

## CASEY IS OUR IRONMAN – a story of courage and determination

Many of you have followed the story of our neighbor, Casey Kammel, who, because of a diving accident, was told he would never walk again. Casey overcame great odds to be able to walk again and resume his career as a fitness instructor. This story is told by his wife, Lisa, as he fights to complete the Ironman Coeur d'Alene in Idaho. Again, despite great odds and on his own, he completes the challenge. Here is his story:

June 21, 2009 - It was a freezing Sunday morning as the Ironman Coeur d'Alene, Idaho was set to begin. Casey was anxious, excited and ready to tackle this challenge.

The wind was blowing hard but luckily it was not raining.

He entered the very rough, white-capped water at 7 a.m. with 2600 other competitors. He was the only physically challenged athlete in the race. His orange swim cap was impossible to discern from the sea of red caps worn by the able-bodied men. (Women wore white, so that was easier!)

We spotted him after almost an hour as he rounded near the shore. His swim paddle on his right made him easy to spot at this point. He made amazing time at 1:01, but instead of going back out for the last lap, he turned and walked up the shore to the transition area. They announced his name and the crowd went wild! He says he could hear them all cheering for him. Needless to say, he could hear all your voices back home as well.

When he reached the transition, they pulled him aside and said he was disqualified for not finishing the swim.



Casey truly thought he would drown if he re-entered the water. He was getting tossed around and the water was getting rougher. He feared for his life. He wasn't physically exhausted, he just knew that the swim is his weakest event due to his limitations and didn't want to risk his life. In fact, he was struggling during the first lap. So he waved his arms, but none of the life guards saw him. He was alone, struggling in the waves. So he caught his breath and kept going. With the thought of doing the 2<sup>nd</sup> lap, he couldn't risk the lifeguards not seeing him again. "I'm not going to subject myself to that possibility," he said later.

In the transition area, I could see him talking to race officials. He begged them to let him go on the bike, but they refused. Rules. Liabilities. They were going to let him sign a waiver to release Ironman of any liabilities, but then rescinded that offer. He was devastated. He collapsed on the ground.

They escorted him out of the race tent. I walked with him for a few minutes. Then he said, "I need my bike supplies, I'm going for my 112 mile ride." And he did! He got on his bike and did his own ride tracking his miles on his computer. He called me half-way through to let me know he was okay.



At around 4 p.m., the girls screamed "Daddy's home, Daddy's home" as he rode up to the back porch. We all ran to greet and congratulate him.

Casey and I sat on the porch step alone for a few minutes. He said, "Where are my running shoes? I need to run now." He needed to do the marathon. Disqualified or not, he was going to finish what he started here in Idaho.

He put on his running gear and I loaded the car with water and snacks. At about 4:20 we headed out into the neighborhood to start his own personal marathon! He was strong and ran 5 miles in the first hour! I cruised slowly behind him in the car. Pulling alongside him to give him water, pretzels, gels and circus animal cookies! They don't have circus animal cookies at the water stations on the course. I told him he must be special!



We even drove by the yellow house we rented on 9<sup>th</sup> Street. Olive and Coop ran outside to wave their signs and cheer their daddy on! It was amazing. Every person that passed gave Casey a wave and watched him for a few extra seconds before continuing on their way.

He was strong and focused, but he was starting to slow down. He hit the "wall" at mile 18. His back was in spasm and his hip was out. His right foot was dragging more pronounced. But he kept running.

I would remind him of how proud we all were of him. That everyone that was texting and calling me kept saying that he was already an Ironman for coming this far. For all the insane training he did to get to this point.

Casey needed to prove it to himself. Casey did not want to disappoint anyone. This support kept driving him. He does not know how to quit.

The local tv station wanted to come, but they were tied up at the race. So I kept my camera on him as long as I could – careful not to run him over. Got close a few times.

It rained off and on during his marathon. The tree-lined streets offered a respite from some of the downpour as he hugged the curbs to stay a little dryer.

He kept asking “Where are we?” as I tracked his distance on the car. “16.2,” I shouted. He replied, “3 hours to go” and kept running. We slowed significantly during those last 10.



Finally...we hit 25.2...one mile to go! He started walking. He said, “You know I can barely stand up right now, right?” I said, “I know babe. Do you want a ride?” He said, “No, I have to finish.” I knew that was what he would say.

We circled the block, passing “home” several times. It was all he could focus on. He lost his sense of direction, so I kept close and reminded him to look for the big yellow house.

“Only .2 to go!!!!” No reply. He just kept walking. Hard, staggered steps. His whole body leaning and rocking. Stumbling at times, but catching himself before he fell.

“26.2 YOU DID IT, YOU DID IT! 10:35 p.m.” He leaned on the car door and said, “Let’s go in before I fall down.”



HE DID IT! Casey IS an IRONMAN!

I fixed him a drink (not that kind!). He guzzled it down then headed to a warm shower. After his shower, I asked if he felt like a new man. He said, "I am warm and clean but I still feel like dog sh\*\*."

He is up and moving this morning and feels great! We just finished an interview with Channel 4 as a follow-up story for the news tonight! We will keep you posted.

He said the generously gifted race wheels made a huge difference. He could actually feel the difference with each pedal stroke. Thanks to all the Naples Biggest Losers!

Thanks to everyone for all their support of Casey and his Ironman adventure! WE couldn't have done it without each and every one of you!

Love,  
Casey, Lisa, Olive & Coop

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