

Triathlete takes his body to next level

by **Richard Obert** - Oct. 4, 2008 04:54 PM
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Brian Kochert didn't play sports in high school. The closest thing he came to competition was intramurals. His junior year at Tempe McClintock he weighed 255 pounds.

He called himself an outsider, but not a social hermit. He had friends and goals.



But ever since he gave one of his kidneys to his mother Cathy nearly 10 years ago, Kochert has been driven to see how far he can push his body.

Pickup basketball turned into 10Ks that evolved into triathlons.

Now 42, at 6 feet 3, 188 pounds, Kochert is winding down six months of training for his third Ironman - the Ford Ironman World Championship on Saturday in Kona, Hawaii.

Kochert knows he would never be going had he not been among the lucky 200 people whose names were drawn in a lottery from nearly 7,000 worldwide entries. The reward: A 2.4-mile ocean swim, followed by a 112-mile bike race, followed by a 26.2-mile run that has to be completed within a 17-hour time limit.

Kochert will compete in the 40-44 age group, still quite competitive. He completed his first Ironman in Arizona in 2005 and finished in 12 1/2 hours. Last year in Austria, he knocked an hour off his time. But the humidity, ever-present wind and rolling hills should make this the most grueling of all for a guy who was just trying to prove that he can do whatever he wanted with one kidney.

He is grateful just to get to a race of this caliber.

"These are top-notch people competing," Kochert said. "I don't want to screw it up.

"I'm hoping for something under 12 1/2 hours."

Before finishing his answer, he anticipated another question, and asked it himself: "Do people think I'm nuts? Yes. All the time."

But he has a will and a drive, and a loving wife of 6 1/2 years, Tina, who supports his passion. They have no kids, so there is flexibility and freedom to devote the necessary time to get into shape.

"He could have far worse habits," said Tina, who will hike and occasionally run with her husband but usually gets on a bike to follow him on his training runs. "Every time he does one of

these things, we talk about it first. We both make the commitment. He does it physically, and I have to do it mentally."

Kochert, who works in a dental lab, regularly competed in shorter triathlons, but the temptation became too great when Arizona was awarded an Ironman competition in 2005.

"I always told people that I would never do one, and then Arizona got one and I had to do it," he said.

He doesn't believe in putting limits on himself.

But nothing he does athletically compares to that June day in 1999 that his 59-year-old mother was laid up in a hospital on dialysis. She needed a kidney transplant.

Doctors looked at Brian's brother and sister, but Brian's kidney matched up the closest.

"It was kind of a no-brainer," Brian said.

He was left with a 12-inch scar, and his mother died less than a month later from another issue, an ailing heart. But Kochert says he finds great satisfaction in knowing that the kidney worked and, although he doesn't advertise it, he is open about telling people that one can function normally after donating a kidney.

"I want people to know it's possible," he said. "It's just one kidney. A kidney donation is rewarding."

Building up to this race, Kochert says he averages about 16 hours a week of training.

He swam with the masters club at Arizona State and joined a Phoenix masters track club to train with other athletes.

Donating the kidney, getting married and competing in his first Ironman were all life-changing events.

Although the race is long and can get lonely, he know he is not alone.

"If he was to be doing this as a one-man show, it would be difficult," Tina said. "He has the whole village behind him."

Tina will be in Hawaii for the Ironman, but she'll only see him at the start - and finish, hopefully less than 13 hours later.

"You sit there for all those hours and wonder what kind of mental state is he in and what kind of physical state is he in," Tina said. "I try to get a read on him and send him my mental vibes to help him along."