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Iron Will Trounces Neuropathic Pain



Emily conquering the 112 mile bike race

Statistics show that only .007363 percent of all Americans can complete the Triathlon. Emily Oleksiuk is among them. Even more remarkable, on November 5, 2005, she finished the grueling Ironman Florida Triathlon just two years after being diagnosed with Parsonage-Turner syndrome, a rare type of neuropathy that causes crippling muscular pain.

While in training for the world's most rigorous sporting activity for individuals, Emily vowed to use the event to defeat the illness that threatened her. "This is not about getting through Parsonage-Turner syndrome," she said. "Rather, it is about conquering it, trampling it into the ground until it is nothing but a past experience I was able to gain valuable lessons from."

Her gutsy determination to fight back showed at each stage of the 140.6 mile race in which only one of every five competitors was female. In just 15 hours and at an average pace of more than nine miles per hour, Emily covered that distance by first swimming (2.4 miles), then biking (112 miles) and finally running (26.2 miles). Competitors are given 17 hours to complete the event. Emily did it with two hours to spare, and only two seconds off her goal..

The possibility of being sidelined by an illness would be hard for anyone to accept. It was especially hard for Emily, who had a hard-earned reputation as one of the toughest players in American collegiate and professional women's soccer. As a goalie, Emily faced down some of the world's best players without flinching. But, when confronting a potentially debilitating illness, she confronted fear.

"The pain was unlike anything I have ever experienced, a deep pain felt all the way to the bone," she recalled. "Spasms wracked my back and shoulder, and the pain was altogether severe and relentless. I spend most of the night in the living room so my fiancé would not hear me crying."

Emily fought back the only way she knew how with an iron will. Completing the Ironman for Emily was more than just crossing the finish line. Returning from the Ironman stronger is the measure of what Emily says is her "full recovery." Since she first began competitive sports, this 24-year-old has shown extraordinary physical and mental toughness. [She proved that again on November 5th.](#)

Now coaching women's soccer at the University of Rhode Island where her fiancée is the men's soccer coach, Emily is teaching the winning spirit by her example.

Emily dedicated her race to raising funds for The Neuropathy Association's efforts to help find a cure for neuropathy and for the nearly 20 million Americans who suffer from it. Donations can be sent to:

Emily
C/o **The Neuropathy Association**
60 East 42nd Street
Suite # 942
New York, NY 10165



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