

Triathlon saved my life

From Addict to Triathlete

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“Got another gram?” I turned to my friend and asked if he had any more crystal meth.

“All finished! Let’s leave the club and see who else has got stash for us?”

Together we stumbled out of the nightclub. The sun was already up. Pale faced with dark jeans and t shirts on, we were modern day vampires who chased the night. Instead this time, the day had caught up with us. No more drugs or money left, and we sat on the curb waiting for our deep frowns to assist our eyes to adjust to the searing white sunlight.

6am and we were a little slow on reflexes as the drugs were still rampant in our veins. Suddenly, barely two feet in front of our noses a peloton of cyclists whooshed past us, startling us.

“Damn cyclists! Who the hell does that to themselves on a Sunday morning” we sniggered. We were too bad ass to be concerned with such healthy things.

Who would have thought that a few years later I would be one of them? I would be one of those bad ass machines living, training, eating, and sleeping Triathlon; the guy who would turn his life around on the way to one of the toughest human endurance races in the world?

Game Over

The depths of drug addiction rob you of many things. Your health, your friends, your money and for some even your life. I had lost most of that and my health was deteriorating. I was mentally, physically, spiritually bankrupt and I needed a miracle. That came in the form of a desperation I felt

that horrified me. I was one of the lucky few who realized that the drugs had taken over – they had won and the only end for me in sight was more despair.

My miracle moment came in the form of a gift, I call “my gift of desperation”. That feeling where I was so desperate to save my life, that I would do anything and everything in my power to get better.

I had found a 1000 to kill myself and now I wanted to find a 1000 ways to save my life.

I committed myself to a 12-step program. The kind I had seen on TV where people sit in a circle and say the words I never thought I would come from my mouth

“My name is Costa and I’m an addict/alcoholic”.

What I learnt quickly was that I was not responsible for my addiction, but I was responsible for my recovery. And as such the pendulum swung in the opposite direction. A lot of internal work took place and within a few months I got back on my feet again. The problem when you are back on your feet again is you have all this new-found energy, time on your hands and new zest for life. I had to do something!

One block

So, I ran around the block once. So proud of myself afterwards, I had a massive breakfast and even ran myself a recovery bath. This was the most exercise I had done in years. In fact, all my life, I hardly did any exercise. At school I ran a little when I was 12 and was rather good at it, but soon the smoking and drinking would get in the way of that. I had no hand eye coordination, couldn’t swim properly, so most sports were out of the question.

This one block was a huge event for me. One that would start something that would change my life forever. It led me to the sport of triathlon and Ironman. Along the way I learnt many things about life, and how to achieve anything I wanted to. Growing into the sport of Triathlon I found three hacks that helped me get to goals I never dreamed possible. Along the way I did 11 half iron distances, three full Ironman, a New York Marathon, and countless sprint and Olympic distances tri’s

Hacks to move from Johnny Walker to Ironman Finisher

1. Aim Low

All my life I was told to aim high and shoot for the stars. That thinking got me to seek out short cuts to get there. None of those helped. This time round I decided to turn it on its head and aim low. I started by running once around the block once a week. Soon, I realized I could run twice around the block. Here is where the magic lay; I was always outperforming my goal and constantly happy with myself and my performance. That translated into incremental progress and consistently improved my fitness levels. And soon, aiming low got me to a 5km race. Five whole kilometres led to 10 and more.....

1- Appoint your board of directors

Within a year I was running 21km races and decided to try my first sprint distance triathlon. I couldn’t swim freestyle without my head out of the water, had never ridden a road bike and with a finishing time around 2hrs30, that first race, I came almost last. It was time to call in the troops. I signed up for my first high altitude training camp with a new coach,

Gerhard De Bruin. At my first camp I was taught how to ride my new bike. It would however still be a whole year before I was brave enough to go into my tri bars, but Gerhard's patience was as strong as my determination. Soon I went to more camps and I hung out with other PRO's, got coached by Lindsay Parry and shared running drills with double Olympians Kate Roberts and Marc Mundell. Here I was still swimming and breathing to one side, barely finishing a long ride while rubbing shoulders with the top athletes and minds in our sport.

That's when I got the idea to appoint my board of directors who would get me to Ironman and beyond. I included my coach, a chiropractor, dietician, few elite athlete friends, biokinetics guy, and therapist. I let my "board" know of this concept and that they had been chosen. I committed to checking in with them weekly or monthly as appropriate. This board knew my goals. Some of them even communicated with each other to share their tips on how I may improve. They kept me accountable, and I had the best team behind me! With my board in place I took an hour 40 minutes off my first Ironman; completing race number 2 in just over 12 and a half hours.

Try hanging out with Olympians, they offer the best inspiration. Stay away from older athletes, they only complain about their injuries and brag about their better gear. Stick to your winning team of directors instead.

2- Do the work

Someone asked me once how you got to complete an Ironman race and I gave them the most painfully simple answer. "You arrive there ready". Triathlon taught me that there is no substitute for immaculate preparation. Our sport is one of many disciplines, too much gear to even contemplate and so many moving parts and things to go wrong. Injuries, gear failure, diet and life in general are all challenges we navigate. The only way to do that is to "do the work". So, I got stuck in and dedicated myself to improving my form, my training and my times. Well prepared I got through it all and knocked my dreams far out of the park. It may not be easy, but it certainly is simple; just do the work!

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In the beginning of my training days I would often swim with tears collecting in my goggles. I knew the only way through the depression and pain of my drug days would be a sense of purpose. Triathlon offered me that as well as focus, a healthy community and challenges. It got me strong both physically, mentally and emotionally.

I love my life more than ever and while I still don't like cycling in the mornings, I would far rather be the guy cycling on the road than drugged up on the sidewalk.

