

Athlete Spotlight Reflection: Ironman Woody Freese

Looking at Woodrow Freese you may not immediately believe he is an endurance athlete. The current Director of Residential Affairs at Clark University, Freese is almost sixty years old, six-foot-four, and 215 pounds. These facts make it only the more impressive that he has competed in over thirty triathlons. All the more impressive is that a majority of these triathlons were of the Ironman variety. An Ironman race consists of a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bike ride, and a 26.2-mile run. During his time with our class he specifically spoke mainly about the Ironman World Championship, a race that takes place in Kona, Hawaii. This race is regarded as the toughest single day athletic competition in the world due to its grueling tasks paired with Kona's high winds, extreme humidity, and choppy waters (Jahnke, 2012).

Freese shared so many detailed experiences with our class that he has had not only with Kona but with all his races. One of the most interesting parts about the Ironman race is the packing list. Freese explained all that goes into packing for the race and what extra levels of travel insurance must be added when flying all the way across the country. He told us about a company that specializes in the transportation of triathlon bicycles. These bikes are by no means cheap so shipping them is very important. Freese explained that there are drop-spots around the country you can bring the bike to. From there it will be driven to California, placed on a shipping container, and sail to Kona. The other interesting part of the packing list is the nutrients. Once you reach the racecourse you either have to accept the food and brands of power bars, etc. they offer, or your only other option is to pack all the necessary food items whether that be protein bars or your ideal sports beverage. This part really interested me because I know a lot of athletes become transfixed on their diet and will only eat specific meals or food items prior to a

competition. Switching up your pre-race rituals can have a grueling mental effect, so it was fascinating to hear how much work goes into simply packing for the race.

The presentation was not only exciting as we were able to learn so much about such a world-renowned competition, but it also had so many connections to our exercise physiology course. Something on my mind throughout the presentation was exactly what sort of foods Woody was consuming during his race in order to keep his metabolic system running and providing him with enough energy for the 14-hour duration. It is clear Woody's metabolism was operating under the oxidative system as we know this to be the only metabolic pathway that could last for that amount of time (McArdle et al., 2016). His diet during the race consisted of sports beverage, Clif Bloks, Succeed caps, and chicken broth (Jahnke, 2012). The use of Clif Bloks reminded me of the quote, "Fat burns in a carbohydrate flame." Even though Freese was definitely tapping into his lipid stores for energy during the race due its oxidative nature, his body still required the constant intake of carbohydrates in the form of Clif Bloks or sports drink because the Krebs Cycle cannot run efficiently without sufficient glucose. This is because without sufficient glucose, glycolysis cannot produce pyruvate, thus slowing down the production of oxaloacetate, the molecule needed to condense with acetyl-coA to begin the Krebs Cycle (McArdle et al., 2016).

Another part of Freese's presentation that directly correlates with our knowledge of exercise physiology was when he spoke about recovery and his attempts to reduce "lactate acid" build up. What he was actually referring to was simply lactate. He mentioned that he would often train for the marathon portion of Ironman by running in the pool as it was less impact. This is a very common misconception but as we know, lactate is not responsible for muscle soreness, it actually flushed from the muscles typically 30 to 60 minutes post exercise (Hastie, slide 13). We

also know that lactate is only formed under anaerobic conditions where there is insufficient oxygen present. Woody is most likely not building up too much lactate then as his long duration workouts would be operating under the oxidative system with sufficient oxygen present.

We were fortunate enough to have the chance to ask Woody several questions about his training, diet, and recovery process all in regard to Ironman. I specifically asked about his routine the day and night before the race. He reflected that for Kona all the athletes eat a very large breakfast and lunch the day before the race. He emphasized the importance of drinking plenty of water the days leading up to an Ironman but especially for Kona due the excessive humidity. He noted that the dinner the night before is very light, usually just a salad. I was also curious as to what a night of sleep before the race was like in regard to any nervousness. He said due to his early wake-up time (3:30 A.M.) getting to bed by eight the night before was imperative. He did explain though that studies show the sleep you get two night prior to the race is going to reflect how well rested you end up feeling on race day.

This presentation definitely opened my eyes to the amount of opportunities there are in the exercise physiology realm. A solid understanding of metabolism and the concepts that go hand in hand with it, could have a dramatic impact on the training of not just an Ironman but any athlete trying to optimize their performance. Professionally this presentation has definitely inspired me to look beyond just the world of “professional sports” when it comes to the field of improving athletic performance. There are so many different types of athletes out there that need help training rather than just your stereotypical football or baseball players. Triathlons and triathletes represent a large athletic population who may be in search of a professional to advise them on diet or train them for their unique style of athletics.

Personally, this presentation and Woody as a person have inspired me. It may sound cliché, but you truly can do anything you set your mind to. It does not have to be an Ironman per say, but we as individuals are so much more capable of accomplishing our goals than we know.

References

- Hastie, M. (n.d.). Lecture 3 anaerobic glycolysis [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from https://courses.lasell.edu/courses/7953/files/1068658?module_item_id=332455
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- McArdle, W. D., Katch, F. I., & Katch, V. L. (2016). *Essentials of Exercise Physiology*. Wolters Kluwer.