

# Run, Théoden, Run

Covering the Charlotte running scene, one stride at a time.

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## Ironman is easy compared to cancer fight

**Scott Bodien** knows a little something about pain and suffering.

The Charlotte man has done three Ironman triathlons since 2007 -- one per year. That's 2.4 miles of swimming, followed by 112 miles of biking, followed by 26.2 miles of running -- covered by Bodien in less than 13 hours and 30 minutes, all three times out.

But while these were grueling challenges for the 35-year-old environmental scientist, three Ironmans are nothing compared to what he had to go through to get to them.



Back in 1996, at the age of 21, Bodien was diagnosed with Burkitt's Lymphoma, a cancer that runs in the bloodstream. During his intense chemotherapy, with his immune system's defenses down, he contracted a flesh eating bacteria on his upper left leg. The only way to stop it was to remove the affected area, which was roughly the size of an 8 1/2-by-11-inch piece of paper. Surgeons grafted skin from another part of his thigh onto the wound.

"The absolute worst pain I experienced was before my skin graft," Bodien recalls. "The dressing changes were unbelievably excruciating, and most of the powerful painkillers eventually did little to alleviate the pain."

Once that ordeal was over -- and once he endured further chemo and radiation treatments - - Bodien underwent a bone marrow transplant on May 28, 1997. He celebrates 13 years being cancer-free today.

Since 2000, in addition to the three Ironman events, Bodien has run more than 6,200 miles, including eight marathons (his PR is a 3:30 at Chicago in 2006). He came to Charlotte in 2003 to work for the Catawba Lands Conservancy, a nonprofit that aims "to protect land in the Charlotte area with high conservation values through purchase or conservation easement."

This year, he is in charge of a new event called **Race For The Land** ([www.racefortheland.com](http://www.racefortheland.com)), a trail half marathon and 8K "that will be held on some of our most stellar protected property." Registration is still open for the Saturday, June 5, event, which will raise money to benefit the work of the Conservancy.

We talked to Bodien recently about the effects of his brush with cancer, how endurance races have enhanced his life since then, and what he's got cooking.



Photo of Scott Bodien by Kerry Ryan, 2010

**Q. That whole flesh eating bacteria thing sounds terrifying.**

[It was.] Prior to the surgery I was told it was likely the entire leg would be removed, or it would be discovered that it would be too late for anything. Obviously the decision was made mid-surgery that my leg -- and me! -- could be saved.

**Q. I understand that you had to learn to walk again after your skin graft. What was that like?**

I was basically immobile until the end of December [1996], when the skin graft operation occurred. Then I had to be very still for several weeks to let the graft take. Coupled with being extremely weak from chemotherapy and radiation, rehab then began from atrophy and all the nerves that had been cut above, along with all the nerve damage in my feet from a peripheral neuropathy -- which was another damaging side effect of my chemotherapy. It was a frustrating experience, from getting out of bed to being utterly exhausted, but I constantly pushed myself to walk to the end of the hall, then begin the process of walking a few more feet down our long driveway. By the time I could walk a thousand feet, I was knocked back again with my transplant, but then it was a continual process of pushing myself further.

**Q. Did you have any running background prior to your cancer?**

I had absolutely no background in running prior to being diagnosed with cancer. My activities were more geared towards hiking, canoeing, and leisurely cycling trips with my family. ... The care necessary following the skin graft operation would have made it seem highly improbable that I could even take up running, but I did and amazingly enough it does not affect my gait. I am very self conscious and protective about my graft area. I do only wear trunk-style running shorts or swimsuits, but it has all filled in so well most people would not even notice it.

**Q. What did having cancer teach you about life?**

I was 21 when I was diagnosed and I was feeling, like most 21 year olds about to graduate, rather indestructible. Well, after that world was quickly shattered, I realized how impossible it would have been for me to complete my struggle alone. I constantly think about all the family, friends, doctors, and nurses who assisted in my journey. My life is a continuation of that experience, and I know I'm not going to get where I'm going totally by myself.

**Q. What has competing in marathons and Ironmans taught you about life?**

The need for balance and perseverance. Getting to the stage of completing an Ironman requires a considerable amount of planning and sacrifice.

**Q. People sometimes say you should live every day like it's your last. Do you share this outlook, or do you have a different saying that you live by?**

I live by a variation of this mantra to live every day like it's my best. As a runner -- and native of the Pacific Northwest -- I'm a big Steve Prefontaine fan. I am very [inspired] by his quote, "To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift."

**Q. What's the toughest race you've ever completed?**

My first Ironman, the 2007 Vineman competition in California wine county, was my toughest race. The anxiety level after all the training and not even having a clue if it would all come together really shook me. I almost missed the swim start and had to focus hard to survive the second loop on the bike, all through a hot day of tough hills in wine country. The run of three loops was one my hardest test of the last 10 years, but it was amazing to have my family there to cheer me on.

**Q. Has there ever been a time you've thought about giving up during a race?**

When you get deep into a race, and you are pushing yourself at a level higher than you are accustomed to training at, it would seem so easy to just give up. But for me, the thought never crosses my mind. I was once given the opportunity of quitting and choosing to die or fighting for the opportunity to live another day. That experience is my perspective. Even an Ironman competition lasts less than a day. How could I remotely compare an Ironman as more difficult than what I accomplished?

**Q. What are your long term goals as a runner and triathlete, now that you're a veteran of several marathons and Ironmans?**

After three years of three Ironman races, I am at exactly that point where I've been wrestling with this question. This year I am focusing on a late season Half Ironman to make specific -- and aggressive! -- goals on each leg. I do know I would like to expand my running into longer trail runs, such as a 50K this or next year. As a runner, I do have a long term goal of qualifying for Boston, but that will come only as the qualifying times enter into the same universe my body lives in. I do believe there is more for me to achieve beyond just better times, and that is has to do with my message. If I've started from scratch, why can't others? Nothing would make me happier than to convince someone afraid to become more active that they can get there if they apply themselves and focus.

**Q. Tell me about your involvement with Catawba Lands Conservancy.**

We are a member-driven organization with a broad spectrum of supporters who see smart, healthy development coupled with thoughtful targeted conservation as a win-win for our community. Over the years I have come to organize some running teams to help raise money for the Conservancy. ... I am currently drowning in all the logistics involved with [the Race For The Land], but am so excited to get my fellow runners out on land most people would not believe is only 30 minutes from Trade and Tryon.

<http://obsruntheoden.blogspot.com/2010/05/ironman-is-easy-compared-to-cancer.html>