

## Meeting The IRONMAN Challenge

The finest athletes from around the world will test themselves at the IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship. A supreme test of physical and mental toughness, events in the IRONMAN and IRONMAN 70.3 Series require both courage and determination, in addition to physical preparation. While each athlete overcomes his or her own personal challenges on the road to becoming an IRONMAN or IRONMAN 70.3 finisher, some must overcome not only the challenges that IRONMAN offers, but the physical challenges life has imposed on them as well.

Since 1982, several physically challenged athletes have seen success in IRONMAN. Among the physically challenged participants, heroes have emerged including Joseph Raineri, a blind athlete from Delaware who became the first physically challenged athlete to finish the race, and the race's first deaf competitor, Michael Russo of New York, who competed in 1984. In 1991, Jim McLaren, a former Division I football player from California who had lost the lower part of his left leg in a motorcycle accident, received worldwide attention when he completed the race biking and running with a custom-designed prosthesis.

In 1994, Dr. Jon Franks, a paraplegic athlete from Venice Beach, California, petitioned the organization to allow him to compete in the race using a handcycle for the bike portion of the event and a racing wheelchair for the marathon. The possibility of his participation stirred debate in the triathlon community. Some felt that Franks' not actually running the marathon portion of the race would compromise the nature of the challenge.

Although Franks did not finish the event, millions watching NBC's race coverage saw his determination to climb the last hill of the bike course and counted him among the race's true winners. His efforts, as well as the growth in the number of physically challenged individuals involved in athletics, generated a groundswell of interest.

The physically challenged division was given a "test run" in 1994, 1995, and 1996 with demonstration participation by wheelchair athletes.

In 1996, John MacLean from Australia completed the event within the overall time of 17 hours and, in 1997, became the first athlete to use a hand-cranked bicycle to finish the event within the

allotted cutoff times for each discipline. In all, eight athletes competed in the newly formalized PC Division. Among them was Clarinda Brueck, a 43-year old teacher from New Jersey. Brueck, who was born without the lower portion of her left arm, eloquently summed up the significance of this competition. "I want physically challenged children to feel what I felt when I first completed a triathlon," she said. "For the first time in my life, I felt I was competing with and even excelling above able-bodied individuals. That's an empowering, life-changing experience. And competing in the IRONMAN Triathlon World Championship emphatically allows you to say, 'If I can complete this race, there's nothing in life that I can't do.'"

A formal division was established for the IRONMAN World Championship in 1997 after years of careful research and planning. In 2006, a formal division was also established at the inaugural IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship.

There are two different categories within the Physically Challenged Division: handcycle and physically challenged. The handcycle division is comprised of athletes who will use a hand cranked cycle on the bike segment and a racing chair on the run. Due to the level of interest from handcycle athletes, qualifying races were established. Athletes now must compete for starting slots at IRONMAN 70.3 Buffalo Springs Lake or IRONMAN 70.3 Cairnes.

Three physically challenged athletes gained entry through the Physically Challenged Lottery, to compete at this year's Subaru IRONMAN 70.3 World Championship.

