

What do you see in an Ironman?

One day I was on the bus travelling to work in Toronto. It was the usual process of eyes down, music playing and sinking into my own head as most people do on the bus. This time though something was different. A number of people kept looking up and staring at one of the passengers. A mid 30's man who was holding his newspaper with an artificial hand.

When I took notice of him something else caught my eye. He was wearing a jacket which was from Ironman Florida. For anyone who has done one of these spectacularly difficult races you will know that this isn't a jacket that you pick up like a Red Wings or Orlando Magic because you like the team. The Ironman jacket is like a trophy, worn only by a person who took the ultimate test of their body and mind to complete this incredible race.

It consists of 3.8 km in open water swimming followed by 180 km of cycling culminating with a 42 km marathon distance run, all done in a single day. This is no slight task. For anybody who is fully able, and in solid physical condition this is an unbelievable accomplishment.

Then I saw the faces of the people on that bus. There was a real discomfort there with most of them. Some pointed, some tried to look away and some just stared. They couldn't imagine what it was like to be "disabled". To be disadvantaged in a way like this man.

How could he brush his teeth they must have thought. How does he put on his clothes. How could he possibly get through a day trying to get by in a "normal" world with his mechanical limb. That's what they must have been trapped into thinking.

My thought was on how he was able to transition from the swim to the bike. How did he put in the hundreds or thousands of hours of training in the water, on the bike and spending what would equate to days out on the road running relentlessly on the pavement to prepare.

For everyone else on that bus, they didn't see the man. They saw his hand and they seemed ashamed. But for me, all that I saw was his jacket and it made me proud.