

From the AMHA to Ironman, Aurora native achieves ultimate goal



By Brock Weir

Jesse Micak has covered a lot of ground since he first laced up and hit the ice, participating in local hockey, followed by baseball, and eventually soccer as part of the Cardinal Carter Team.

Last month, as he crossed the finish line, the Aurora native earned the right to call himself 'Ironman' after successfully completing the Ironman North American Championship in Mont-Tremblant, Quebec.

The Ironman is not mere child's play - it is a full triathlon consisting of a 3.8 km swim, a 180 km bike ride, and a full marathon of 42.2 km. Crossing the finish line 12 hours and six minutes after starting with over 2,500 competitors from across the globe, Mr. Micak set his goal just over a year ago, with very little triathlon experience under his belt.

He hired a coach, worked out over the past year, got his feet wet in some Regional races across Southern Ontario, and focused on his singular goal for Mont-Tremblant.

'The ultimate goal was to finish and do the best I could,' he says. 'For me, it is very much learning a new sport at the age of 29. Most of the sports I do play today are those I played at a very young age for youth sports, so it was somewhat new learning another sport at this stage, primarily swimming. Swimming was a discipline that required the most work over the past year.'

'It was really unknown to me how I would do in the swimming portion. I figured I would be out in the water for two hours, maybe for two-and-a-half, and that was the real x-factor in trying to determine what my overall time would be. I finished the swim in an hour-twenty, but I made up a lot of time on the bike and run.'

Building up to this significant achievement this summer was a 'natural progression', he says. He was active in sports from a very early age including Aurora Minor Hockey, various baseball teams, playing soccer for Cardinal Carter Catholic High School, and rising through the ranks during his academic career. Eventually, however, he hit the 'corporate world' and there he says he found a 'void in sports.'

'As a teenager, I was used to competing in sports and getting that back and that focus, working towards improving something really drove me,' he says. 'That's why I selected Ironman. I thought of it as a true challenge for me personally. It was something that was foreign and would require quite a bit of work, and that is what drove the ambition.'

Another factor in driving this ambition happened two years ago when he took part in the Ride to Conquer Cancer, the 100 km ride from Toronto to Niagara Falls, along with his father and siblings. Cancer is something that has touched his family, like so many

other families that take part, and their success in that fundraiser gave him another shot of confidence that if he trained properly he would be able to put all the pieces together and ultimately achieve that Ironman goal.

While his parents and siblings were supportive of the ultimate goal, he found the most invaluable support from his wife. While he says he was not 'built like an endurance athlete' at the time, they decided that while it would take a lot of hard work and dedication, particularly on evenings and weekends, and it was something they could work towards together.

'I missed a lot of 30th birthday parties, I missed a lot of pre-wedding parties, a lot of weekends up at the cottage with families, but I had her support all along the way and that was very meaningful,' he says.

As he crossed the finish line at around 775 out of 2,500, his wife was there, along with his parents, cheering him on from the sidelines. As it began to sink in with each individual step that he was that much closer to his ultimate goal, he says he was just trying to take it all in.

'It was such a positive atmosphere, and the support, noise and energy just taking place within the walls at Mont-Tremblant was just overwhelming me,' he says. 'I was eager and excited to see [my family] and to share that moment with them. [The greatest memory] will be the enjoyment and relief of committing to a goal and completing it. That is one of the great things about triathlon. It is a sport growing across the country and you see such a wide range of age groups participating. It's a competition against yourself to do the best you can for yourself. I set a goal, I completed it, irrespective of time. That didn't matter for me. It was about doing the best I could and keeping myself healthy along the way.'