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Judge Cynthia Newton Remains an Ironman Gold All World Athlete Despite Injury

CLEARWATER - For the second year in a row, Pinellas-Pasco Circuit Judge Cynthia Newton has been designated an Ironman Gold All World Athlete, which means she is the top one percent of her age group who compete worldwide in Ironman triathlon competitions.

Judge Newton, 52, has managed to hold on to her special distinction despite the fact that, in one of her races, she ran with a stress fracture in her left foot, a painful condition that required her to repeatedly pop 800 milligrams of Ibuprofen into her mouth as she bicycled and ran.

And that wasn't the only injury she faced in 2018.

Judge Newton learned she was a 2019 Ironman Gold All World Athlete last month.

The designation was based on Judge Newton's performance in three races last year -- a full Ironman in Houston, Texas, on April 28, a half-Ironman in Santa Cruz on Sept. 9, and a second full Ironman on Nov. 18.

For the uninitiated, an Ironman is a grueling, if often scenic, race. It consists of a 112-mile bicycle ride, a 26.2-mile run, and a 2.4-mile swim.

As she started training at the beginning of last year, Judge Newton hoped to perform better in the Houston Ironman in 2018 than she had in 2017, when her unfamiliarity with the swim course in Lake Woodlands cost her crucial minutes.

But then, in January, Judge Newton was diagnosed with tendonitis in her left foot, a condition her podiatrist attributed to over-training. She wore a boot for two weeks, hobbling to her courtroom in downtown St. Petersburg to hear civil cases. All told, she couldn't run for a month.



The Ironman in Houston, Texas

To compensate, she trained more than usual on her bicycle, and she swam more, too, thinking she might have to perform better during those two parts of the upcoming triathlon to make up for any possible shortcomings during the foot race.

Her plan worked.

She completed the swim portion that April day in one hour and 11 minutes, compared with one hour and 26 minutes the previous year. Likewise, she completed the bicycle portion in five hours and 18 minutes, compared with five hours and 44 minutes the year before.

And, as expected, she used more time running – four hours and 35 minutes, compared with four hours and 23 minutes the year before.

Still, her overall time last years was better than it was the year before: 11 hours and 17 minutes compared with 12 hours and one minute, which was then her personal best for an Ironman.

After the Texas race, Judge Newton rested for a month, and decided to take a break from Ironman races by competing in a comparably shorter race in Cleveland in August – the Olympic Distance National Championship.

How much shorter? A swim .9 miles long compared to one 2.4 miles long, a bicycle ride 25 miles long compared to one 112 miles long, and a run 6.2 miles long compared to one 26.2 miles long.

After the Cleveland race, Judge Newton felt comfortable enough to start training for Ironman competitions again, setting her sights on a half-Ironman in Santa Cruz that was to take place on Sept. 9.

It ended up being her best race of the year, with a time of 5 hours and 34 minutes, so she decided to register for her first full Ironman since Texas, one in Cozumel that was to take place on Nov. 18.



The bike portion in Cozumel

Three weeks before the Mexico race, however, while she was running in the hilly countryside of San Antonio, in Pasco County, she suffered a stress fracture. She couldn't walk for hours. She stopped training. Her podiatrist gave her a prescription for pills containing 800 milligrams for Ibuprofen.

Judge Newton decided to go to Cozumel anyway. She had paid the \$735 entry fee for the race, and there were friends there as well as her coach. She came up with a plan: She knew she could swim, she knew she could ride her bicycle. It was a matter of whether she would be able to do the run.

She ended up taking four of the pills – one during the bicycle ride, and one for each of the three straight-and-back loops for the run.

"It hurt really bad," Judge Newton said, "I just mentally broke it down into course sections," tackling and finishing one at a time.

"The crowd was really great," she said. "They were cheering, 'Vamos!'"

"The last thing I was going to do was Not finish the race," she said. "The time was 12 hours and 35 minutes on a broken foot."

While not her best performance, it was enough to garner the Gold All World Athlete designation. She is ranked 50 out of 4,922 athletes in the world in the 50-54 age group, and her rank among fellow athletes in the United States is 22.

She returned to St. Petersburg, and was in a boot for a month for a diagnosed stress fracture.

Judge Newton has no regrets, and plans on competing in future races.

"There are so many injuries in Ironman (competitions)," she said, and she doesn't know of anyone who hasn't had any who remains committed to the sport.

And there is always that elusive, perfect race, the one in which an athlete does everything right regardless of a particular course's challenges.

Judge Newton doesn't believe she has had one yet.