

Post Crescent
Fox Valley Dynamic Iron Women
By Gloria West
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Scientists investigating gender differences have found women report more pain throughout the course of their lifetime. They also experience it in more bodily areas, more often and for longer duration when compared to men. While these studies may be conclusive, the verdict is still out as to women tolerating pain more than men? Instinctively it seems women would be less likely to tolerate pain as they genetically do not have the muscle to protect the nervous system. If it ever came to studying pain tolerance between local sexes, the scientists will find a dense population of woman who will influence the results.

Yikes!! Sisters, do we really want to keep encouraging each other to do Ironman? If the Fox Valley area keeps producing more and more IRON WOMEN, soon, men will think 'if so many women can do the Ironman 2.4 mile swim, 56 mile bike and 26.2 mile run, they can do the garbage, clean the garage and repair leaky roofs.

The entire Fox Valley keeps populating these women of steel and hearts of courage test the limits at their own "big dance." They are competitive and compassionate; each with a slightly different goals. Some may hope just to beat the 17 hour cut off. Others may be stare down their female competition in front of them, hoping their strength will surpass them. Some are more interested in wrapping themselves in sisterhood bonds for a lifetime while they train together.

With one gunshot, their journey to real survival, to real womanhood begins. After the registration form has been signed, these energetic divas have a common bond: the desire to the finish. What drives so many women from all walks of life to the early morning Madison trip to compete in either their first or 15th Ironman? Perhaps for some it is the crazy-in-love-triathlon trend or for the unexplainable, sensational feeling when finishing. Local Iron Woman Divas like, Rhea Kratzer and Wendy Heldt, continue to wheel through to their third year at Ironman together, building a solid training base and an even stronger friendship. "I am all about the training and most of all the friendships. Ironman Triathlon is addicting and I hope I can continue to do this for a long, long time," said Rhea.

Moms, working women and having Ironman discipline makes for passionate women who obvious love testing their limits or perhaps their family loyalty. Sue Schmalz of Neenah finished the 2007 IM with a personal record. After 13 consecutive Ironmans and at 49 years old, Sue slimmed off a huge chunk of change last summer for her Personal Best Record of 12:39:34. "More than once I've asked myself, what am I doing out here? Then I see my husband and daughter cheering me on. They are stand outside in all weather conditions for hours to see me go by. That is what gets me to the finish line." Let's just say on Ironman Sunday they spend quite a few hours of "family time" together.

Race day for Wisconsin Iron Women is combined with September temperatures ranging from 55 to 105 degrees and topped off with the toughest bike course of all. Anne Siegrist has completed 13 Ironman races and loves the Wisconsin Ironman bike course the best. "Madison is more challenging than any other of Ironman competitions in the world Yet along the course you find thousands of your closest friends cheering, signage that keeps you from giving up and music to lift your spirits and energy level. That's why I do it." Chris Bouressa of Kaukauna endures the notorious course with flying colors when she placed third in her age group last year with a very impressive time of 11:51.

A realistic approach to this grueling multi sport is best described by Patti Yeager of Appleton. "Last time when I finally got to the finish line, I knew I had accomplished something beyond my wildest nightmares. Now it's 2008 and with 4 months left until I can write another page in my IM history book. There are no predictions-too many things can influence that long day. I can only hope that there will be more smiles than grimaces!"

I had to chuckle when interviewing some of the women, as their age surely reflected their comments. Ashley Owen, something 20, had a quick suggestion, "Anyone can do an Ironman - all you have to do is put your mind to it." My answer to her is, "Wait until you hit your late fifties- you first have to find your mind."

When asking other local women why an Ironman, I found they may not do it to race but for the “racieness.” “Most of my friends who I train with are about 10-15 years older than me and can whip me on the course. I have to keep training to hopefully look as hot as they do as I age.” Karen Kewley. As women, this comment is perhaps easiest to relate to. “What keeps me going is just being able to do it. The goal is to be healthy enough to be up for a challenge and have tons of energy to keep up with the kids, work and school. I want to be the oldest and in shape woman to compete at Kona.” Sheryl Gauthier

With the Madison Ironman just one hundred miles down the road, our community is lucky to have so many Iron Women Divas and there are many more. It does not matter if they are doing it to win or doing it to finish. Their drive for a better lifestyle, to be positive athletic role models and to never give up “raises the bar” for Fox Valley Women.