

IRONBRIAN THE SUPPORTER

BRIAN KERBY WENT FROM BEING THE MD OF ADIDAS SA TO SUPPORTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AND HE DID IT WITH IRONMAN. HERE IS HIS STORY.

IRONMAN SOUTH Africa 2011 was never part of the plan. But, as in life, changes happen. After completing Ironman in 2010, my sole focus as Managing Director of Adidas SA was ensuring that the FIFA World Cup 2010 would be a massive success. With plenty of support from a fantastic team, Adidas SA comfortably achieved all of their set targets and more – a truly wonderful achievement for a small subsidiary of a global company. I was flying, and now it was time to spread my wings and look for possible global opportunities within the adidas Group – really challenge myself in the global world. These were exciting times. However, things didn't pan out quite as expected and I found myself out in the cold with no global role forthcoming. To complicate things, I ended up in hospital ICU with a bad case of prostatitis, possibly brought on by all the end of year stresses. As I said, Ironman was not part of my plans for 2011, as I normally only do it every second year. Training for an Ironman and holding down a top management position is tough going, so competing every second year gave the body time to recover and allowed more

quality time with the family. But things were now different. Once I was out of hospital, I contacted Stefan Howells (MD of SCORE) and let him know that I was available for any fundraising initiative they could come up with, as I was going to enter Ironman in 2011. Unfortunately, the prostatitis put pay to my Ironman 70.3 plans, but I now had a new goal. After successfully raising R324,000 to build a multi-purpose sports court for the winners of the SCORE Cup of Heroes competition in 2010, it was decided to embark on a slightly less ambitious project and raise R80,000 to send the 2011 Cup of Heroes winners on a life skills and leadership course. For more on this initiative, log on to www.ironbrian.org. The end of the year came quickly and I completed all my handovers, said my sad goodbyes, and walked out the door after 15 wonderful years with a fantastic brand. For the first time in my life, I was no longer part of the corporate world – extremely scary, but exciting all the same. It was now time to take some time out and re-assess the future. January came and went as it normally does, with all the holidays and the tying

up of some loose ends which I never managed to do before leaving adidas SA. My father-in-law passed away unexpectedly in February, so we spent the better part of two weeks in P.E handling the necessary arrangements. Before I even realised, it was March and Ironman was less than a month away – where had all the time gone? What had happened to all those hours of training I was going to put in now that I no longer had an eight to six job with plenty of travel? When I looked back at my training, I found that I was well short of what I had done the year before. Whilst I managed some mid-morning sessions which I wouldn't normally have been able to do, the bulk of my training was still done early in the morning as per when I was working. The big difference however, was that I was less stressed, sleeping better, and spending more quality time with the family. So, whilst I was putting in fewer hours, they were all quality hours. The training picked up in March, but nothing more than in prior years – although, I put in more brick sessions off the bike and increased my running mileage, as this is where I feel I've come up short in the past. With race day

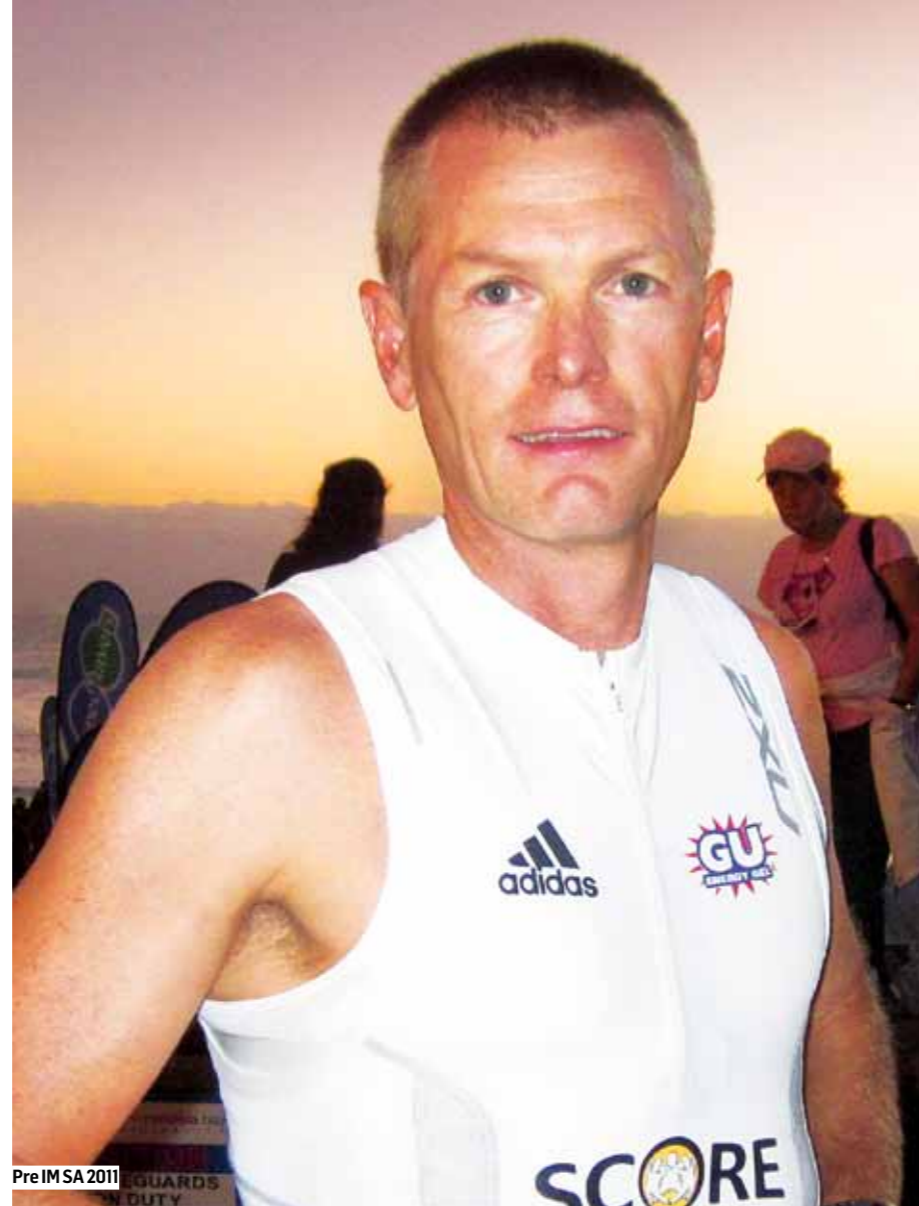


"all my pre-race preparation went off perfectly and come race day, I was raring to go"

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Brian with his support team at IM SA 2011 - Louise and Kobi



Running along Marine Drive at IM SA 2011



Here is Brian working with SCORE, in Khayelitsha

“all I could of think of was SCORE fundraising- how could I possibly not finish the race?”

looming, I was feeling particularly strong – all I needed was to stay healthy. This is where things can go wrong. You put in months of training and then pick up a cold just before race day and blow your chances. Thankfully, all my pre-race preparation went off perfectly and come race day, I was raring to go.

After a good night's sleep, I was down in transition early. My nightmare is arriving on the morning of the race and finding that your tyres are flat, then having to race around changing tubes – not my thing at the best of times. With all the last minute checks done and a quick pre-race interview for SCORE, I was standing on the start line feeling great. I told myself that all the hard work was done and now it was time to put myself to the test. The conditions were great and I believed that I had it in me to go sub-11 hours, which I've never done before.

The swim is by far my weakest discipline and the one which I spend the least time on. I put in the bare minimum

of training (no more than two sessions a week) as I have justified in my head that the time I lose on the swim can easily be picked up on the bike or run. My swim was a little slower than I would have liked, as my sighting on the back buoy was way off. Still, I came out of the water feeling strong and ready for a good bike.

I took the first lap very easy, aware of how strictly the race referees were implementing the drafting, blocking and passing rules. The first lap is always congested so you have to be careful, especially when you get out of the water in the middle-to-back of the field and are looking to pick up time. I picked up the pace on the second lap and was cruising, the GU's were sliding down no problem and I was well hydrated – none of the nausea of past Ironman events. My day was about to take a change for the worse. At 110km, my front wheel punctured – no problem, easy to change. I have only punctured once before in a race so changing tubes is hardly a fine art with

me, but I was up and running in about 10 minutes or so. One of my CO² cartridges didn't work, so in the back of my mind I had one spare tube left, but no CO² cartridges. On the hill up past Action Cycles, I stopped and picked up two spare CO² cartridges, just in case! This proved to be a good move, as a few minutes later my rear wheel punctured. I couldn't believe this was happening to me. Fixing a rear wheel puncture is a pretty messy, greasy affair for me but I managed to get it done.

By now I had lost a good deal of time and my sub-11 hour plan was rapidly becoming unrealistic, unless I could seriously pick up the pace over the last 50km. Just before the turnaround point at the end of Seaview Road (140km), I felt the sickening feeling of my rear wheel deflating – surely not? Puncture number three and no more spare tubes! I can only guess that my spare tube was old, as I had never needed to replace a rear wheel tube in all the time I'd been competing in events. I ran/walked my bike to the

turnaround point and the marshals radioed for the roving mechanic vehicle, but they had just passed there a few minutes ago so it would be quite some time before they came back. My only option was to start walking and hope that someone would be able to help me with an extended valve spare tube, as I was riding deep section Zipp wheels.

As I walked and pushed my bike, all I could think of was the SCORE fundraising - how could I possibly not finish the race? People had made donations and everyone at SCORE was counting on me. Mel from SCORE had even driven up the day before to watch me compete. And what about all those kids who we were fundraising for – I couldn't let them down. I had to finish! A number of competitors stopped and offered assistance, but no one was able to help with the specific spare I needed. Finally, someone gave me what he said was an extended valve spare so I quickly took off my wheel and removed the punctured tube, only to find that the spare he had given me was incorrect. This is where one's true character is tested! I put my bike over my shoulder and with the rear wheel in my hand began walking for

what seemed like ages. My feet were blistered and my cleats were worn to the metal by the time some kind soul stopped and offered me help. He wasn't even riding deep section wheels, so I truly doubted that he'd be able to help - but amongst all the bike spares he pulled out from his saddle bag, he had exactly what I needed. I could have kissed him, I was so grateful! But I'm sure he wouldn't have wanted that. I felt like I'd been given a lifeline!

Needless to say, I committed the beginner mistake of going way too hard over the last 35km, hoping to catch up as much time as possible. I raced through transition and onto the road for the last leg. I settled into an easy pace and hoped that I would find my running legs. By the 8km mark, I realised that there would need to be a change of strategy if I was to complete the race standing up, so I set about running from one aid station to the next and walking through before running again. Breaking the marathon up into bite size bits certainly helped, as my legs were completely blown and all I wanted to do was walk. Whilst my body was broken, I knew in my mind that I was strong enough

to finish. Eleven hours came and went and I hadn't even started the last lap of the run. This was proving to be a very long day. I'd never been running through the back of the University in the dark before – I was normally finished by then. I'd run down the red carpet at Ironman three times before, but this must rank as one of the most satisfying. Normally, I feel a huge sense of achievement and elation, but this was overshadowed by the unbelievable sense of relief at finishing. This was truly a case of a strong mind overcoming a weak body. If you want something badly enough, you can overcome all obstacles to achieve it. I had taken my body where it had never been before and come out on top. This would not have been possible without the incredible support of my family, friends and those wonderful people at SCORE – thank you all very much. ●

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