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THE IMPACT OF SUCCESS

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Jason Sissel '07

Going the distance to cure pediatric cancer

Forty miles into the race, **Jason Sissel '07** was feeling the heat.

It wasn't just because the temperature in the Canadian countryside had risen into the high 90s. Sissel, 33, was cutting it close on time: In order to make the Ultraman Canada triathlon's 12-hour deadline for Day 3, he needed to pick up the pace for the final 12.4 miles of the run.



This was no easy feat. Sissel was already feeling spent, having swum 6.2 miles and cycled 260 miles during the first two days of the race. And while he had completed a few marathons, he had never attempted to run 52.4 miles before.

But the Kellogg graduate was determined to reach the finish line — and for good reason. He was racing for his foundation, Endure to Cure, which supports pediatric cancer treatment centers such as Children's Memorial Hospital, Texas Children's Hospital and University of Chicago Comer Children's Hospital. Sissel founded the organization in 2008 in memory of his grandfather, who died of cancer in 2007. He has pledged to raise \$1 million by 2012 via sponsorship for his "Endurance Campaign," which includes climbing the highest peaks on all seven continents, completing multiple Ironman and Ultraman triathlons, and cycling 4,000 miles from California to Massachusetts. Other athletes on "Team Endure to Cure" will participate in endurance events of their choosing to raise an additional \$2 million.

So far, Sissel has raised several thousand dollars through individual donations and sponsorship from companies such as KINeSYS, Rudy Project, CompuTrainer and Element Multisport. He is still seeking corporate sponsors. Several Kellogg graduates, including **Patrick D. Thompson '06**, **Lanre Sarumi '07** and **Matthew T. Voss '98**, are also supporting the cause by serving on Endure to Cure's board.

Remarkably, throughout his life, Sissel wasn't an endurance athlete. In fact, while he was involved in sports during high school and college, he had never run farther than a 5K.

His first experience with an endurance sport was in 2005, when he completed his first marathon. A few years later he climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. While standing on the top of the mountain, Sissel reflected on a conversation that he once had with his grandfather, and experienced a breakthrough of sorts.

"My grandfather asked me to carry on his spirit after he passed away," says Sissel. "I realized that I could do that by pairing up a series of rather challenging and inspiring events — like cycling across the U.S. and climbing mountains — with fundraising for a cancer-related cause."

A month later, Sissel resigned from his job at Robert Baird & Co. and launched Endure to Cure out of his home office in Chicago. He decided to focus solely on pediatric cancer because "out of all cancer patients, kids have the best chance of survival and making a difference after they survive," he explains. "Furthermore, a lot of the research and treatments that originate from pediatric oncology can successfully be applied to adult cancers."

Sissel kept that in mind as he approached the finish line of the Ultraman race. By that time, he was so fatigued and "in a zone" that he lost the ability to hear, he says. As soon as he crossed the finish line — with three minutes and 25 seconds to spare — he fell to the ground and passed out. When he woke, he suffered temporary memory loss and couldn't recognize the people around him.

"It was scary, but it was worth it," he says. "I mean, is it scary for kids with cancer to feel like they might die, trying to fight such an ugly disease? I don't know what it's like to go through round after round of chemo, but I imagine it is scary for any child to go through. I hope my experiences can at least be a source of hope and inspiration to each one of them to keep fighting."

For more information on Endure to Cure or to make a donation, visit www.enduretocure.org •