

NEWS

My Kona: Bethann Telford



Through Kona Inspired, Bethann Telford will embark on the race of a lifetime this October.

By Kendra Mahon

If you followed Kona Inspired, a new and exciting program for 2012, then you are probably familiar with Bethann Telford. Diagnosed with brain cancer in 2005, she was forced to take a time out from her normally active lifestyle to undergo surgery. As part of her recovery process, Telford had to teach herself how to walk again. It's pretty safe to say that the idea of not only running again in the near future, but of racing competitively, would be out of the question.

A month later, Telford entered a local 5K race, the first in what would be a long string of acts that would prove what a strong and determined individual she truly is. Urged by doctors, family and friends to walk the race rather than run, Telford took their advice until she was about halfway through the event. Seeing her father cheering for her on the sidelines sparked something inside Telford and she started running. "He just started screaming and yelling for me," she remembers with the hint of a smile in her voice. "He was the one that always knew I would persevere." Telford ran the rest of the race.

That same year, Bethann continued to push herself and competed in the Marine Corps Marathon. She then proceeded to take on several sprint and Olympic-distance triathlons, as well as IRONMAN 70.3 Eagleman in 2007. "It wasn't before I realized I could do a 70.3 that I really started to think about the possibility of doing a full IRONMAN," Telford says. In 2008 and 2009, she tackled IRONMAN Lake Placid. Nothing was going to slow down Telford.

Throughout all of these races, training and battling her cancer, Telford had one giant dream that she refused to give up on: making it to Kona. For years, she entered the IRONMAN Lottery Program, hoping to be one of the few chosen. This year, with the launch of Kona Inspired, IRONMAN athletes and fans had the chance to vote for the most inspiring, determined and dedicated individuals, helping them achieve their lifelong dreams of competing on the Big Island. Telford seized the opportunity to tell her story to the world and the world responded. In round three, she received the majority community vote that would send her to Kailua-Kona in October.

On July 18, 2012, Telford was in a work meeting when she got a phone call that would make it a little hard to focus for the rest of the day. A frequent public speaker at schools in her area, Telford has made and kept many connections with students. It happened to be a young high school girl who phoned Telford first that morning. "She called me and said, 'Miss Beth, you won!'" Telford recalls. "I said, 'Don't lie to me!' I couldn't believe it. So, I put her on speaker phone while I was in the meeting and told her to hold on. I called my partner at NASA and he was in a meeting, too, but I asked him if he had saw that I won - I wasn't near a computer. He got on his iPad, and everyone else in the meeting got on their iPads and after a few seconds, they all started screaming and I started screaming." The joy and complete disbelief that still lingers in her voice as she tells the story is overwhelming. As she talks, I can picture the moment perfectly in my head and can't help but plaster a gigantic smile on my face. Telford then called her dad and told him the exciting news. "I said, 'Daddy, I won!' and he said 'WHAT?' and I asked him if he was proud of me," she remembers. "He started crying and after a few minutes he said, 'BethAnn, are you taking me with you?'" Telford laughs. Her father, mother, and two friends - one being her coach - will be traveling to Hawai'i with her as supporters.

Although she is grateful and excited for her parents and friends to join her on this journey, there is someone else Telford hopes will be able to make the trip as well: 6-year-old Anya, a girl from her hometown who is also battling brain cancer. The Team Inspiration organization is working to compile enough air miles to get Anya and her mother to Kona so that she can see Telford race. "I call her my 'bestest friend,'" Telford says of the 6-year-old. "She's been coming to my events for a while now to watch me and it's just great to have her there. My whole thing is that I'm not doing this for me, but for others in the brain tumor community - especially for the kids." Team Inspiration will be creating a special lei for Telford with the names of children suffering from cancer that Telford will be racing for. "I'm doing it for the people who are unable to. Some are my age, but I feel it's tougher for the children. I'll be taking them with me in my spirit," she says. "Some of them have passed, so I know they will definitely be there with me." Telford, who is still in chemotherapy, firmly believes that it is these individuals that continue to push her through and give her strength. "Every moment [of the race] will be for someone."

Next year, Telford has a major surgery scheduled. "This may be the last big thing I do," she says, "but if it is, I'm really happy." When I ask her what she is looking forward to the most in Kona, her answers put a lump in my throat. "I'm looking forward to the finish line, when I prove that I never gave up on myself. I might not be here next year, but I proved that it's possible to do so many things no matter what your disability is," she says. "I look forward to my parents seeing me cross the finish line, because I know they'll be worried about me. I just feel honored that I've been picked and I want all the people who voted for me to be truly proud of who they've chosen."

To learn more about BethAnn and her fight, visit www.teambt.org. To view BethAnn's winning Kona Inspired video, and to check out others, [click here](#).

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