

Alumni

# Ask an Alum: How to Be a World-Class Athlete... at 78

John Weber '65DM, a retired dentist and professor at Cornell Medical College, started running triathlons in his late sixties. Last year, at age seventy-seven, he became an Ironman All World Athlete champion.

By

Jessica Sebor

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John Weber (Lori van Houten)

### **What's an Ironman Triathlon?**

The Ironman is a 2.4-mile swim in open water, a 112-mile bike ride, and then a 26.2-mile run. It's one of the most difficult one-day endurance challenges in the world.

## **How did you get started with the Ironman?**

I began running marathons first. My children had grown up and I was single again at sixty and thinking about retirement. My two oldest were living in Boston and training for the marathon, and they convinced me to start running, too. I thought I was too old, but figured that I'd give it a try.

I wanted to get in better shape — for one thing, I was back on the dating market for the first time in a long time — but I quickly found that after a good 10K run, I just felt better. I ended up doing twenty-five marathons before someone suggested a triathlon. The addiction grew from there.

## **Tell us about your training schedule.**

I'm always training. It's too difficult to come back if you stop. But my season really starts with the world championship in Kona, Hawaii. That's in October, but I go out to Hawaii around August 15 to train. When I'm there, I'll do around one hundred miles on the bike twice a week, one 20-mile run, one 15-mile run, and then I'll swim the Ironman distance twice every week. I just do that in rotation. Come race time, I know every pimple on that course.

## **Are you on a special diet?**

I'm not a fanatic. There are some people who live on dried chicken breast and avocado. That's not me. My diet is a mixture of most anything, but nothing in excess. I have ice cream once a week.

## **What are your goals now?**

I won a world championship at seventy-five and my next chance of winning one will be when I age up to the eighty-to-eighty-five age group in 2018. Right now, I'm in the seventy-five-to-seventy-nine group, competing against younger athletes. People think that a few years wouldn't matter in your seventies, but they seem to!

But really, I'm not so concerned with medals. I'm just happy to be able to continue to do what I do and enjoy the company of my fellow athletes — wherever they are in the world.

## **If medals don't motivate you, what does?**

For me, a triathlon isn't just a sport; it's a lifestyle. I'm seventy-eight years old, and when I go for my annual physical, my GP shakes his head and says, "This is really just a well-baby exam." That feels good.

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