Over the past few weeks, there have been a lot of stories coming out of Coeur d'Alene regarding this year's Ironman CDA on June 24. My sources tell me it was a difficult day between the very choppy water for the swim and a challenging new bike course. Reports put the waves at up to 3 feet, though from what I could see on the live video, I highly doubt that the whitecaps I saw were on top of 3 foot swells. Having grown up next to the St. Lawrence River, I know my whitecaps!

They gave the participants the opportunity to not do the swim - and to simply make it an "Iron-duathlon". This decision wasn't made until just prior to the swim start.

I have no difficulty whatsoever with keeping participants safe. I totally understand the rationale - and the liability involved.

But let's face it - Ironman SHOULD be difficult. Ironman SHOULD have it's own set of risks. Isn't that part of the appeal in attempting it?

This is but a microcosm of our world today.

There was a time when there were far more risks involved in attempting the Ironman triathlon. Initially, you could only do it on the Big Island of Hawaii, you dealt with whatever Madame Pele dished up as far as conditions go, and you sucked it up and lived with it and got on with it - or, you didn't. The decision was a personal one - and always is at every point in the day. Do I go on, or do I stop? Am I in harm's way? Or do I keep moving in a forward direction, regardless of the cost?

Nowadays, Ironman is in a padded world. The organizers want to make it as safe as possible. We want to make everything in North America as safe as possible. We have a right to a safe race, correct? Yes, we have the right to be safe ...

... but ... well, we also have self-responsibility - to partake in the event, or not. It's all about

decisions.

You don't like the swim conditions? Well, first of all, it's supposed to be a challenge - because it's a bloody Ironman! If you trained with that in mind, then you were probably ok with everything. But if not, then you would have had to make a difficult decision. It's never easy to make it, but somewhere along the line, it is YOUR responsibility.

Sure, it may sound like it's easy for me to say this - I wasn't there. True. But I can speak from the experience of having raced the distance - and I know that undertaking Ironman should not be taken lightly. There are risks. It SHOULD be a challenge, and we should all accept that on any given day, it could involve more or less risk. But - that's why we do it, isn't it? To push ourselves, to find our limits, and to press beyond them?

As they say, if it was easy, EVERYONE would do it.

Oh, wait a second ... everyone IS doing it. Registration for these events continues to grow in leaps and bounds. Suddenly it's the Marathon of the 2000's ... or the Marathon of the X Generation.

What does that mean?

There was a time when the marathon was for the freaks of the world. The only people that even thought of it were the die-hard runners who wanted to pursue the next challenge. Most had already run 5Ks and 10Ks and half marathons and now the next (logical) challenge was to go for the legendary marathon. This was a progression of the athlete's mind-set, not a "to-do" on a list to complete before they put me in a pine box.

But somewhere along the line, marathons became "accessible". Having an active population is inherently good ... but suddenly marathons became accessible to the non-runner. Even if you weren't a runner, you could go on a 6 month training program, survive your marathon, cross it off the list of to-dos, and then perhaps even stop running (since running wasn't about lifestyle, it was about "completion" and "accomplishment").

This may purely be a symptom of our society, in which everything is based upon who has the most toys or who's done the most or who's been to the most exotic places.

And then ... it happened to Ironman. And the recent events in Idaho have reminded me of this.

Maybe I am just "old school". I see the depth of the event. I remember my thoughts when I watched it on TV in 1982. It was raw. It was powerful. It was not for the faint of heart. It wasn't for the average person. There weren't any safety nets.

Now, Ironman has become, for many (and certainly not all) just another "to-do" list item.

This has made the issue of rights and responsibilities all the more evident to me. It's a tough day, not something to take lightly, and has it's own associated risks. No, you can't (nor shouldn't) do it in a vacuum - it exists in our world, our day, as it happens, regardless of what the conditions are or how tough it is. You know that from the get-go - so you suck it up and go - or you don't. Simple. Though there is a right to have a safe race (and yes, there are times when judgment prevails on the part of the race directors), there are far more instances in which we need to just take responsibility for ourselves.

I think the value of the race would be enhanced - and the view once it's over would be improved. Instead of the conditions being lousy and ruining my day", it should be more about "wow, isn't it great that I managed the day successfully given that it SHOULD be a challenge". It involves being prepared - with the pride of knowing that you ARE as prepared as you feel you need to be.

It should be about sacrifice - of your time, your efforts. Yes, it is going to cause you to adjust your life while you train for it - of course it should. Anything worth doing is going to take your heart and soul, time and effort, and support from those that are important in your world. Part of the "old school" beauty is in the sacrifice it takes to climb to the top of that mountain.

Maybe this has become lost in the mix. Maybe it's just about checking it off a list.

I know it wasn't that way for me. And I know that the journey of Ironman was much more than just "finishing". It was an opportunity for growth and learning along the way. Frankly, the finish line was almost anti-climactic compared to what I experienced along the way in the months leading up to it.

Perhaps our society is so taken by external approval and accomplishment that we fail to see the value of inward growth and development.

What I do know is that it's all morphed into something totally different than what I ever envisioned.

And frankly, I don't like what it looks like now anywhere near what it was before.