

## The Magic of Ironman

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Every October, the quiet, tropical Hawaiian town of Kailua-Kona is transformed into an international proving ground for the world's greatest endurance event, the Ironman World Championship.

Fifteen hundred men and women on both the professional and amateur levels come here every year to test their physical and emotional strength of the grueling Kona course. You can sense the anxiety, nervousness and determination that the contestants are facing mere days before one of the biggest races of their careers.

Each has their own reasons for being here, and different race goals, but they all share the common desire to complete the course: a 2.4 mile ocean swim, followed by a 112-mile bike ride, and topped off with a marathon (26.2 miles).

Pre-race week excitement is palpable. The local residents extend courtesies to everyone involved with Ironman. As a chiropractic "IronDoc," our day begins at the Kailua Bay pier at 5:00 a.m. Each competitor can visit the American Chiropractic Association's treatment area, set up near the pier where the athletes finish their morning practice on the swim course. We evaluate and treat the athletes each morning during the week before the race.

On race day, our team is also stationed at the bike/run transition area to assist any competitors needing helpful treatment before embarking on their marathon run. At the finish line, we prepare to triage all of those who finish the race. We assess each athlete to assure their health and safety, and we help them recover properly by hydrating, inducing solid foods, and attaining medical attention if necessary, or we provide a cool-down walk over to the massage/chiropractic area for treatment.

Research data is being collected by the ACA Sports Council on body misalignments and injuries of endurance athletes, which will someday provide a standard for treatment and diagnosis of many injuries incurred by triathletes. Our treatments are one-on-one and ultimately provide relief to their biomechanical systems. We also fortify their strength emotionally by assuring them that they are ready, and that their bodies can perform to their potential on race day.

Race time arrives as the sun rises over Hualalai peak. The beginning of the much anticipated event is dramatically signaled by the boom of the cannon at 7:00 a.m, and the race is on! Thousands of local volunteers, who have given many hours of kindness and service to the Ironman event, join with spectators in cheering the participants as they enter the ocean at Kailua Bay for the first leg of their journey.

No sooner do the swimmers finish the two mile ocean swim that they immediately leap onto their bikes for the longest part of the Ironman contest: 112 miles of road winding through madam Pele's lava fields. The riders immediately gauge the wind's direction to figure out if they will have the wind at their back or in their faces on the return trip from Kawaihae.

The bikers still face the 26-mile run. The run sends the runners back into town amidst cheering

spectators and helpful volunteers, all encouraging them on. As they make their way through the lava-paved roads past the natural energy lab, then finally back into town and the finish line on Alii drive, the athletes are engulfed in a sea of celebration. Spectators and volunteers cheer these athletes who have realized the dream of completing this grueling challenge of endurance.

The Ironman event affects everyone there. This special day in Kona shows us how deep the personal challenge of this race can be. The hearts and souls of these competitors shine forth as they overcome the highs and lows of this demanding race. The true magic found in Ironman is the camaraderie and friendships that are forged. The joy and pain that this Ironman creates is felt by all involved. This extraordinary endurance sport and the individual performances truly inspires everyone exposed to the event.

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