



# PRO TALK: shortis speaks



## Post Ironman Blues

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So you've reached your goal of completing an Ironman. You've had a fantastic time celebrating your achievement with your fellow competitors, family and friends. On returning to work your colleagues congratulate you, and then suddenly, it is three weeks post Ironman. It begins to feel like a bit of a distant memory, you're not feeling all that crash hot, the high has disappeared and you're not quite your usual self. Welcome to post Ironman depression.

Now before you start running off to a therapist, I'm not talking about any type of clinical depression here, this is just a natural part of the ebbs and flows that comprise life. It is only natural that after the euphoria and adrenalin rush of achieving a task of such magnitude, that the natural order of things dictates you have a period of coming down.

When the muscle soreness has worn off after the race, you feel pretty good, even great perhaps, for the first couple of weeks. The high of it all carries you through the physical exhaustion. However, it waits patiently around the corner to catch up with you at a time when the exhilaration is wearing off. It is two to three weeks later when it gets you and the 'blues' seem to set in. You're tired, grumpy, emotional and a bit irrational.

It may not be an actual medical condition, but just from anecdotal evidence (me and every other Ironman athlete I've spoken to) there is such a thing as post Ironman depression. I have seen grown men cry like babies and normally calm, patient individuals 'lose it' for no apparent reason. Sometimes it can manifest simply as vagueness. I've been known to be in a conversation and forget what

I was saying mid-sentence. (My fiancé Nicole purports that this is the norm, not the exception, but it's my story that it is only post Ironman, and I'm sticking to it!)

So what is it that causes these post Ironman blues? Well I've got a couple of theories. Quite often the achievement of a long term or difficult goal is accompanied by feelings of a somewhat anti-climax. When training for Ironman, you have a build-up of time, effort, energy and emotion toward achieving this one singular goal. In fact it alters your whole lifestyle. Now I know at the time Ironman can feel like a really long day, but it is just that – one day. The culmination of months of effort is achieved and over in less than seventeen hours. Usually once you achieve a certain goal you feel some tangible sense of it for an extended period of time.

Let's think about that for a moment. Just say your goal is to be state manager of your company. Once you achieve that objective, every day you go to work you have a sense of satisfaction in having achieved that goal, and the same applies when your aim is to buy a house - you have a tangible sense of the achievement of that goal every time you walk in

the door. This is certainly not true of Ironman. It is quite unique, in that apart from perhaps an increased level of fitness, there is no tangible sense of the accomplishment. What you are left with is memories. This can be quite frustrating when we are accustomed to having a tangible sense of a target achieved. Certainly this significantly contributes to the feelings of anticlimax in the weeks following an Ironman.

But it is not this alone that produces post Ironman blues. There is also the sense of 'well what now?' that can follow such a huge triumph. Completing an Ironman gives me a feeling unlike anything else, and I can only assume that the rest of you out there feel similarly. So once you've completed the race, everything else can seem small and insignificant in comparison. You have achieved the longest race in triathlon, so what now?

There is however usually a remedy for this feeling, once you realise that the next hurdle to overcome is the problem of getting back into training after Ironman. But this is not the end to your post Ironman blues, for alas, this in itself can also contribute to the problem. I often think that the hardest thing about racing Ironman is not racing it, nor is it the training, but rather it is backing up to do the training for another Ironman. After twenty-five Ironmans it doesn't seem to get any easier to back up.

I think it is a combination of tiredness and the lack of motivation (the anti climax thing comes to rear its ugly head). Let's face it; Ironman is very demanding physically, mentally and emotionally. So afterwards you are just plain worn out. After such a draining event you need a rest. So you start to sleep in and go to the coffee shop, you stay up late watching TV, or go out. In short, you get out of the habit of consistent training. This makes everything just that much harder. If this isn't enough to give you the blues, then tell me your secret!!

So with these special set of circumstances that accompany reaching your Ironman goals, we must approach it with an equally special attitude. When you have worked that hard for so long you are quite entitled to, and in fact *should*, remind yourself of your achievement every day. I'm not suggesting you shout it from the rooftops, or leave little memos detailing your successes to your colleagues, but just that when you conquer Ironman, keep it alive inside, because it helps to combat those post Ironman blues, and darn it, just simply because you've earned the right to! So too should you remind yourself that there is light at the end of the tunnel and that this is merely the natural cycle of things. Just as quickly as the last Ironman registers as a memory and not just something you did a couple of weeks ago, so too will you find yourself on the starting line of your next big Ironman challenge – and for those of us who have already done it – we all know that the feeling you have on that one day is worth everything else you go through before and after! 🏆