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Buffalo Twp. native uses Ironman strength to help autism fight

By [Rex Rutkoski](#)

VALLEY NEWS DISPATCH

Tuesday, February 1, 2005

Buffalo Township native Brad Henry wants to be an Ironman.

In many ways, he implies, his son Chase, who will be 6 years old next month, already is.

The North Carolina resident is training to compete in the Ironman USA Triathlon in July at Lake Placid, N.Y., hoping to earn a coveted spot in the October Ironman World Championship in Hawaii. Both events require a 2.4-mile swim (an ocean swim in Hawaii), followed by a 112-mile bike race and a 26.2-mile marathon run.

The Ironman could be the race of his life as he will be competing to raise \$250,000 for the Cure Autism Now Foundation

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and the Victory Junction Gang Camp for children with chronic or life-threatening illness.

"When our son Chase was 18 months old, it seemed as if he were drifting away from us. We didn't know what was wrong. Everyone said he would speak like other kids eventually, he was just a little behind," he said.

In June 2003, Chase was diagnosed with autism, a developmental disorder that affects communication and social interaction. "That day, our world was rocked to the core," Henry said. "Each day is a new challenge. We don't know where the finish line is, but we keep pressing on, one step at a time, hoping for a cure. Our son's life, and many other children's lives, depends on a cure."

Henry, 49, played football at Freeport High School and then at Kiski Prep. As a high school cross-country star, he broke numerous distance records. He was a 10,000-meter runner at the University of Maryland, which won the ACC Championships in 1974.

He said he fondly reminisces about life and sport in the Alle-Kiski Valley when he returns for visits with his mother, Elaine Henry of Harrison. His father was the late Dr. Boyd Henry.

Henry believes his own life and his family's experience with autism has shown him that he has an exceptional reserve of personal strength.

He is CEO of a consumer products licensing company, helping negotiate contracts with NASCAR and movie studios, and also is agent for driver Tina Gordon, the only female in the NASCAR Busch series. Boyd also is the author of "Whoever Gets To Heaven First Wins," which has a forward by J. D. Gibbs, president of Joe Gibbs Racing.

"The 100 mile-plus weeks that I put in to achieve a championship at Maryland have that familiar pain of Ironman training," Henry said. "Little did I know that pain would, years later, give me the strength to tackle two huge obstacles. One is raising an autistic child and the other is competing in the Ironman."

Both are quite a metaphor for life, he added.

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Henry compares the physical endurance required to complete the Ironman to the mental strength needed to handle life's difficult situations.

In training, his goal is to either swim, bike or run daily, or a combination of two or all three. As the race gets closer, the mileage will build to about 10,000 yards in the pool, 300 miles on the bike and 35 to 50 miles of running each week.

"Endurance training, like life, is painful but exhilarating," Henry said. "When I ran 100 mile-plus weeks at the University of Maryland, I burned out doing that because that was all I did. I didn't have a life, running was it."

The key to success, Henry said, is not to look at the total distance at first, but to train in increments.

"My first day in the pool 12 years ago was very humbling," he said.

His goal was an Olympic distance triathlon, which is a 1.5K swim, 40K bike ride and a 10K run. The swim portion would equal about 60 laps in a pool, with each lap being 25 yards.

"I was ready. I had my goggles, swim hat and was looking good. Off I went. When I got to the end of the pool and started back I thought, 'Oh, no!' and started to doggie paddle. Forty yards of swimming and I was out of breath."

The next time in the pool, however, he completed two laps, then five, 10 and 25 without stopping. He can now swim 160 continuous laps.

"I am a very average swimmer, but I relate this story to tell people not to look at all the work but to look at the goal. I hear so many stories of people who won't start anything because the task seems so huge. Instead of thinking how far you need to go just take one step at a time. Before you know it you are much farther down the road than you ever thought you could get."

On long training runs, Henry has a lot of time to reflect on life. "When the pain gets tough, I think of Chase and all the autistic children and parents who battle every day with no end in sight," he said. "I want to be able to some day see the finish line for a cure for autism."

"What a glorious day it would be to hear Chase say, 'I knew you wouldn't give up daddy.' "



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