

TRIATHLON IS ABOUT INSPIRATION

By Shiu Tong

Most endurance sports would have inspirational stories, and the sport of Triathlon has many hard-warming ones too. When I was doing my Langkawi Ironman expedition in 2001, I thought my story was somewhat inspirational – having only 5 months of preparation time; not knowing how to swim front-crawl and having only a total bike mileage of 900 km.

Nonetheless, those became nothing when I saw some other triathletes during the race who were truly inspirational. American Paul Martin entered the race under the Physically Challenged category. Don's left leg is a stump from the knee downwards. He swam with a piece of rod attached to his stump and cycled with a normal bicycle with his cycling shoes attached to his artificial "limp". He completed the marathon with a special-made "spring" attached to his left limp. Paul completed the entire Ironman race without assistance and finished with a time well below 12 hours – a very credible time even for the able bodied.

American Randy Caddell was another star in Langkawi. He is paralysed waist-down but is a pro-triathlete. He swam with only his arms, "biked" on a hand-cycle and "ran" in a wheel chair. Remarkably, Randy completed the Ironman solely with his arms alone. By no means is this an easy feat.

I had no chance to talk to Paul or Randy personally, but I could imagine the pain they experienced when they first started triathlon with their handicap. I admire their determination and perseverance in wanting to complete the gruelling Ironman task, challenging their own limits despite their physical disabilities.

I think neither Paul nor Randy received any handsome reward for their efforts. I believe that they did it and are continuing to do triathlons and Ironman to prove that they are just as able, if not more able than many of us who are fortunate to have physically able bodies.

During the entire Ironman, there were times when I doubted my ability to complete the race and even thought of giving up. But when that happened, the images of Don and Randy flashed across my mind and I could not bear the reality of them being able to finish the race and not me. That kept me going till I crossed the finishing line.