

Letter to IRONMAN Officials from Mike Levine, Pancreatic Cancer Survivor

My name is Mike Levine, and I am requesting special consideration for entry into the 2017 Ironman World Championship in Kona on October 14. I hope you will find my story truly inspirational and representative of the Ironman motto: “Anything is Possible”

I know you get a lot of requests. There are so many deserving people. I’ve seen the race. I’ve done the race—twice. I know its redemptive power, its ability to transform lives, to restore faith, to straighten crooked paths.

I’m not looking for redemption, I’m looking for the Ironman to help me close the door gracefully, but with passion on a wonderful life. More importantly, I am looking to bring hope, inspiration and awareness to an undeserved disease sorely in need of support.

In July of 2015, I was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, our nation’s deadliest cancer. Sadly, less than 20% survive the first year after diagnosis. My own 2 year battle, puts me in a small circle of survivors. For now, the disease is “calm” as my oncologist says. But I am still a stage 4 cancer patient and my future will not be long term. The end for me will come. The question before me now is, what form will that end take?

As a two-time Ironman finisher and former Tri-Fed USA All American, it would have been difficult for me to simply sit and wait, mourning my own death. Yet, until a few months ago, I would never have considered the Ironman as part of my exit plan. Then I met Kathleen McCartney, who along with Julie Moss did so much to put the sport of triathlon on the map. Ironically, Kathleen was my inspiration to compete in the Oct. 1982 Ironman event. She and I started training together, lightly at first, with me lasting minutes at a time and Kathleen offering patient and steady encouragement. We became fast friends, and with Kathleen’s support, I got stronger and stronger. Like my own personal Cinderella, she brought joy and enthusiasm back into my life. It was through and with Kathleen that I found a new determination and motivation to fight my disease—not to the bitter end, but to the very best end possible.

All the while, slowly, gradually the unlikely thought of returning to Kona, of starting the race and actually getting to the finish line began to form.

Is it a realistic goal? Like I said, I’ve done the race twice, so I know it is. My doctors have cleared me. Come October, I’ll be ready, I just need a race number!

I have the strong support of PanCAN, the global leader in the fight against pancreatic cancer, who will be supporting me every step of the way, both emotionally and by telling my story to inspire others. I think this is a great story—a great story for Ironman, but also in the cause of this dreadful disease. We need awareness, funding and most of all, hope. We need a tale, not of despair, but of optimism. I have a feeling that the image of Kathleen and I crossing the finish line together, hands held high in victory would be just the ticket.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.