

# Ultra Triathlon: When finishing an Ironman is not challenging enough

By Priscilla    25 April, 2017    No Comments

For those to whom an Ironman (3.8km of swimming, 180km of biking and 42.2km of running) is no longer enough, they turn to the niche sport of Ultra triathlon – which refers to anything longer than the standard Ironman distance.



*Iztok Fister Jr. revels in the challenges of ultra triathlons.*

## Need to be mentally strong

[Iztok Fister Jr.](#), 27, from Slovenia, is an Ultra Triathlete and revels in challenging his body with these super long distance triathlons. Said Iztok, “The most common variants of ultra triathlons are double, triple, quintuple and deca ironman. For example double ironman consists of 7.6km swimming, 360km biking and 84.4km running

Added the Ph.D student in computer science, “I would say that the composition of three endurance sports makes ultra triathlon interesting. It is tough to train those as a single sport, but training them together demands additional preparation especially mentally. You have to think about lots of things to accomplish such an experience.”

## Motivations for taking part in such an event

What drives people to take part in such a challenging event?



*Iztok encourages athletes to look beyond their limits or borders of what they are capable of.*

Said Iztok "Every ultra triathlete has a different personal story that guided them to begin doing it. Firstly people should not look at their limits or borders, but should be aware of their capabilities on the other side. The ultra triathlon story usually begins with finishing a standard Ironman – which surely destroys every single muscle in the body. But successful Ironman performances can cause the people to dream about something bigger; something that rarely people should be capable of."

## Road cycling background

Iztok's background was in road cycling but he after a while, he felt the need to push himself further and try out something more challenging. That led him down the path ultra triathlon.

Said Iztok "I always want to do the hardest things in life. I was a road cyclist since a young age, and that gave me some extra motivation when switching to triathlon. I was acquainted with bicycle and running techniques so the only problem was swimming."



*Iztok wants to constantly push himself to do some of the hardest things in life.*

He added "I can still remember the numerous swim trainings, which successfully transformed me into a triathlete. As a sportsman, I was never competitive in sprint and shorter distances, so endurance sport was the springboard to fulfil me to work better in life. It also helps me to develop new ideas in my work."

## Iztok's own journey into ultra triathlons

Iztok's first Double Ironman experience was in 2011, when he had been aged 22. Said Iztok "I started the race, not expecting any problems. I thought to myself *proper pacing and eating will be very important* But my young mind was mistaken; after the swim and the first 100km of biking, I was in the top three overall which made me nervous. So every lap I was looking at the results table and comparing myself to the overall leader

He added "My primary goal was still to safely complete the race, but I was totally exhausted after seven hours of riding a bike and didn't have enough energy left for the run. I realised that I had to slow down. The run became harder and harder and 84.4km seemed to be unreachable. The ~~sun~~ hot weather did not help at all and I was getting dehydrated. The cramps were painful and I had to stop after the first marathon. Luckily it was a valuable decision. I needed to rest for two weeks to feel my legs again after that."



*Iztok's first Double Ironman experience was in 2011.*

His failure to finish his first ultra triathlon only spurred Iztok to succeed at the massive distance. He said, "The wish to complete an ultra triathlon was still present.. Last year's training had served as a basis for me to upgrade my training plan. And as I grew a year older became more rational. But it was not enough; I stopped at the first marathon again, having encountered medical problems – my body temperature was exceeding 40 degrees C and I had to spend several days after that to bring my body temperature back down. That made me realise I could not compete in hot conditions even though I had completed the AVA Ironman 70.3 in Singapore three times."

## What led to his successful attempt

The following year after that, Iztok was not initially planning to take part in any ultra triathlons, but he changed his mind when his brother applied to take part in a double Ironman that year in 2014.

Said Iztok, "The winter preparations went well and the summer training was doubled. I felt strong two months before the event but I encountered a complicated neurodermitis issue (a form of chronic eczema) and I was forced to stop training overnight. I reconciled that I would not start a double ironman in this life again."



*Iztok at the Aviva Ironman 70.3 in Singapore.*

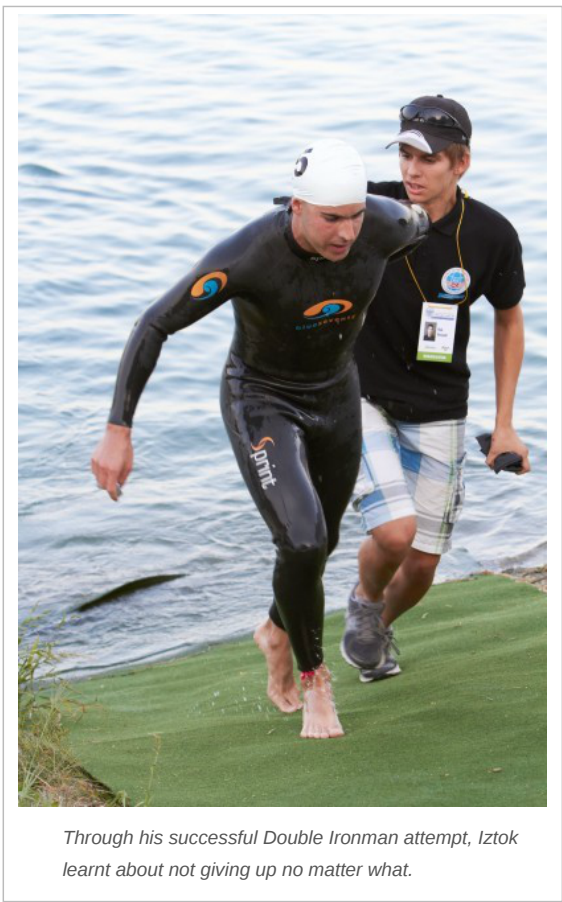
He added "I also went to Taiwan in July to visit my wife, who worked there for a month at a hospital. Besides attending talks and meetings for work, we also climbed Yushan Mountain. When I returned to Slovenia, I did not train anymore."



But Iztok changed his mind again about taking part in an ultra triathlon, about two weeks before the race. He said “The decision of starting a race for the third time was born. Immediately I realised I am almost without training, but I was mentally stronger than ever before. Everything went smoothly. I trained for two weeks and simply finished it. My brother also finished this race and we were probably the youngest brothers who had completed it.”

He added “After that race, I learnt a lot of things but the most important was to not give up. The bike went smoothly but after the first marathon when I had problems with my feet, I had to take off my sports shoes. I thought I had lost the battle again, but decided to change my sports shoes with sandals, and after some time was then able to switch back to the sports shoes again.”

To Iztok, the last 30km of running was the most gruelling part of the event. He said “This was the hardest and most demanding part. But to finish was something you cannot imagine. It was wonderful. When you finish it, you feel something you have never done before. You work just for those five minutes, for the past 30 hours straight. But you are too tired to think about it the moment you finish and you do not recall every aspect of completing the race; it usually sinks in later



## What he thinks about when racing these distances

What does Iztok think about, when racing such long distances? What goes on in his mind? He said “I am thinking usually about the purpose of life; solving some philosophical questions. Of course I can say I created my own research ideas through thinking when racing such distances.”

But like any other human being, during his successful attempt, Iztok also admitted that he had doubted himself multiple times. He said, “After 10 hours of racing, I felt weak and tired. In those moments, the best prevention is to stop thinking about anything, the legs start moving automatically. My head rests and finish line is approaching when you focus your thoughts solely on these then it helps.”

## Mental preparation is important



*Iztok stresses that mental preparation is important for endurance athletes.*

Now that he has completed an ultra triathlon, Izток stresses that mental preparation is much more important than physical. He said "Every athlete has to find a way to prepare himself for this race, but I strongly think a special emphasis should be placed on mental preparation."

He also added that compared to an Ultra triathlon, an Ironman pales in comparison. Said Izток "I always remember what my friend, Beauchamp, told me. He said that once you start an ironman, you know that you will sleep in your bed the same day. But when you begin an ultra triathlon, you can be sure that you will not."

But Izток stresses that a successful Ironman finish is required in order to tackle an ultra triathlon though. Said Izток, "It is necessary to have an Ironman finish. Preparing for an ultra triathlon takes at least three years, to prevent injuries, due to the fact the body needs to slowly adapt to the training."



*For a successful Double Ironman finish, some athletes may need more training and preparation than others.*

He added "But then again, some athletes need more training than others depending on their background. Some can be active for many years with lots of triathlon experience. Those require only little training. By the same token, there are also mental preparations and having to study what food your body can process easily is important to predict possible problems and know what to do, in case they can occur."

## Tips for potential wannabes

What tips does Izток have for potential ultra triathlon wannabes out there?



*Iztok tells triathletes to not be afraid to enter this niche sport.*

He said “Do not be afraid to enter this sport. If you are looking for a real challenge in your life, try ultra triathlon. You will need to work hard, but you will be rewarded when you finish it. Some ex-athletes also told me that if you finish an ultra triathlon, you will find any hard thing in your life to be very easy.”

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