

The Triathlon Summit - Discover What it Takes to Win an Ironman

KERRY: All right. Hello everyone. Welcome to the Triathlon Summit. Today I have Heather Gollnick on the line. Heather Gollnick is a professional triathlete. She primarily races at the Iron and 70.3 distances and is a five -- actually, you're more than a five-time Ironman Champion now, aren't you?

HEATHER: No, a five-time Ironman Champ.

KERRY: Okay, five-time Ironman Champion. I thought it was more. She owns her own triathlon coaching company called Gollnick's Iron Edge. If that wasn't enough she also has three kids. So she is a powerhouse of a woman and I'm happy to have her on. Heather, welcome to the call.

HEATHER: Hi Kerry. Thanks for having me.

KERRY: Well, thanks for coming on. I definitely appreciate you coming on. Let's start off with the first question. You just came back, pretty recently actually, you did Pucon down in Chili, right?

HEATHER: Yes.

KERRY: That's a 70.3 distance. How did that go for you?

HEATHER: Chili is one of my very favorite races. Number one, it's absolutely stunning there. The people are so fun there. They treat triathletes like they're rock stars. They pick you up and take care of you and meet every one of your needs. They don't have a lot of the big-time sports there like football and baseball. Triathletes are much more well-known. You may see a triathlete on a billboard where you'd never see that in the states. They treat you really well.

I absolutely love the course. I've raced there five times. Last year was the first time I pulled off the win. This year going into it I was facing my main competition was Lindsay Corben, who had just finished fifth at Hawaii. So they were making it a big battle between us, basically age and experience over youth. So I had to show them that age and experience was what could do it.

KERRY: [Laughs] Good deal. So what is that course like? Is it pretty flat? Is it hilly?

HEATHER: There's two loops on the swim and it's awesome because you get out and you run on this black-sand beach where the race actually starts and finishes. The bike course is rolling. But the run is the hilliest run course. It

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think it's harder than Wildflower. It's just up and down and up and down. I love that kind of strength course.

KERRY: Awesome. That sounds pretty cool. So here's a question that a lot of people struggle with that are triathletes out there, trying to find the balance. How do you manage having a family? Because you've got your three kids, your husband and you've got a business and then you're racing as a pro triathlete. How do you do it?

HEATHER: To be honest, it's difficult. People say, "You always make it look easy." But it's really difficult to do it all and to feel like you're doing a great job at all three. I always want to excel at everything. So sometimes you feel like one of them gets a little off-balance. Maybe you're training a lot, maybe you're not spending as much time working or with the kids. But then there's also those recovery periods where maybe you're spending more time with the kids. It's definitely a balance. I'm definitely a good multi-tasker and I really just love all that I do. I love the coaching and all the athletes. Obviously I love my kids, but being there at their activities, their baseball games and tennis practices. They're all at school which does give me that big window of time to get my training done or get my work done. It try to just be really efficient with the time that I have so that when they get home from school we can have family time. It's still crazy running around but we're together for all their activities.

KERRY: Awesome. Cool. So here's another question. You've been doing great the past few years, obviously. You've been doing well. You've been getting quicker. What do you think has been your keys to improving every year?

HEATHER: Well I always joke, when Kevin McKennan was interviewing me after I had won a couple of Ironmans in a row he's like, "What's up?" I said, "All my kids are in school now." [Laughter] When the first two went you had a little more time and it was easy to get my mother-in-law or my mom to come over and have one kid to watch. But now that they're all at school, it's much easier. The hard part is then on weekends they've got ballgames and tournaments. The busy-ness changes from weekends to after school. You just kind of have to change with it. I definitely think that I have a little bit more quality over quantity in my workouts, which is hard when you're training for an Ironman because the quantity is there so much as well.

KERRY: Sure. Is there anything you've changed in the past few years that has improved your performance at all in your training?

HEATHER: I really listen to my body. I'm definitely really smart about if I feel aches and pains or something that could turn into an injury taking the time off necessary to listen to it. I wasn't always that way. Years ago I was a little

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more hard-headed and “I can get through this. It’s just a little ache and pain.” But I’ve really learned that taking a few days off and getting rid of whatever is aching or going on before it turns into something big has really helped. I think that wisdom is just something that comes with age.

KERRY: The wisdom, right?

HEATHER: Yeah. I’ve done it so long that you kind of learn what works and what doesn’t work. This year I actually hired LifeSport Coaching and I’m working with Paul. I started working with them in December. It’s been great because they’ve been trying to put a little bit of different twist into things I’ve been doing. One thing that Paul is really good on is, I’m not very good at recovery. I finish a 4-hour bike ride with a 45-minute break and then I’m off running around playing tennis with my son and I go do this and that. They’re really big on the recovery. I really never put my feet up or take in a nap or anything like that. They were all joking that sometime they’re going to get me to take a nap but at least now if I’m on the phone I’ll put my feet up. So I’m making a little progress that way.

KERRY: There you go, multitasking, like you said, right?

HEATHER: Yep.

KERRY: Good deal. I know you’ve hosted some triathlon camps and you’ve just finished a bunch of those. Why don’t you tell us a little bit about those.

HEATHER: Yeah. Our company, Iron Edge Coaching, I coach individual athletes. We have a couple of athletes that are coaches that work with us. We put on triathlon camps in Florida. The first one was really, really fun. I had two coaches, friends of mine, Elizabeth Sadowski and Jennifer Harrison from Chicago. They both are great age-groupers. Elizabeth is a pro. They brought a bunch of their athletes down. We had 16 women at the first camp. It was an all-women’s triathlon camp. It was so much fun. Obviously we swam and biked and ran but we had a lot of fun and a lot of education as well.

Then the next two camps we did were sprint Ironman distance so we get quite a variety of athletes. It’s really about teaching them running drills and swimming drills and videotaping them and taking them out to the ocean. There’s one who maybe had a fear of the ocean or someone that hadn’t been pace lining [?] before. It’s really educational. We did have a couple of athletes that were quite advanced and they came to learn about nutrition and how to properly get enough calories in for the Ironman. It as a really fun experience. It takes place at a coffee shop - bike shop combo called Village Bike in Sarasota. It’s just a great atmosphere hanging out with other athletes that are really eager to learn for four days. It’s just a

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blast.

KERRY: Awesome. Cool. So you've got three kids. Were you doing triathlons before you had your kids?

HEATHER: I did, on a smaller level. I actually didn't turn professional until my kids were almost six years old. I was doing it because I loved it and was a decent age-grouper. I really wanted to race professional for Ironman Madison, the first year that it came. So that year I turned professional, primarily because I wanted to race Madison as a pro and live close. We were living in the outskirts of Milwaukee at the time, about 50 minutes from Madison. I'd go up and train on the course and knew it really well going into it, which really helped me in that race.

KERRY: Cool. So what was your key then to coming back to training and breaking back in after you had kids? I understand that that can be...I don't know, I'm a guy [laughter] but I hear it can be difficult sometimes.

HEATHER: What people really want to know is, at least women want to know, do you really get stronger after you have kids. A lot of women triathletes don't want to take time off to have children, even though they want children. It is nine months where you're not racing. But the break does your body great and then you learn so much about pain in childbirth. The races are pretty easy in comparison. I think it definitely makes you stronger and just the change in your hormones. I definitely got stronger after I had children.

KERRY: In terms of just endurance and strength and all that?

HEATHER: Yeah, everything.

KERRY: Cool. So when you're racing in an Ironman you hear certain people have different mind games they play or things like that. Do you have anything that you're thinking specifically when you're out racing?

HEATHER: I'm usually pretty happy-go-lucky talking to people. But when I'm actually racing, for the most part, I just want to beat everyone and anyone, especially the competition. Sometimes my friends will say, "We were cheering for you." You just get in that zone. I definitely, honestly, a lot of times am not the stronger athlete. I think in Pucon Lindsay was probably in better shape than me but mentally I can just push to that next level, just pushing through that pain or whatever you're feeling. I was pretty beat up the next day. I felt like I had raced an Ironman, just pushing my body to that next level.

KERRY: Yeah, absolutely. Do you have a favorite pre-race meal?

HEATHER: I do. I have the same thing all the time. I have a gluten-free bagel or

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English muffin or toast, gluten-free always, with almond butter and a banana sliced on it. Then First Endurance makes this product called “pre-race” and I’ll sip that. I’ll have that even before all my key workouts. So it’s a staple in my diet.

KERRY: Cool. Why gluten-free?

HEATHER: It’s a little bit easier to digest, which means less work for your digestive system so you don’t have as many issues using the restroom.

KERRY: Right, right. I find that interesting. The reason I asked is because I actually have celiac disease so I can’t have any gluten. I was like, “Oh, she can’t have gluten.” But different reasons. All right. When you race what do you like to eat?

HEATHER: I use a First Endurance product [indecipherable] It really seems to give me a blast. Pretty much I’ll use the EFS drink until I run out of that and then I’ll have to use what’s on the course, depending on what’s on the course. I try to avoid that sometimes. In Pucon they had this Chilean drink. It was like sparkling seltzer water and it tasted awful. You just didn’t want to run out of what you brought. [Laughter]

KERRY: Cool. You’re getting involved with putting on a race this year. Why don’t you tell us a little bit about that and what the whole story is with it.

HEATHER: Yeah. It’s called Revolution Three Triathlon. It’s going to become a whole series of races. Right now we’re in the process of securing the other venues. Right now the first is going to be a half and it’s going to be in Middlebury, CT. It’s going to take place at an amusement park. What we wanted to do with this whole series is really just change the way triathlon is done, revolutionize. So making it really family-friendly, the technology being amazing. All of the athletes are going to wear GPS tracking device, which is like Ironman live on your wrist. We’ll be able to track the athletes and we’re going to have computer lounges and even people from home, the technology and the amount of cameras we’re going to have. It’s going to be pretty amazing. Just having some different policies and things in place. I’ve raced triathlons so long that there’s certain things that for a family makes it hard. Sometimes I felt bad for my husband having to stand there for nine and a half hours and no where to go with the kids and nothing to do. So we’re trying to do things a little bit different. It looks like for the next year we will have a series where one is a half and an Olympic and the third is going to be a half and a full, a point series. We’re really focusing on the amateurs as well as the pros. The first race will have a \$100,000 prize purse and we’ve already got all the big names in triathlon submitted.

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I'm basically sponsorship marketing director. My husband is the race director. It's great to be working closely with it. I'll be doing the commentating at the race. It's going to be fun. I'll be involved with it in a different light. I will miss racing. I'm sure it'll kill me race day to not be racing.

KERRY: Yeah, definitely. So what's the website for that?

HEATHER: Rev3tri.com. We're still taking registrations. Once you look at the website you'll realize they put a lot of work into it. It's amazing. Somebody told me I did a great job on the website. I laughed because I'm the least computer literate person there is. So I'm like, "Yeah, I didn't do it." They're going to go above and beyond with all the give-aways and the swag bags. Just everything that they're going to try to do, they're just going to try to step it up a level. I know a lot of people complain about how much the entry fees are. So they're really trying to step it up to that next level. So it's going to be pretty cool.

On the Rev3 Triathlon site there's downloads. You can see the whole course review. You can watch some of the ideas of what the technology is going to be, see all the pros that are going. It's a pretty amazing site.

KERRY: Cool. What do you have this year planned for races?

HEATHER: Right now we're just planning the beginning of my season. In a couple weeks I will be doing the 70.3 in New Orleans. Then shortly after that I will do St. Croix. Then I'm going to be heading down to Brazil to do Ironman Brazil. That'll be my first time doing Ironman Brazil, so I'm really excited about it. I hope to get my Kona spot then to be able to do Kona and Clearwater, I did take the Clearwater spot, at the end of the year.

KERRY: Cool. Well that's a full race schedule, for sure. That's good. That's great. What do you do after a big Ironman to recover? Do you get right back into training? What do you do?

HEATHER: No. Actually, I'm a big fan, or I have a love/hate relationship with ice baths. I put on a hoodie and I'll make some recovery hot chocolate and I'll sit in the ice bath, usually as soon as the race is over. I even do that after a lot of my key runs and stuff. If I'm doing a long run. It really helps facilitate recovery for me.

But anyway, after the Ironman I just try to get some really good food in me as soon as I can. That first week or two is really just pretty light recovery. I end up usually swimming quite a bit, because that seems to loosen me. There's times where I haven't run for ten days because I'm pretty beat up after an Ironman. It really just depends. Typically I'll take

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some time just to let the body recover, especially the harder the race.

Ironman Arizona, that was actually the year before, I think I came off the bike like fourth place and ran down Joanna Ziger to win by like 45 seconds. I was physically trashed but mentally too. So I think it's a really good idea for athletes, even if they're not beat up physically... sometimes they have something go wrong and they couldn't push the race, they had to walk the run or something, but they never give themselves that mental break. You really need that mental recovery as well.

KERRY: Yeah, for sure.

HEATHER: Our family tries to schedule it. Like after that race we took the kids to the Grand Canyon. We took like a five-day vacation. After New Orleans it racked up with Easter vacation so we're going to visit family for a week. So it's kind of good because then I can go do a little training but yet you're with your family, you're on vacation, you don't do as much, which actually in the long-run benefits you.

KERRY: Sure, sure. Well, that is all the questions I have for you. Do you have anything you'd like to add?

HEATHER: No.

KERRY: Cool. Well Heather, thank you so much for coming on.

HEATHER: Thank you. Thank you for interviewing me. I hope the rest of the interviews all go great.

KERRY: Definitely. And what's the name of the website where people can get your Revolution 3 Series information from, for the race?

HEATHER: Rev3Tri.com. You can also go to my site, HeatherGollnick.com or IronEdgeCoaching.com.

KERRY: All right, great. Good stuff. Heather, again, thank you. We'll talk to you later.

HEATHER: Super.