



*September 4, 2020*

*For immediate release from Nutri-Grain IRONMAN New Zealand, for more visit [www.IRONMAN.com](http://www.IRONMAN.com)*

*Free to use editorial images attached:*

- *Judd Baker with his twins ???, as supplied*
- *Judd Baker on the run in and event in 2018. Credit: photos4sale, Allan Ure*

## **FORMER WELLINGTON MAORI PROP FORWARD CONTINUES HIS LIFE TRANSFORMATION WITH TONY JACKSON SCHOLARSHIP FOR IRONMAN NEW ZEALAND**

38-year-old Wellington father of three Judd Baker was this week named as one of two Tony Jackson Scholarship recipients to receive support in pursuit of his dream to race and finish Nutri-Grain IRONMAN New Zealand in Taupo next March.

The Scholarship is given annually in memory of the great Tony Jackson to assist people who live up to Tony's values and will carry that same spirit into the event. Baker was nominated by his good mate of 20 years Darren West.

"Judd has the desire, the will power and drive to complete Ironman 2021," said West. "I believe he truly lives the values of a Tony Jackson Scholarship recipient. He lives for his family and making societal change through his work. He has made huge changes in his lifestyle to create a healthy environment for himself to help educate those around him on the importance of good health and wellbeing. He is living proof that hard work and mind set can create change. Judd is an inspiration amongst his friends and now helps other on their own weight loss transformation."

That weight loss journey has seen Baker lose an incredible 50kg's in recent years as he competed in cross-fit competitions, ran half-marathons, and recently completed a half-IRONMAN with IRONMAORI. It was in one of those events that his care for others and the impression he can leave on them showed in his selfless actions.

In 2018 Judd did his first triathlon in the IRONMAORI ¼ but the derailleur snapped on his bike just 20km into the ride. Forced to take a ride back to Napier Baker's heart dropped, knowing his kids were on their way to watch him finish, so he asked the organisers if he could just do the run anyway so his kids could see that you don't give up when you face adversity.

A former Premier club rugby prop with Poneke good enough to represent Wellington Maori, Baker currently works as a Senior Injury Prevention Manager with ACC and has held various jobs that help inspire others in the community to better themselves and look after those around them, notably helping implement the 'it's not OK' family violence prevention programme, as he delivered behavioural change and awareness workshops around New Zealand.

So, a man with a strong heart for his community and others facing difficult times, but West says the biggest impact that Baker has daily is on his blended family. Married to Mel, Baker is an inspiration to his stepdaughter and twins.

"Most people know blended families have their difficulties, not this one," said West. "Judd is an amazing father to the twins and father-figure to his stepdaughter. The twins didn't have the easiest entry into the world with both having their fair share of health issues, Judd and Mel took it all in their stride through the multiple hospital visits and operations. These hospital visits are still ongoing."

Baker himself was kept in the dark about the nomination and only found out when he received news he and Aucklander Kylie Frost had in fact been chosen out of a large number of worthy applicants.

"I only found out on Monday night. My best mate Darren put it together with help from my wife Mel, my mum, and two other old friends. They did it in secret and did a great job of keeping it quiet!"

"I feel overwhelmed and humbled. I'd heard about the Tony Jackson Scholarship when I was looking to sign up but didn't think much of it at the time. It's kind of surreal, sort of like 'I can't believe this is happening to me'.

Now the news has sunk in, Baker can't wait to benefit from the support he will receive in the lead up to race day, but also to discover more about Tony through the continued work of his widow Verna Cook-Jackson who continues to play a strong mentor role in the Scholarship programme.

"I'm most looking forward to learning more about Tony Jackson and thinking about his commitment and achievements in IRONMAN. I don't know a lot about him, but the little I do know is already inspiring. I'm also looking forward to the coaching. I'm generally a bit of a weekend warrior, DIY type. It'll be nice to get some expert help for once."

Baker was close to his father Fred 'Frog' Baker, a life member at Poneke Rugby Club until his sad passing last year. The 38-year-old has him and others in his community to thank for shaping him into the man he is today as he contemplates arguably his biggest personal challenge yet.

"I've got a great group of friends that have helped me on my journey so far, especially in recent times with training and preparing for IRONMAORI and now Nutri-Grain IRONMAN New Zealand. A lot of them have already done an IRONMAN and I just love learning from them.

"It's also really comforting having these people around peppering you up. Also, my wife Mel, our three kids Keira, Zinzan, and Stevie. They're my everything and a major motivator for me. I also carry my late father Fred with me. He was always so supportive and quietly proud of me.

"I don't mind admitting I am scared and nervous, but also really excited. I love a challenge, even more the ones that scare the shit out of me!"

ENDS

### ***What is the Tony Jackson Scholarship?***

*The annual scholarship offers a deserving athlete an IRONMAN New Zealand event package (including entry), to enable them to participate in IRONMAN New Zealand.*

*The scholarship is set up to support athletes that without this support may not be able to participate in the IRONMAN New Zealand event.*

*The scholarship was created in memory of Tony Jackson, an IRONMAN New Zealand 28-time finisher and Hall of Fame member. Acknowledging his outstanding contribution to IRONMAN and to continue his passion to encourage, help, inspire and motivate athletes to achieve their IRONMAN goals irrespective of their athletic ability, personal challenges, background, age or gender.*

### ***What does the 2021 Scholarship include?***

- *Entry into 2021 Nutri-Grain IRONMAN New Zealand*
- *Two nights' accommodation in Taupo prior to the event for training*
- *A complimentary Performance Bicycle Tuning fit for any bike*
- *A Boost Coaching package*

### ***Who was Tony Jackson?***

*Tony competed in New Zealand's first IRONMAN event in 1985 at the age of 45. Tony continued to compete in every IRONMAN New Zealand for twenty-eight years until 2013.*

*Tony was the epitome of the IRONMAN spirit; a man who quietly managed to, every day, mentor, encourage, guide, and enthuse ordinary people into doing things they had thought*

*impossible to achieve. Tony's mantra to fellow athletes was, "Nothing is impossible to the willing mind." Scores of athletes benefited from Tony's quiet and wise coaching.*

*By his own admission Tony was never a world beater – but the records do show he could turn out some good times. He qualified for Kona many times, podium placing in 1988 in 11 hours 35 mins.*

*At Christmas 2007 Tony was diagnosed with a brain tumour and was given a 12-week life expectancy. Ten weeks later, with the thought of only having about two more weeks to live - and in the middle of radiotherapy and chemotherapy - Tony finished his 24th IRONMAN NZ.*

*For the next five years – despite multiple operations and a stroke - Tony completed five more IRONMAN New Zealand events. Each year he coached and mentored scores of fellow athletes to achieve their goals whilst having to undergo major difficulties in his own health and training.*

*Tony passed-away in March 2013.*

*This scholarship is IRONMAN New Zealand's way of continuing Tony's, and their belief, to each person out there - that, like everything in life, including IRONMAN - 'Nothing is impossible... to the willing mind'.*