

Brother and sister take on Ironman challenge

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A news tip on a brother and sister competing in an Ironman competition turned up a more than just two triathlon athletes in the family.

Kristen Henke and Travis Hinrichs, whose roots are in Belvidere, finished a full Ironman – 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bicycle ride and a 26.2-mile run in Madison, Wis., Sept. 11.

Hinrichs crossed the finish line in 15:30:43. He watched his sister come in at 16:15:07.

The two weren't far apart from each other in the swim and bike portions of the Ironman. Henke swam Lake Monona in 1:29, and her brother in 1:33. On the bike, Hinrichs pedaled a time of 7:14:16 and for Henke, it was 7:45:19.

Henke and Hinrichs were ranked 104 and 209, respectively, in their age divisions.

Henke saw her brother during the bicycle ride.

"I don't know how many finished. Several hundred didn't. It was pretty cool to do it with my brother," she said.

The Ironman, Henke said, became addictive.

"I wasn't planning to work my way up to the Ironman. I had no intentions of doing it," she said.

She swam, biked and ran her way through her first sprint triathlon in 2010 after her son turned a year old. In 2012, she tackled her first Half Ironman.

Altogether, Henke has finished three Half Ironman and several sprint length and Olympic length triathlons, which is close to a mile swim, 26-mile bicycle ride and six-mile run.

Last year, Henke watched her husband Tracy, complete a full Ironman.

"It was an amazing experience to watch him," she said. Henke decided she needed to do it.

"I registered last September after the race was over," she said.

"It's a motivation to keep a healthy lifestyle and something to challenge yourself and see what you can do," Hinrichs said.

He said his volume of training rose dramatically to prepare for the challenge. He was riding 60 miles and running 12.

"You get used to it," he said. "The time passes faster when you get used to longer distances."

He also glanced at his watch less.

Hinrichs had completed two Half Ironman treks prior to the ultimate test.

Many of the Ironman finishers came in close to midnight before the race closed.

Hinrichs said he didn't get to bed until 1 a.m., and had to be back up at 5:30 a.m., to pick up his finisher jacket.

"You get 17 hours to finish," Henke said. "We started at 7 a.m. and had to be done by midnight. I just wanted to finish."

She said the crowd support was incredible.

Her mother, Vicki Hinrichs was part of that crowd.

"I just couldn't believe they were doing it. I went for support. I wanted to be there when they crossed the finish line," Vicki said.

Her sister and husband drove to Madison and picked Vicki up on the way. Everyone stayed in

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different hotels – hotel rooms are typically booked one year in advance. Vicki said they were worried about parking, but managed to find a garage.

The swim started at sunrise, she said. She didn't see her children at the swim, but she could hear the hands of the 2,500 athletes slapping at the water.

Henke said she had heard the horror stories of people being kicked in the face, but she said her swim was fantastic and the weather was perfect.

Vicki explained she could also see the transitioning location from swim to bikes.

"The bikes were all lined up and there were volunteers all over to help them find their bikes," she said.

She said Henke and Hinrichs looked good during the bike ride and not so good after the run started.

"I was just praying they would finish with all that training and work that they did," Vicki said.

Spectators knew where their athletes were at all times because of chip trackers that transferred the data to a website.

The training for Henke included a personal trainer about a year ago to build her strength.

"Some people get coaches. Travis had a coach," she said. "I had a plan I sort of followed and I just needed to increase mileage."

Henke said Trainor, Iowa, where she lives is hilly like the Ironman, which reached an elevation of more than 5,100 feet.

The training is time-consuming.

"You have to have both parties on board. My husband knew what it would take. He knew he would have that responsibility," Henke said about the couple's six-year-old son.

She didn't have a diet plan, nor did Hinrichs, but he said vegetables, proteins and fruits were important.

Henke said foods like ready-made peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and wafers were handed to them during the race.

"After dark, they served chicken broth in cups. They serve it warm because of the salt. I tried it and felt sick so I didn't do it again," Henke said.

She said at the end of the race, volunteers are there to catch the finishers, and find out if they need medical attention.

"After that, you can go eat, and pick up a finisher's T-shirt and hat. It's quite the ordeal and very well organized," Henke said.

Vicki may have already booked a hotel room for next year. In 2017, it will be Travis's wife, Jennifer's turn.

"My sister asked if we are going next year, too," Vicki said.

"I think I'll do another one. Jennifer got 2017," Hinrichs said. "There's a sense of acknowledgement when they announce you're an Ironman. It's a pretty awesome experience. People cheered."