

KATYITES MADE OF IRON

Local Triathletes Compete in the Ironman Texas

*By Kelly Isenberger
Select Photography by Suzi Issa*

Katyite Greg Nunn recently competed in the Ironman Texas after months of training for the race



Greg Nunn has competed in many races around Texas, like the Lone Star Sprint Triathlon



Aaron Palaian and Greg Nunn before a swimming training session for the Ironman Texas



As one of the most painstaking, yet esteemed, athletic events, the Ironman has attracted many Katy triathletes looking for a chance to test the limits. Katyites Greg Nunn and Mary Castellucci recently accepted the challenge, racing in the Memorial Hermann Ironman Texas in The Woodlands. Each Ironman race requires athletes to swim, bike, and run 140.6 miles total. If that isn't challenging enough, the high temperatures often present at many races are sure to test the perseverance of all.

The Mount Everest of Races

It has been said that Ironmen do not quit. They endure grueling conditions, aches and pains, possibly bike crashes, and will crawl to get to the finish line if need be. For Castellucci and Nunn, their recent experience was no different. Given 17 hours to complete the race, they began the Ironman with a 2.4-mile swim through The Woodlands Lake. They then transitioned to their bikes to ride 112 miles northward, entering Sam Houston State Park and going back down through the rolling hills of north Houston. From there, they ran 26.2 miles – a full marathon – to the finish line on Market St. in The Woodlands.

Neither Nunn nor Castellucci are triathlete newcomers, giving them an edge over the competition. Over the past six years, Nunn has competed in triathlons of various distances, including 26 sprints, 10 Olympics, and several half Ironman triathlons. He also completed his ninth marathon in January. As a spin instructor and personal trainer, Nunn has coached, inspired, and challenged others to push themselves farther than they believed they could. For him, the Ironman was the perfect chance to do the same for himself and he knew he needed to take the opportunity to compete. "I've seen it as a Mount Everest that I thought I would try one day," Nunn shares. "I slowly worked myself towards it."

An Ironclad Determination

Castellucci has a similar story. With a background in personal training, she ran her first marathon at 39 and just completed her 10th Houston Marathon. She started doing sprint triathlons in the summers, and when the Cinco Ranch Triathlon began, she competed in it every year until it moved to Firethorne, where she competed again this past October.

She loves the long distances and tried a half Ironman. "I was going to turn 60, and I had thought about an Ironman, even though it seemed impossible," says Castellucci. "But then, I came across a woman named Bobby Williams. She had done her first Ironman when she was 60. So, I called her up, and she inspired me."

Last summer, both Nunn and Castellucci took the first step toward achieving their Ironman goals, registering for the enormous undertaking. The long journey toward the Ironman had only just begun, though. Athletes preparing for an Ironman race train for months, possibly a year, and may eventually train up to 20 hours a week.

Steeling Themselves for the Challenge

Aaron Palaian, a local coach, trained several athletes for the Memorial Hermann Ironman Texas. He explains, "There are many things that go into training for an Ironman. Physically training for the distance, knowing how to recover, eating properly, getting rest, making sure every workout has a purpose, mentally focusing, and preparing for what will go wrong are all aspects of Ironman preparation."

Because training for an Ironman is so time consuming, it can become taxing on the mind and the family. Palaian says, "Make time to be at home. Find ways to train with the kids and spouse. Stay motivated by making it exciting, even if it isn't in your training plan." Nunn advises, "You have to have your family support, starting with your spouse, because this would not be possible for me without a wife who understands this crazy idea. She puts up with me getting up early, washing my loads of workout clothes, and being tired on the weekend."

Castellucci also had the support of her family and friends, with her husband at the race cheering her on and her friends volunteering at the event, so they could see her cross the finish line. Knowing that they were on the course with her, with one in a kayak, one on a jet ski, and one at a water station, kept her going throughout the race.

Inspiring Future Ironmen

For Nunn, becoming an Ironman means having accomplished something few other people have ever done. "I am overwhelmed and thankful that I can approach 48 years old and [have been] able to train for and finish an Ironman," he shares. Castellucci enjoys the journey of training and racing. She explains, "I want to prove to older women that it is never too late. I want to be an inspiration." Allow Nunn and Castellucci's remarkable Ironman stories to inspire you, and it's entirely possible that you will begin to dream, too. **KM**

KELLY ISENBERGER is a Katy mom, whose husband recently competed in the Ironman Texas. She recently competed in a half Ironman race.



Mary Castellucci began running marathons when she was 39 and signed up for the Ironman to challenge herself



Mary Castellucci crosses the finish line of the Iron Star Triathlon

5 SECRETS ABOUT IRONMAN ATHLETES

1. All participants begin the swim at the exact same time.
2. Ironman competitors burn 8,000 to 10,000 calories or more during the race and consume chicken broth and flat soda while on the course.
3. Many race finishers choose to get an M-dot tattoo, of the letter M with a dot over it, made to look like a person.
4. The swim, bike, and run all have allotted times, and a competitor who does not make the cut-off cannot compete any further.
5. The Ironman record is 7 hours, 50 minutes, and 27 seconds, held by Luc Van Lierde.

Sources: ironman.com, ironmantexas.com, livestrong.com



Coach Aaron Palaman helps Katy athletes train for Ironman races

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