

## Ran marathon with arm in sling

# Former Brockton councillor completes Ironman while injured

By JOHN MCPHEE  
WHT Editor

“Anything is possible.”

That’s the slogan for Ironman competitions around the world. And it must be the slogan that motivates and inspires a former Brockton councillor who is the newest Ironman. He’s no longer running for office but running for himself – and pushing himself to levels he never could realize before.

Under normal circumstances, not many would have



Former Brockton Coun. Dan Gieruszak crosses the finish line to complete his Ironman endurance race in Mount Tremblant, Quebec on Aug. 18 at the North American Championships. Less than two weeks prior, he injured his shoulder after crashing his bike into a ditch when a tour bus cut him off while training in Niagraa Falls. He ran the 42-kilometre race with his right arm in a sling to help prevent additional pain from occurring during the run. The 15:22:30 time behind him reflects the start time of the race. Gieruszak started in a later group behind “pros”. His time was 14:42.

Submitted photo

*“It’s amazing what you can do when you start out one step at a time.”*

-Dan Gieruszak

the stamina to complete the challenging Ironman race where you swim for 3.8 kilometres, cycle for 180 km., and then run for another 42 km. – all in one day.

But Dan Gieruszak not only finished the race, he did so while enduring a dislocated collar bone, bruised ribs, and other aches and pains suffered when he was thrown from his bike after being cut off by a bus while training in Niagara Falls. The mishap happened less than two weeks before the North American Ironman Championships in Mount Tremblant, Quebec on Aug. 18.

“Everyone is supposed to treat cyclists like a car on the road. Give them enough room,” Gieruszak told The WHT in a recent interview. “The tour bus turned into my lane and I went flying into the ditch.”

He got right back up and chased down (on his bike) the bus. “The driver thought he had given me enough room. But he got out his first aid kit and helped scrape the gravel off my back and shoulder.”

Three days later, and just 10 days before the big race, Gieruszak went to the emergency department and got the bad news confirming his aches and pains were real including a damaged rotator cuff.

“I was told I wouldn’t be able to do the swim,” he said.

But Gieruszak continued training by biking and running on a treadmill with his arm in a sling.

He planned to train and go to the event as a volunteer. But, four days before the race, he managed to complete a two-km. swim. “It felt like I might be able to do the full swim,” he said. Anything is possible.

At Tremblant, Gieruszak said the swim part “was the complete unknown. Would my shoulder be able to handle it. One arm two legs, two hours.”

It did hold up and after the swim, Gieruszak said he “felt confident” that he could then hop on the bike and ride for the 180 km. And he did it in 7 hours, 20 minutes – just 20 minutes behind his average time. He followed that up with the 42-km run, which took almost two hours longer than normal for him. His total time in the event was 14 hours, 42 minutes.

But for Gieruszak and most Ironman competitors, “it’s not about the placing, it’s about the finishing,” he explained.

It was a special accomplishment for Gieruszak, who got into long distance endurance racing and training just under three-and-a-half years ago and has competed in about 10 triathlons.

“I joked that I wanted to complete an Ironman race before my 60th birthday,” Gieruszak said, noting the day he got back into the pool after his crash was his 59th birthday.

Anything is possible.

After the crash he “immediately knew my first attempt to complete an Ironman was in doubt, but I was confident recovery might be much faster than it otherwise would have been (had he not continued training). For



Back in Brockton, Gieruszak proudly displays the medal he received for completing the race.

John McPhee photo

months I had been continually stressing my body and then resting to rebuild and recover.”

On Aug. 14 “the shoulder was too sore to touch” and on Aug. 17 it was taped by a physiotherapist to restrict movement and the next day “I was able to complete the event with minimal pain.” But he needed the sling to avoid additional pain.

“Once I was past the half way mark in the marathon I was confident I was going to finish,” he said. Giving up wasn’t an option for Gieruszak. “It’s amazing what you can do when you start out one step at a time.”

But he’s not alone. “One thing I found in training is that you don’t become an Ironman, you become an Iron family. You need the support of your spouse and family and friends.” His wife Elizabeth Braden prepares special meals to build up his stamina and is always there ready to help during a race.

“While training and on the course I was driven by the support of family and friends who would have shared my disappointment had I not been able to complete the event,” he said.

He also had evidence he could endure such challenges, pushing himself to his limit and beyond. When he had the run-in with the bus on Aug. 5, Gieruszak was around the 130-km mark of a planned 212-km session, and being in severe pain, he rode the bike back to his mother’s in Burlington from Niagara Falls.

After Mount Tremblant Gieruszak competed in a half-Ironman on Sept. 8 in Huntsville. He says competing isn’t an addiction. “It’s more of a lifestyle,” he said.

And it’s a lifestyle that looks as though it’s here to stay. Gieruszak noted there are some marathoners competing into their 80s.

He plans to return to Mount Tremblant next year, but before then, Gieruszak is contemplating applying to go into an ‘Ultraman’ competition.

In that three-day event you swim 10 km; bike 380 km, and then do two marathons (42 km each) in one day.

Don’t count Gieruszak out. Anything is possible.