

‘I just knew I would run again’

Defense attorney battles from debilitating disease to triathlon success.

By Jeff Gothard

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INDIAN RIVER COUNTY – Ten years ago, defense lawyer Andy Metcalf was

diagnosed with a medical condition doctors said would end his athletic aspirations.

Not one to let that ruling stand, the 42-year-old recently competed against elite athletes such as Lance Armstrong in his first triathlon.

Metcalf was told he had Guillain-Barre Syndrome, which attacks the peripheral nervous system, causing paralysis. “At that time, I could stand, but when my brain told my legs to walk, they just wouldn’t go,” he said.

Metcalf was an avid runner before the diagnosis, and was told he had to find new ways to alleviate stress since running was out of the question. After six months of therapy, Metcalf was able to walk and his balance improved, but the doctor’s words haunted him. “I knew he was wrong. I just knew I would run again.” Metcalf said. “The best way to motivate me is to tell me I can’t do something.”

And so began the struggle to reclaim his former prowess. With patience and a positive attitude, Metcalf started running a few times per week, but something still plagued him.

“It was December of 2011. I realized that I wasn’t in the shape I could be,” he said. “I felt I had been given a second chance, and I was squandering it.”

Metcalf made a commitment to race in the toughest endurance race available, the Ironman. His commitment was not just physical, however. He found that his chosen sport was not cheap. “Even an entry level racing bike can cost \$5,000,” Metcalf explained, ‘a state-of-the-art bike could fetch \$20,000.’”

Metcalf and his family soon found that the time commitment necessary for this endeavor was costly as well. Metcalf's wife Merrin, remembers: "It was taxing, for sure. He was gone a lot. We are all very proud of him, though. He completely transformed himself.

When my husband says he wants to do something, nothing gets in his way."

Metcalf even gave up his other favorite sport.

"I was a golf fanatic, but soon could not spare the four hours on Sunday." He said.

Time was a valuable commodity in his schedule. Metcalf would (reluctantly at first) rise at 5 a.m., and swim. "I spent an average of one and-a-half hours in the pool before work," he noted.

The swim portion of the race, he says, is a key to the whole competition. "If you are too fatigued after the swim, it will affect the rest of your race." Following a full work day, he could often be found running the bridges or in a local spin class.

The athletic workload seemed tailor made for Metcalf. "I actually love the feeling of pushing myself to the breaking point. When I don't give up, when I finish, that's the best feeling in the world."

There was another benefit to his discipline. Metcalf soon found he could eat as much as he wanted. "I eat a lot and often. You have to be careful, though," he cautioned, "Every calorie should have value. I try not to eat junk."

By May, 2012 and just four months into his training, he had lost 40 pounds and determined he was ready to compete in his first ironman. The Ironman 70.3 consisted of a 1.2-mile swim, 56 miles of cycling, and a 13.1-mile run. The race was held in May, 2012

at Haines City. Among those in the all-star field was Lance Armstrong. Armstrong had not yet admitted to doping during his cycling career.

“To be honest I was scared, but not of competing against Lance,” he said. “This was my first big event, and I just wanted to finish.”

Metcalf did finish and Armstrong did win the event. In retrospect, after Armstrong’s admission to doping, does Metcalf think Armstrong cheated?

“The consensus is that the 70.3 races are clean,” said Metcalf. “Even though at that point Lance was still denying all drug use.”

Armstrong began his career as a triathlete, and later switched to just competitive cycling.

“His lung capacity is amazing, and in altitudes like the Tour de France, he dominated,”

said Metcalf. “I think that at some point, though, guys who were using drugs began nipping at his heels and Lance wanted to win. I can never condone cheating, period. I do, however, think Lance is one of the world’s great athletes, and that the contributions he has made to charity are remarkable.”

For Metcalf, he is hooked and has no plans to cut back.

“Triathlon is addictive. I have tried many sports, but with the triathlon cross-training I never get bored, I’m in the best shape of my life, and I’ve never been happier,”

