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FEATURES

The finish line of a dream



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BAKKE-SVENSSON/Ironman

Ironman Quick Facts

WHEN: Saturday, November 14, 2009, beginning at 6:45 a.m. with the professional athletes and physically challenged/handcycle athletes. Age group athlete waves start at 6:55 a.m., with the final wave entering the water at 8:00 a.m.

WHAT: A 1.2-mile swim, 56-mile bike and a 13.1-mile run. Competitors have 7.5 hours to finish the race; cutoff times are applied to each segment of the race.

WHERE: Clearwater Beach, Fla., one of the world's top tourist destinations.

WHO: More than 1,500 athletes from around the globe.

PURSE: A total of \$90,000 is split among the top 10 professional men and women. Timex Ironman Watch Bonuses worth \$10,000 are also available to athletes along the bike and run courses.

2009 CHAMPIONS: Michael Raelert (Germany), 3:34:04; Julie Dibens (Great Britain), 3:59:33.

TRAINING: The average Ironman triathlete spends 10 to 30-plus hours each week training for this event. Many competitors also cross-train with weight training, stretching and yoga, among other activities.

WEATHER: Average temperatures on race day range from 60 to 78 degrees Fahrenheit.

LIVE COVERAGE: Triathlon fans can follow every stroke, spin and stride live on race day by visiting www.ironman.com. Tune into a live race day web cast that includes real-time race results, live audio and video updates by well-known triathletes, as well as text updates and photos.

TELEVISION: The broadcast of the 2009 Foster Grant Ironman World Championship 70.3, presented by Ford will air in the spring of 2010, time and date will be announced in the coming weeks. Check your local listings and stay tuned to www.ironman.com for further details.

After dramatic weight loss, Soileau tackles Ironman

By **ELLYN COUVILLION**

Advocate staff writer

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Chad Soileau, 37, who shed 262 pounds in 2006 and took up biking, running and swimming, has realized another of his dreams.

On Nov. 14, he competed in the Foster Grant Ironman World Championship 70.3, in Clearwater, Fla., his first worldwide triathlon event.

"It was absolutely one of the greatest days of my life," Soileau said.

Soileau was invited to participate in the 70.3-mile swimming, biking and running event by the World Triathlon Corp., which owns the Ironman brand, as one of three "inspirational runners" because of the way he's turned his life around through weight loss and exercise.

On the day before the race, he was interviewed by NBC Sports — the segment will be aired in the spring of 2010 — along with other media.

"It was really, really neat. It was fun," Soileau said of the experience.

His story was also presented at the welcoming dinner before the race, which drew more than 1,500 athletes from around the world.

While the event in Florida was what's called a "half Ironman," Soileau is planning to attain the status of Ironman in another event next year, he said.

In Clearwater, right on the Gulf, Soileau completed a 1.2-mile swim, a 56-mile bike ride and a 13.1-mile run over 37 hours and 11 minutes.



The swimming portion, originally slated to take place in the Gulf, was moved to the bay instead, because of a tropical storm that had passed through days earlier, Soileau said.

But, he said, on the day of the race, “It was beautiful. The weather was perfect.”

Begun as a challenge between a group of Navy Seals, the Ironman has become “one of the most recognized endurance events in the world,” according to its Web site, <http://ironman.com>.

The race consists of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride and a 26.2-mile run. The ultimate Ironman event is the Ford Ironman World Championship held every October in Kona, Hawaii.

Participants are the top competitors from other Ironman events held throughout the year.

The half Ironman, the 70.3 series, which Soileau competed in recently, was begun three years ago and “has become the fastest growing triathlon series in the world,” according to the Ironman site.

Its world championship is the one Soileau was selected for, held in Clearwater, Fla., every November.

Three years ago, Soileau lost 100 pounds through gastric bypass surgery and another 162 pounds through exercise and training.

He’s gone on to compete in 35 triathlons.

He’s not looking to win in these events.

“I’m never going to win a triathlon. I’m never going to win a race ... It’s me beating a course,” Soileau said in a previous interview with The Advocate.

In January, Soileau, talked in an Advocate article about how he hoped to run as an inspirational athlete this fall for the Ford Ironman World Championship in Hawaii.

While he wasn’t selected this year, he was excited to be invited to run in the Foster Grant Ironman World Championship 70.3, he said.

The championship, like the one in Hawaii, is a qualifying-only event.

As he says in his race report on his Web site, <http://www.team464.com>, “I’m in one of the most competitive age groups in the sport of triathlon. Securing a slot to this race in the 35-39 would be next to impossible for me.”

Being chosen to participate as an inspirational athlete in the half Ironman event made it happen for Soileau.

In the November event in Clearwater, he was swimming, biking and running alongside some of the “top athletes in the world, as far as triathlons,” Soileau said in a recent phone interview.

Two of those athletes also came from Baton Rouge — Sean Schnur and Brian Lejeune.

According to Ironman information, Schnur, 30, placed fourth

in his age group, 30 to 34, and Lejeune, 26, finished 73rd in his age group.

“It was a great experience. It was well organized — a great venue and lots of strong competition,” Schnur said.

Soileau is setting his sights on next year’s races. He’s registered for the Ford Ironman Coeur d’Alene, which will be held in the town by that name in Idaho in June 2010.

He’s also registered again for the chance to secure a slot as an inspirational athlete for the Ford Ironman World Championship to be held in Hawaii in October 2010.

“I’m going to be an Ironman next year,” he said.

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