

UAMS College of Medicine Student Participates in International Ironman Championship in France

Many people have bucket list items. For some, it may be attending medical school. For others, it may be participating in the Ironman World Championship. Brendon Hogge thought, “Why not do both ... simultaneously?”

Hogge, a second-year medical student in the UAMS College of Medicine on the UAMS Northwest Regional Campus in Fayetteville, recently competed in the Ironman World Championship in Nice, France. This race is a 2.4 mile swim, 112 mile bike, and 26.2 mile run, with entrance by qualification only.

Hogge has been doing Ironman races since undergraduate school, but he didn’t really plan on qualifying for the international competition this year. But he did just that Oct. 15 with a personal best time in the Waco, Texas, Ironman.

“My goal in every Ironman competition is just to cross that finish line,” Hogge said. “I did not go in thinking I would qualify for the World Championship. I wore newer shoes that day and got a blister the size of a credit card, but I ended up just running through it. The faster you run, the sooner it is over.”

Hogge got into sports when he was young because his parents always encouraged physical fitness for Hogge and his siblings. Hogge’s brothers, in fact, did his first Olympic-distance triathlon with him.

“My parents wanted us to stay active,” he said. “So, I did all the sports in high school that I could. In undergraduate school, I had to put some of that on hold because I was studying so hard to prepare for med school.”

But after “doom scrolling for too many hours” one night as an undergrad, he decided to make a change and found something to push and challenge himself a little further. That’s how he ended up doing his first Ironman competition.

“I’m slowest at running,” Hogge said. “Biking is my favorite. When you’re biking, you’re on top of the world until the last quarter of the course. When you finish the bike, you’re dead tired, and you think, ‘Well, all I have left is to run a full marathon.’”

Hogge says that last part with a laugh. Then he continues, “You cross the finish line and vow to never do another. Then a week or two later, you start looking for another race.”

Obviously, a person doesn’t just wake up one day and compete in an Ironman race. There is a lot of training and preparation that goes into it beforehand. Hogge trained and competed in the race while also keeping up with the fast-paced schedule of a medical student.

The challenge, Hogge said, was how to work the training into his med school schedule. For one thing, he would often bike from his home in Bentonville to the UAMS campus in Fayetteville — about 30 miles one way, or a 60-mile bike commute to and from campus. A fellow student would sometimes join him on those rides.

“Swimming you can train in an hour or so,” he said. “For biking, you really have to get in six hours, so on Saturdays I’ll get up at 3 a.m. and bike before the heat hits. Running takes a long time too. To mix training with studying, I use med school flash cards while I do my warm-up and cool-down walks.”

Hogge is also the father of his 3-year-old daughter. While Hogge’s wife got to join him for the trip to Nice, which coincided with their sixth wedding anniversary, their daughter stayed home with her grandparents. Having a daughter and competing in Ironman races while in med school is challenging, Hogge said, but he sees it as part of a bigger picture.

“Doing an Ironman is hard, and medical school is hard, and while mixing the two together is a little crazy, it helps give balance to my life,” Hogge said. “A well-rounded life is so important. I’m a med student. I’m a husband. I’m a dad. I’m an Ironman competitor and a believer in Jesus Christ. Just one of these things is not all of me. These things together make me who I am.”

As for the race in Nice, as always, his goal was to finish, which he did. He said the weather was perfect and other than losing all of his race snacks because of a pothole in the first five miles of the bike portion, everything went smoothly.

Other highlights included getting to introduce his wife to the host family he lived with when he studied abroad in Spain nine years ago and participating in the “Parade of Nations,” where he marched with the other U.S. racers (about 600 of the 2,500 competitors were from the U.S.). “Oh, and the French bakeries were sublime,” he said.

Once back in the states, he and his wife had a joyful reunion with their daughter, and Hogge has settled back into his life as a medical student. Once out of medical school, he wants to focus on emergency medicine.

Are there any more races in his future?

“Everything just hurts after a big race,” Hogge said. “You just want time to pass so you can heal. And then, well, you catch yourself looking at race schedules again.”

True to fashion, Hogge did a half Ironman in Memphis with one of his brothers a few weeks after the competition in France and plans to race Ironman Texas in Houston in spring 2024.