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- Bike: Kylie cycling at the Taupo 70.3 in December 2019. Credit Finisher Pix
- Run: Kylie on the ru. Credit Photos4sale, Allan Ure

TONY JACKSON IRONMAN SCHOLARSHIP WINNER RACING DEBILITATING ILLNESS IN PURSUIT OF IRONMAN DREAM

Tony Jackson Scholarship recipient Kylie Frost will battle incredible medical odds as she looks to honour the memory of the man whose name is on the annual IRONMAN New Zealand scholarship, but also her former coach Tony O'Hagan, who tragically passed-away earlier this year.

Aucklander Frost has been named as one of two budding IRONMAN athletes to receive the scholarship for the 2021 event in Taupō. Although she never met Jackson in person, she has come to know who he was and what he stood for through getting to know his widow Verna Jackson-Cook through her continued involvement in the event and the annual scholarship assisting two worthy participants to race in Taupō.

"Tony's legacy and what IRONMAN New Zealand has given me with this scholarship will change my life forever. I will never be able to say thank-you enough for this opportunity and I will do everything I can to prove myself worthy," said a humbled Frost.

"I had met Verna but it was later when someone suggested I apply for the Tony Jackson Scholarship that I learned about Tony. But who he was and what he believed spoke to me, it explained why Verna had been so encouraging, it became something I simply had to apply for."

That Frost is even contemplating taking on Nutri-Grain IRONMAN New Zealand is a miracle. The 46-year-old has spent five years trying to get on the start-line in Taupō and is racing time to achieve her dream.

“I have an incurable disease called Ankylosing Spondylitis. It is a severe form of arthritis which could see me disabled and in a wheelchair. It isn’t a matter of if my disease deteriorates but when and my time is running out. The fact that I can even think about doing IRONMAN is a small minor miracle as I was having trouble walking when I started this journey.”

That journey started in the pool after a visit to a physio who recommended Kylie get to work on a body that was shutting down through lack of activity and the damaging affects of the disease.

“On my first day in the pool, I loved it, the water was warm and felt divine. He started me simply walking up and down then we did some simple stretches for my ankles and hips. Then finally some arm exercises with a pool noodle. He made me promise to do no more than 20 minutes and to ring him the next day if my body reacted badly. Quite frankly he was afraid I would drown!”

Against the initial advice of her husband, Frost headed to the gym and then started running and cycling and after many tough days and weeks of training was contemplating her first Taupō 70.3 when she suffered a serious accident on the bike, wrecking her right shoulder.

“In August 2018 while training for Taupo 70.3 and the full IRONMAN I smashed my right shoulder and my December 70.3 entry was deferred till March and my full was cancelled. I sat in the shower and cried from the frustration and disappointment. It felt like the end of all my dreams. I could have given up, but I didn’t. My injury would never have healed on its own and November 20th, 2018, I had surgery to wire my shoulder back together.”

More weeks of painful rehab and adapting her training saw her get to the start-line of the 70.3 at IRONMAN New Zealand, appropriately raced on her birthday in 2019. And while she missed the eventual finish line cut off and did not ‘officially’ finish, she did bravely make it to the line in 8:44, with that finish line experience only fueling her desire to hit that red carpet next March with a full IRONMAN distance behind her.

“2021 is going to be my year, my day, the day I will call myself an IRONMAN. No, my husband isn’t happy about it, but he loves me enough to let me try. In fact, he was so inspired by what I was trying to do, he raced next to me on my first triathlon (to keep my doctor happy) and later went on to do a full IRONMAN - three times! Since then he registered for Cairns, his dream is to one day get to Kona. He has learnt in the last few years that I am determined enough that he won’t stop me. He also knows that one day I will most likely have to swap my bike and running shoes for a wheelchair.

“Over the last few years as I progressed I came to understand that if I really wanted it badly enough and I was prepared to work hard then I could accomplish anything. But I am also

realistic enough to know I am going to need all the help and support I can get to get me to the start line. Knowing I have the backing and support of IRONMAN New Zealand, Verna and Andrew at Boost Coaching takes it from a dream and makes it a reality.”

Frost is very focused on doing this for herself before it is too late, but also hopes to inspire others through her efforts.

“My main goal has always been to educate people on conditions like mine as well as to help them find a way past the pain to realise that they can still live a full life and achieve their own goals. Obviously as a Tony Jackson Scholarship recipient I will be able to do that more.

“I was very fortunate as an athlete to have a great man to guide me in Tony O’Hagan. I am devastated that he is gone. He was the first person to say I could do this. We would just have to train slower and take our time. He was a coach, a friend and a mentor and someone I owe a lot to. I want to complete this even more for him to prove his faith in me was justified.

“Then there are my kids. Two of them have forms of arthritis and are trying to come to terms with the fact that their life may not be what they had imagined due to this disease. I am teaching them that no goal is too far out of reach. That you should never give up no matter what you face. Keep going because anything is possible!”

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 participant 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'.