

Natural Healing Express Weekly

Column 207 Athletic Mastery – Cari Smulyan, Part 1

What great fortune I have to be able to interview Miss Cari Smulyan, who just completed the Iron Man Competition in Madison Wisconsin. For those of you who are not familiar with an Iron Man here are some quick facts.

An **Ironman Triathlon** is one of a series of long-distance [triathlon](#) races organized by the [World Triathlon Corporation](#) (WTC) consisting of a 2.4-mile (3.86 km) [swim](#), a 112-mile (180.25 km) [bicycle ride](#) and a [marathon](#) 26.2-mile (42.2 km) [run](#), raced in that order and without a break. It is widely considered one of the most difficult one-day sporting events in the world.

Most Ironman events have a strict time limit of 17 hours to complete the race. The race typically starts at 7:00 a.m.; the mandatory swim cut off for the 2.4-mile (3.9 km) swim is 9:20 a.m. (2 hours 20 minutes), the mandatory bike cut off time is 5:30 p.m. (8 hours 10 minutes), and the mandatory marathon cut off is midnight (6 hours 30 minutes). Any participant who manages to complete the triathlon within these timings becomes an Ironman.

The name "Ironman Triathlon" is also associated with the original Ironman triathlon which is now the [Ironman World Championship](#). Held in [Kailua-Kona](#), the world championship has been held annually in Hawaii since [1978](#) (with an additional race in 1982) and is preceded by a series of qualifying Ironman events. The Ironman World Championships have become known for their grueling length, harsh race conditions, and [Emmy Award](#)-winning [television coverage](#).

Watching my friend complete this event was something I will never forget. Everyone in our support group to was in awe of her achievement. I met Cari in Los Angeles where we were both chasing some pretty big dreams. Although it feels like a lifetime ago, our "sisterhood" has withstood the test of time and when she informed us she was coming to Madison to compete, well, we just could not stay away.

Cari is a high achiever and has done several cool things like co-produced a show on Broadway called Xanadu. Yep, that one. Cari is also a beautiful lady, inside and out; her enthusiasm, spirit and zest for life is unmatched. I hope you all enjoy this two part series on Athletic Mastery featuring our incredible Cari!

Susan -Hi Cari... We are so proud of you! – Please tell us a little bit about your recent experience at the Wisconsin IronMan Competition...

***Cari- It was wonderful. I loved Madison, I had never been before this race and it was so beautiful and the people couldn't have been nicer. I really enjoyed this racecourse - It was challenging but fun! The crowd support was insane - on some of the more challenging hills there was so much crowd support they created an almost tunnel effect which I have only ever seen on TV when watching the Tour De France. It was pretty epic. While I wasn't thrilled with my times in this race – one thing I can say is that I had a blast and my cheeks hurt at the end of the day from smiling all day.***

Susan -What was it like for you to compete at this level of athletic mastery?

***Cari-LOL. I wish I could say I was competing but unfortunately the only person I am competing against is myself. The level of true athletic mastery that pros and semi pros have is something that is otherworldly. I just feel honored and privileged that I get to be a part of it. I compare it being a driver in the Indy 500 who is happy to be there but is always a lap behind.***

Susan-Do you enjoy one aspect of the IronMan (swimming, biking, running) more than the others? If so, why?

***Cari -It's funny I get asked this all the time. I really have come to love each one for different reasons. That being said on race day my least favorite is the swim because it is always so hectic. You are trying to swim and fight off other swimmers at the same time, you have people hitting you in the face and grabbing onto your legs and you can't be upset because everyone is doing it and it isn't done intentionally. However when it comes to training I really enjoy being in the water because there is a certain freedom that comes from swimming, it is one of the most natural things to our bodies – we spent the first nine months of our lives swimming. I also think water is extremely healing and there are so many books to that effect so I can't help but feel that when I swim.***

***Biking I have become passionate about in the last couple of years. When I started racing two years ago I bought my first bike two months before my first race. My coach told me it would take two years to really find my bike legs and being the impatient person I am of course didn't believe her. Two years later, thousands of miles under my belt and a lot of races I can say she was 100% right. I feel like I found my bike legs and now I want to know how to tweak them to get even stronger. I love being on my bike and I love the community I have become a part of through cycling. Always look forward to jumping on the saddle for a long ride. On race day there is a little bit of tension through the bike because 112 miles is a long distance and you just pray that the bike gods are with you and nothing goes wrong. One of the best feelings I have experienced is the sense of exhilaration and relief when you jump off the bike and you know all that is left is the run and the only thing that stands between you and the finish line is you. There are no flat tires or mechanical things to worry about.***

***Running was my first love and becoming a runner (while not a fast one) is one of my greatest personal achievements. I didn't start running till I was 23. I had a horrible experience my first day of P.E. in first grade and it soured me on running. I would do any form of workout as long as it wasn't running. Then one morning I woke and I had so much anxiety something inside me said I have to run. I ran for 20mins and you would have thought I won the Boston Marathon. After that I was hooked. There is nothing like being able to put on my running shoes and just go. That doesn't mean it isn't without a lot of challenges but it is my first love and it was the hardest to obtain so it will always be number one in my heart.***

Susan -Have you participated in any other IronMan Competitions? If so, where did you compete? How was this one different?

***Cari-My first full was August 2014 in Louisville, KY. Louisville is one of the oldest IM courses and while it is considered a challenging bike course it is extremely friendly for a first timer. I had a great time at Louisville but it was 98 with a heat index of 105 and that takes a lot of you. It wasn't pretty – but I***

*learned so much about myself, I had a great swim and bike but had some GI issues because of heat that affected my run. My number one goal for Wisconsin was to redeem my marathon from Louisville and I was able to do that and I am really proud of that.*

*The crowd support is great in Louisville is amazing I didn't think it could get better but as I mentioned Madison had then beat by a hair. Louisville's shoot (which is what they call the last .2 miles to the finish line) is one of the most famous and crossing that finish line was one of the most memorable moments of my life. Finishing Madison was great too but not as insane as Louisville.*

Susan -What is the biggest challenge regarding this IronMan?

*Cari -Time and nutrition. Training for a full IM requires a lot of sacrifice and time. I love training otherwise I wouldn't do it but I would be lying if I didn't say it gets hard especially in the last couple months when you have to miss out on social events because you have to get in a 5 hour ride . I am constantly trying to find a better balance and being OCD and wanting to be my best make it hard to say "Ok I will do this race but I am only going to train 80% as hard as I did last time." I am in awe of my friends who have kids and work and still find time for their training.*

*Nutrition is one of the most important components of being a successful athlete of any kind. Until I started doing triathlons I wasn't fueling my body properly before, during and after my workouts. I have always been a healthy eater but I was horrible about fueling myself during long workouts and post workouts. For my first two half ironman's I guessed at my nutrition. I had also done dozens of marathons and half marathons without the knowledge of how to fuel myself during the race. I look back and I cringe. It was only while training for my first full IM that I realized I needed help. Two months before Louisville I was on my second 90 mile ride and I bonked out as they call it. I went to nutritionist and my mind was blown.*

Susan -Can you share some of the foods that seemed to really help with your training?

*Cari -As I mentioned above, nutrition is one of the most important aspects of training and to being successful – I truly can't express it enough. Also it isn't just putting in any kind of food but putting in the right kind of food and discovering what works for you and your body. Everybody is different and what works for one person with not work for another. I try to find the most whole, natural and organic foods when possible, it can be a challenge since so many of the endurance foods have lots of fillers but it is worth it. Here is a list of my favorite pre, mid and post workout foods.*

*Pre: AdvoCare Muscle Gain Protein Powder and Some form of cold pressed fresh juice*

*Beet Elite*

*Almond butter and jelly sandwich on gluten free or paloe bread (Justin's Almond butter is my current favorite)*

*Purpak: <http://livepurpak.com> - My friend created this and I love it. It is a great way to get in your multi vitamin.*

**Mid: Almond butter and jelly sandwich**

**Bonk Bars- my favorites are fig, apple pie and almond butter but they are all pretty good and they are Gluten Free!**

**Huma Chai gels- humagel.com – Huma gels are the only gels I can get down and they are all natural! They taste like a spoonful of jam.**

**Skratch – my favorite sports drink and again natural**

**Purpak – during long workouts I use this pre, mid and post workout.**

**The Right Stuff- This is only for long endurance training to help get the extra sodium you need but I prefer this over any form of salt pills.**

**Post: Watermelon water – great way to rehydrate yourself**

**Coconut Water- Whole coconut water, not processed, another great way to rehydrate yourself.**

**AdvoCare Muscle Gain + Cold pressed Juice + L- Glutamine (so important for muscle recovery)**

Susan -How did you become interested in this competition?

**Cari -I love pushing myself physically and finding new challenges. I had been thinking about Ironman's for a long time, pretty much since I started doing marathons. I had a couple friends do them and I it pushed me further into wanting to do it. Then I started doing a series of races to raise money for my best friends little girl who was diagnosed with cancer at the age of two. I decided to do a race for each round of chemo she had to go through. During this time I said it was time to face my fear and do my first half Ironman because if Maeve could endure chemo at 2 years old, I could handle a few hours of pain. I knew if it went well I would do a full. My first full IM was very special to me because it was also the last race in my Super Maeve fundraising series.**

We will continue our interview next week.

Enjoy! Hope to see you soon and as always, please contact us via one of the following methods. Natural Healing Express: Phone 815 990 8732, email: skscham@aol.com 204 W Main St, Lena, IL 61048.

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