

BETHANN TELFORD

An Unstoppable Athlete Fulfills a Dream



BETHANN TELFORD CROSSING THE FINISH LINE AT IRONMAN LAKE PLACID.

Most runners dream of running the Boston Marathon. For 40-year-old BethAnn Telford of Fairfax, Va., this took on a special urgency when she was diagnosed with a brain tumor in 2004, after she felt a strange pop and experienced balance and concentration problems while running the Marine Corps Marathon. She completed the race, but the diagnosis stunned her. “My life changed in an instant,” she says.

WHAT WAS YOUR TREATMENT LIKE? I had brain surgery, and my treatment left me tired and nauseous, and I developed difficulty with my bladder function. My left side is now weaker than my right, which has changed my gait and stride and has caused foot injuries and stress fractures. I also had a partial removal of my pituitary gland, which affects my temperature regulation, especially after a strenuous workout. I tend to get very cold right after an event and have to be careful to warm

up quickly. After the Richmond Marathon, my body went into hypothermia and I was rushed to the hospital.

AS A LIFELONG ATHLETE, WHAT WAS YOUR REACTION TO YOUR DIAGNOSIS? I was determined to continue on with a normal life as much as possible. I had to learn to walk, talk and move all over again, but I told my doctors that I still planned on competing and that I would try to live my life with no limitations. But one year after my first operation, my doctors found that my tumor was re-growing and I needed more surgery.

SINCE YOUR ILLNESS, YOU BECAME A TRIATHLETE AND HAVE EVEN COMPLETED TWO IRONMAN TRIATHLONS. TELL ME HOW YOUR ENTRY INTO THE BOSTON MARATHON CAME ABOUT. I worked hard over the spring and summer of 2009 and felt confident I could run a 3:50 at Marine Corps Marathon to qualify for Boston. But from the

start I just couldn’t get comfortable. I even broke down and cried at Mile 20 on the 14th Street Bridge thinking that I just couldn’t make it. I ended up missing the qualifying time by one minute and 16 seconds.

But I was determined to not give up. The Richmond Marathon was only three weeks later, so I immediately registered for it. Race day was cool and rainy, but I felt much better. Around the 18-mile mark, I knew it would be close and I fought to maintain my pace for the last few miles of the race. I finished in 3:49:43 and qualified for Boston.

The next evening, I went to the Boston Marathon website and was devastated to see that the race was sold out. I called the Boston Athletic Association but was told that there was nothing they could do. I was dejected and frustrated; I thought my chances of running the 2010 Boston Marathon were over. But on December 1 at 4:12 p.m., I received a call from the Boston Marathon. I thought it was a prank, but it wasn’t. They had received countless phone calls, e-mails and letters from my supporters explaining my circumstances and requesting them to consider allowing me to race. “Beth Ann,” they said, “you’re going to Boston.”

HOW HAS YOUR TRAINING FOR BOSTON BEEN GOING? In December I received a pacemaker implant, and I haven’t been able to do much bending or lifting, but I’ll be ready. I secretly have a goal of finishing the marathon under 4:00, and my long-term goal is to compete at the Ford Ironman World Championship in Hawaii, not just for myself, but for those that lost their battles or are suffering from brain disease and cannot be there.

WHAT ARE YOU INVOLVED IN NOW? I’ve completed a lot of short runs, both for fun and to support various causes, but the cause closest to my heart is the National Brain Tumor Society’s Race for Hope, which I’ve run every year since 2006. I’ve also founded TeamBT (teambt.org) to help raise funds for brain tumor research. **CM**

Are you a competitor, or do you know a competitor who would like to share their story? Send your ideas to imacompetitor@competitorgroup.com.