, from infant category to sprint distance or the hardest one, the Ironman. Taking place all over the world, anyone can join a team or train by itself to take part in one of this challenges.

Ironman arose in 1977 in a ceremony in Hawaii, which meet people from swimming and running clubs, debating about which type of athlete, ones or the others were more fit. During the meeting, someone affirms that in a magazine article it's said that actually the cyclist were the more fit athletes in the word, so they decide to do a race combining the three sports in their longest competition distance: the Waikiki Roughwater Swim (3.86 km), the Aroung-Oahu Bike Race (185 km) and the Honolulu Marathon (42.195 km). It was said that, whoever finished it in the first position will be call the Ironman, giving the name to this new sport world event. The popularity of this new sport grew over the time, more and more similar events were organized all over the world, sharing between them establish distances of 3.9 km swimming, 180 km cycling and 42.4 km running. While Hawaii Ironman, the first of all them, turns into The World Ironman Championship.

Due to the success of this new sport event, quickly Ironman turns to be an idea to become into a brand. At the beginning, the Hawaii Triathlon Corporation was created to manage it, but since 1990 it was established the World Triathlon Corporation (WTC) in order to furthering the sport of triathlon and increasing the prize for the events winners. Until the present day the WTC is headed now by the Chinese brand Wanda which is in charge of the organisation of all the official Ironman Triathlon events. Moreover it takes care of the Ironman image, preventing that similar sport events use their name.

Since 1983 the admission to The World Ironman Championship (Hawaii), follows a qualification bases system. More than 30 Ironman triathlon races are organised around Europe, America, Asia, Africa and Oceania. By taking part in Ironman and Ironman 70.3 events, professional athletes achieve points to improve their position in the ranking system, based on the position they achieved. Only the top 50 male and top 35 female professionals in the ranking have the opportunity to take part on it. On the other hand, for those who can be called amateur athletes, the qualification depends on the position that they achieve in their age group.

Living in a society with an increasing level of leisure, how are such individual able to raise the bar?

Being able to participate in an Ironman is different from take part in a 10 km race in your town or biking by the sea. The Ironman is one of the most complete and challenging sports in the world. It is not possible to initiate in the triathlon's world by taking part

in an Ironman. It could take years of preparation just to be able to join, yet to be able to excel at it.

Typically, people who take part in an Ironman have a huge background in different triathlon modalities: duathlon (running and cycling), aquathlon (swimming and running), sprint triathlons ... etc. Their main aim is to proceed gradually in the level of difficulty. For example, if the athlete is used to running but not to swimming, the ideal process would be to start with duathlon or aquathlon. If the athlete would start training from scratch, a similar progression manner would be followed: start by training in one of the three modalities and then gradually include the remaining modalities. This process, whose time length would depend on schedule and personal effort, would finish once the first sprint triathlon had been accomplished. As of that moment, the number of triathlons should increase, and the training sessions shouldn't stop.

Just the intention to participate is not sufficient in the triathlon world. This sport requires an economical investment in clothes and equipment for all the disciplines. The ideal situation is to have specific clothes for each discipline and a good bike; however, this wouldn't be a principal worry for beginners as it doesn't matter how much was paid for the bike if the athlete cannot operate it quickly enough. Hence training must come first followed by the equipment to be used.

Another important thing is to find a team to train with or pay for a personal trainer. Triathlon is the combination of three different disciplines at the same time hence professional orientation is needed. This would insure a gradual progression in the athlete's endurance and fitness level without causing any damage to the body. It's cheaper and probably easier to join a team. Once in a team, another athlete would be able to help and lead the training session. This would also have the effect of peer to peer encouragement which would have a positive effect on the athlete's mental state.

Finally, taking part in a triathlon requires athletes to take really good care of their bodies and make it their priority. The level of demand of this sport should be complemented with physiotherapy sessions. This would let the athletes recover from excessive effort and it would prevent issues or complications from overstraining them. The absence of pain does mean that the body is in its optimal operation conditions. A professional, that is knowledgeable in the behaviour of the body, is a must in order to prevent the athlete's body from failing under this excessive physical strain.

Having all the material, the team or trainer, the aim to do it and the conviction that this is a long time process, life as triathlete can start.

### **a) Perseverance and discipline**

It's recommending to train around 14 and 30 hours per week, combining the three disciplines and finding an equilibrium between them. It's important to take into account that the distances and times of each sport during the event are different, so the kind of train shouldn't be the same. To be a "complete" athlete, not only run, cycling and swimming is enough. So that, it's recommended to do gym sessions with strength and stretch routines and take part in other sports.

## **b) Mental training**

We are our worse enemy, in such a physically demanding sport it is important to be able to control the thoughts, as in the training sessions as in the competition days. We are not machines, some days the body reacts perfectly to what we demand to it but others it can't and frustration appears. This can't end with all the effort that have been already done. Be part of a team always helps, being surrounded by people that really understand it, physical and mentally. But never forget that the competition day the triathletes are along.

## **c) Adaptive capacity**

Nowadays life means long work hours and few free time, moreover add to the long list of responsibilities home and family things. How could anyone train unless two hours per day? When? Where? No matter if it's raining or not, living in the middle of the city or in the outskirts, a triathlete should always be able to find the time and use it. Have the sport bag always prepared and replace the naps or hours in front of the TV by opportunities to train.

## **d) Recovery and stretching**

Recovery is as important as training, but when during the process of preparing an Ironman the meaning of recovery changes from the usual one, that would mean pass the day sleeping on the sofa, to the concept "active recovery", that means having recovery training sessions, for example, 2000 meters of swimming or 1 hour of cycling.

Stretching is the base to not suffer injuries. Try to stretch all the muscles from the head to toe, trying different exercises to not let the body get used to them. Be aware, an injury could mean the end of the season and throw away all your effort.

## **e) Food and hydration**

Human body need enough energy to pass and resist long training days. Having a control on the diet, defining one according to the real necessity of energy, it's the key. Try to eat five times per day including carbohydrates and protein and go to the doctor from time to time to make blood test. It could be possible to introduce vitamins or food supplements and to increase the intake of some kind of food.

The hydration level should be always high, therefore around four liters of water are the amount recommended for such a huge effort. Never forget to drink of water during the training session and even more important during the competition days.

## **f) Family and friends support**

Living in a society in which the level of procrastinating are increasing, practising such a sport could seem synonymous of being mad. People will comment both, in positive and negative ways about it. Be focused on the objective and look for support on those around you. Partner, parents, kids or friends, will have to get used to it, supporting you day by day.

After going through all these preparations, the athlete is now ready to endure this not so easy effort. The date of the athlete's first ironman is approaching. This physically

intensive challenge is to be completed in about 17 hours. Although the average time to finish it is lower, the main focus of most athletes is to endure this task till the end not to accomplish it in the least possible time. Pride is earned once the athlete reaches the finish line.

Professional triathletes who accomplish this task on a regular basis advise newcomers to remember that rivalry comes from within: each athlete is his/her own rival. Some practical advice would be not to wear new clothes; to eat something every 40 to 50 minutes before the triathlon. Moreover, they advise to proceed swimming with head, cycling with calmness and running with courage. But above all, every athlete crossing the finish line will experience such a special moment that you will never be forgotten. That's why every step of the journey up to this point is to be enjoyed.

In conclusion, triathlon is not an easy sport, is not just something that you start to do for fun, is something that will be present everyday of your life. Training sessions, sporting events, economic investment... once you have started is not way to stop it. Try to follow the steps described above point by point. Avoid the frustration because others achieve it before, all of us are different and each thing should happen in the correct time. Enjoy all your training sessions, you will discover that the fatigue is just the best motivation to continue, but don't forget to stop, when it is needed. Find support on those who love you, explain them your feelings, objectives and why do you love it. Take them with you when you cross the finish line. Remember that being an Ironman is not just a hobby it's a life style.