

Injured officer returns to triathlon competition

By John Gunther
The World

COOS BAY (AP) — As Robert Lounsbury recovered in a hospital bed with multiple breaks and bruises after crashing his bike into a parked city truck in October of 2015, one thing was clear to the Coos Bay Police sergeant and triathlete: He would compete again.

“There was never a doubt I would be back triathloning,” he said. “I always knew I would be back.”

Lounsbury fulfilled that goal on Nov. 20, when he raced to a new personal best at an Ironman-length event in Arizona.

Lounsbury completed the 2.4-mile swim, 112-mile bike ride and marathon run in 10 hours, 16 minutes and 55 seconds.

It completed an amazing year of recovery from a horrific accident, reported *The World*.

Lounsbury’s crash came when he was training for the same triathlon on October 6 in 2015.

He doesn’t remember all the details because he suffered a concussion, but what he thinks happened is he swerved to avoid being hit by a car just after the bike lane on Bayshore Drive ends and instead hit the truck, while he was pedaling nearly 25 mph.

The sum of injuries included a broken collarbone, a broken neck, 15 various breaks in his ribs and a broken thumb that required surgery. He also lost a tooth and had his teeth knocked out of place, requiring braces.

Lounsbury spent five days in the hospital and left in dual arm slings and wearing a neck brace.

He was back on his bike within a few weeks, and running on a treadmill before long. It was hardest to get

back into swimming, but he made it back into the pool, too.

He gives a lot of the credit for his recovery to physical therapist Lawrence Cheal and his wife, Julie Batchelor, for helping him rehabilitate from all the various breaks and his thumb injury.

Just competing in a triathlon would have been a stretch of the imagination when Lounsbury was young.

“I was a short, fat kid growing up in Coquille,” he said. “I weighed more than I do now and I was 5 inches shorter.”

Lounsbury started running for fitness when he was 14 and lost a lot of weight while having a growth spurt. But he never tried running as a competitive sport, even though North Bend’s cross-country coach tried to recruit him when he was in high school there.

He was nearly 15 years into his police career in Coos Bay before he got the taste of competition — in water skiing.

A friend convinced him to go to a tournament and, as he puts it, “I was hooked on competition.”

The following year, he signed up for the water skiing competition at the Western States Police and Fire Games. When he saw he could compete in a second event for just \$10 more, he decided to try triathlon.

Nick Furman, a local cyclist and runner, helped him with his bicycling and swimming in a crash course on the sport.

When Lounsbury arrived at the games, the water skiing event was canceled because of a lack of participants. But Lounsbury placed 12th in the triathlon, which was at

the Olympic distance, with a slight modification on the run. The swim was 1,500 meters and the bike was 40 kilometers. The run was about 7 miles instead of the normal 10-kilometer (6.2-mile) distance.

Lounsbury was hooked on triathlons and he’s been doing them ever since.

“My wife tells me every day that I’m crazy,” he said.

He was drawn to the sport because of the competition and because he knew running eventually would take a toll on his body but triathlon requires work in all three disciplines.

“I like the cross-training,” he said. “It keeps it exciting.”

It wasn’t long before Lounsbury started experimenting in longer triathlons. He completed his first half in 2010 and his first full Ironman in 2013, at Couer D’Alene, Idaho.

For Lounsbury, swimming has been the toughest discipline to master.

“Swimming is so highly technical,” he said.

Ironically, the accident likely made him a better swimmer when he returned to the pool because he had to re-learn everything and got rid of bad habits he had picked up.

He credits Ralph Mohr and Jayna Tomac, regulars at Mingus Park Pool, for making him a better swimmer.

Biking, on the other hand, has been the easiest and developed into his favorite.

“I just like the feeling of freedom on the bicycle,” he said. “It makes me feel like a kid again.”

Lounsbury is grateful for the flexible schedule he has for his police job.

In the height of Ironman preparation, Lounsbury trains

12 to 17 hours a week, split between the three disciplines with roughly 50 percent biking. Some days he doubles up, with swimming in the morning and biking in the afternoon. He also does some weight training in the gym.

He has one long workout a week for each discipline — a 5- to 6-hour bike ride, a 2-hour run and a 4,000-yard swim.

He also tries to have two hard training weeks and then one easier week, which he says is important both physically and mentally.

“I’ve learned a lot about training methodology,” he said.

Since his accident, he’s done more of his bicycle training indoors, and been surprised by how efficient it is. Indoor cycling requires constant pedaling while there is some coasting outdoors.

“Going into Arizona, I didn’t know how I would do,” Lounsbury said. “I had my best bike split.”

He averaged 21.5 mph for the 120-mile ride.

Lounsbury’s times were 1 hour, 5 minutes and 9 seconds for the 4,000-meter swim; 5 hours, 16 minutes and 22 seconds for the bike; and 3 hours, 49 minutes and 38 seconds

for the marathon.

He finished 25th out of 188 men in the 45-49 age group and 188th out of 2,445 participants overall.

Lounsbury’s ultimate goal is to qualify for the Ironman World Championship at Kona in Hawaii, an event that is shown on network television every year (it’s where he first saw triathlon).

Getting into Kona is tough, though. Each sanctioned Ironman event is allocated a number of spots for each age group in Kona.

In Arizona, there were four spots available and the fourth-place finisher in Lounsbury’s age group was 45 minutes faster than him.

The closest he came was in an event at Whistler, where he was seventh in his age group and missed qualifying by just two spots.

“It’s crazy competition,” Lounsbury said.

He is hoping maybe when he turns 50 in two years to have a better chance.

In the meantime, he will enjoy the thrill of the competition and training.

“It’s a good break from my job,” he said. “It’s that euphoric feeling that you get, and you get it in all three disciplines.”

For spay or neuter assistance contact Kiki at 541-549-9941

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