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again come true

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LASTING LEGACY

ROBERT BUREN

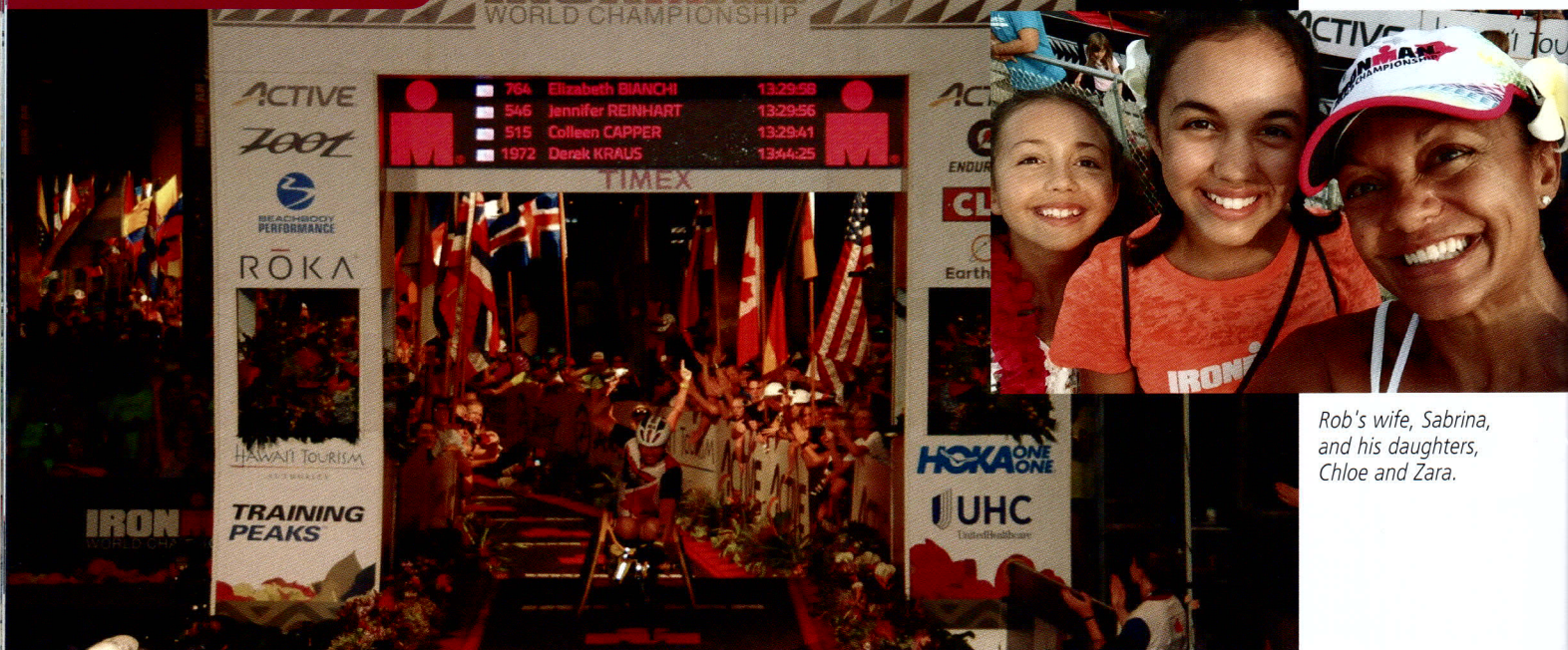
***The First Canadian with Paraplegia to Race
at the Ironman World Championship***



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Rob's wife, Sabrina, and his daughters, Chloe and Zara.

ROBERT BUREN

The First Canadian with Paraplegia to Race at the Ironman World Championship

Rob Buren's journey to the Ironman World Championship in Kona, Hawaii, this year was a little different than most others. In 2008, his enjoyment of cycling and running sparked an interest in completing a triathlon the following year, but little did he know that one fateful day in October of that year would dramatically change that goal, and the course of his life.

On October 5th, 2008, Rob broke his back in a mountain biking accident. He said, "Going from fully able-bodied to having paraplegia in the prime of my life, forced me to redefine the world and my place in it. I have a whole new appreciation for life, and how we all are trying to work our way through it." Despite this new challenge, Buren's interest in triathlon never died.

Rob lives in Oakville, with his wife and two daughters, with whom he shares a love of sports and being active. "I define myself first and foremost as a family man," he said. "Without question, the most important people in my life are my wife, Sabrina and daughters, Chloe and Zara. My girls are my motivation for almost everything I do, and my family and friends are always close at hand to help me achieve any goal that I have."

Just a few weeks before his injury, Sabrina and he completed their first half marathon. "I'm not sure

I would have called myself an athlete at the time, but with road cycling, mountain biking, running, motor-sports and chasing my kids around, I was definitely active. The day that I broke my back and lay on the forest floor waiting to be rescued, the one thing that I knew for certain, was that I had to keep moving."

Soon after his accident, his friends started training for and completing triathlons. From sprint distance all the way to Ironman, the fear of being left out, combined with the curiosity of wondering if it was even possible to do these sports with just his arms, ignited the spark he needed. "While still in rehab, Rich VanderWal brought his handcycle to my room so I could try it out. I distinctly remember the thrill of riding faster and faster laps around the hospital. A few months later, I borrowed a racing wheelchair, and with the help of Ken Thom and the Mississauga Cruisers racing team, I learned how to cram my body into the chair and begin to push. Finally, my friend Peter Carson helped me learn to swim again. Eight years later, I'm proud to say that I've completed countless races in all kinds of sports and distances, including six Half-Ironman distance triathlons and one Full Ironman (making me the first Canadian with paraplegia to complete this 226 km.

race). Sports have been a huge part of my recovery, sanity, and my new identity. So yes, now I can say with confidence that I am truly an athlete."

During a race, Rob has two helpers (called handlers) to help get him in and out of the water. Using wetsuit pants to keep his legs buoyant, and at the surface of the water he's taught himself how to swim entirely with his arms. "The hard part," he said, "is learning how to turn your body to breathe. Without having abs or legs, I drank a lot of



The marathon run started as the sun was going down and finished in the dark.



The 180 km. bike course was made extra challenging by strong crosswinds, scorching heat coming off the road and lava fields, and over 5,800 feet /1770 metres of elevation gain. Rob completed the bike in 8:15:59.



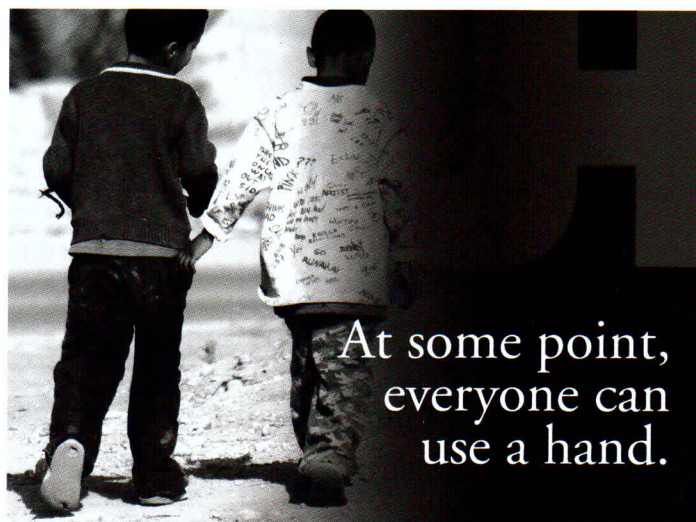
Rob started in the last wave of athletes and finished the 3.8 km. swim in 1:35:22. His handlers carried him through the fresh water showers to try and wash the salt of before starting the bike race.

water during my first few attempts to swim." He then gets into his handcycle for the bike portion of the triathlon, followed by his racing wheelchair for the run. Right from the beginning, he's always enjoyed challenging himself; to see how far and how fast he could go. Before the five year anniversary of his injury, Rob and his wife Sabrina completed their first Ironman Triathlon in Louisville Kentucky. The Ironman race is a 3.8 km. open water swim, followed by at 180 km. bike and a 42.2 km. (marathon distance) run. While he felt extremely proud of his accomplishment, the only thing he thought could top it would be to race in Kona, Hawaii, at the Ironman World

Championships. This would be the ultimate challenge. At this event, 2,300 of the world's top triathletes need to earn their chance to race for the crown. This is the Mecca for long distance triathlon, often referred to as The Big Dance. For athletes like Rob, classified as Handcyclists, there are only four male handcycling spots available to be won each year, and only three races, in remote locations around the world, over a three week period, at which to qualify for them. Rob narrowly missed earning a spot at the half distance Ironman 70.3 in Luxemburg in 2015, but qualified a year later at Ironman 70.3 Buffalo Springs Lake, Texas. He was the first Canadian with paraplegia to qualify for and ultimately complete the Ironman World Championship.

"I put my head down and worked towards this for over two years," Rob said. "To get to Kona was the ultimate goal and dream come true. Saying this now, it's actually quite funny that I've referred to it as a dream come true, as there's so much pain and suffering involved to build the strength

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everyone can
use a hand.

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and endurance needed. On top of that, training for up to eight hours a day by yourself can get pretty lonely. Because most able-bodied athletes cycle faster than me, but run slower, and there are only a handful of paratriathletes in Canada, it's hard to find training partners. Fortunately, for a few of my long bikes rides and all of my swimming in the pool, I had a few good friends to train with. But still, these last 10 months were definitely the toughest training and racing of my life."

Rob crossed the finish line in 13:30:26, earning himself second place in his division. "It was a feeling like none other," he said. "Coming into the finish chute the crowds went insane, and I high-fived everyone I could without coming to a stop. Climbing the platform I heard my name, and stopped to pump the sky a few times. I did it!"

Now that he's accomplished his goal of racing in the most iconic event in the world of

triathlon, Rob is taking a short break to recover, and decide on what his next challenge will be. "I know I'll always want to go faster in my sports, but training 20 hours a week for the full Ironman distance is difficult to sustain indefinitely, and I'd really like to pursue some of my other passions as well."

In addition to sports, Rob is happy on the stage. From a young age he attended the choir school in London, Ontario, and fondly remembers getting out in front and making himself heard. This continued into his university and business years. He said, "Since breaking my back I've had many great opportunities to share my story and what I've learned so far on this journey. From elementary schools and corporations, to NPOs and TEDx, I love the challenge of adapting my message for the audience and value the feedback from attendees. My hope is that how I've

responded to my accident can inspire others to make the most of the abilities that they have and encourage individuals to find their motivation to achieve whatever they set their minds to."

If Rob's not doing something with his family working out, or speaking, you can bet he's working on some business idea. "I've always liked the satisfaction and accomplishment that comes from working hard. Starting with a paper route at the age of 10 and most recently working for Microsoft Canada and a small business I co-founded with a couple of friends in 2007 (www.sector.ca), my career has been diverse and extremely rewarding. This year my entrepreneurial goals include doing more motivational speaking and starting something that will make the world a better place."

You can follow Rob on his blog Rock the Chair at www.RockTheChair.com. ●