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MEDIA STATEMENT

Graduate overcomes crippling disease to qualify for Kona

Indigenous Marathon Project 2012 graduate, Nat Heath, defied paralysis and medical advice to take out first place in his age category at the Port Macquarie Ironman on Sunday 3 May.

In 2010, Heath lost sensation in his body from the neck down and was diagnosed with Guillain-Barre Syndrome, an autoimmune condition where a person's nerves are attacked by the body's own immune defence system.

His doctors advised it would be unlikely he could participate in any kind of endurance sport in the future.

That was all the advice Heath needed to prove them wrong.

"I used the diagnosis as motivation to get better. I took it as a challenge to prove to the doctors, my friends and family that I could get my fitness back," he said.

Fast-forward two years, Heath was selected in the 2012 IMP squad and ran the 2013 Tokyo Marathon following the cancellation of the New York Marathon in 2012, another set-back that demonstrated Heath's resilience and ability to overcome obstacles.

In 2014, he became the first IMP runner to run a sub three hour marathon blitzing the Blackmores Sydney Running Festival Marathon in a time of 2:54.

Just eight months later, Heath took out the Port Macquarie Ironman in his age category (30-34) in a time of 9:28:08, qualifying him for the World Championships in the world's most iconic and prestigious Hawaii Ironman.

He worked his way through the field, exiting the swim in 18th position, then steaming to fifth place in the bike leg before bringing it home in the run with a time of 3:18 to take out the top spot in his age group.

Heath shed tears of relief when he crossed the finish line.

"It was a real sense of relief. I had two goals last year. One was to run a sub three hour marathon and the other was to qualify for Kona.

"I worked so hard for this. I put a lot of pressure on myself to achieve the goals I set for myself and I couldn't be happier. I'm really looking forward to tackling Kona – the biggest Ironman in the world," he said.

Heath finished the Port Macquarie Ironman in the top 3% of the field, claiming overall 19th position overall from 674 athletes.

Heath's passion, dedication and commitment to contributing to the lives of Indigenous Australians is obvious.

IMP provided Heath with the self-belief and confidence to relocate from his hometown of Newcastle, New South Wales where he worked at the University of Newcastle's Wollotuka Institute, to accept a lower-paid position in Sydney as Program Manager for the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME).



Heath possesses an incredible capacity to inspire others and become a role model, proving that no challenge or adversity is too great if you are willing to set goals, work hard and let nothing stand in your way.

The IMP relies on the generous support of the Australian Government Department of Health, Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport, ASICS, Qantas, Accor, Sportscover and the generosity of the Australian public.

For more information or to arrange an interview with Nat please contact Communication and Fundraising Manager: Kellie O'Sullivan (02) 6162 4750 or 0437 699 950.

More information about IMP can be found at www.imp.org.au or visit our Facebook page, The Marathon Project.

