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In three years man goes from 464 pounds to 205 pounds – and triathlons

By **Terry Tomalin**, Times Fitness/Outdoors editor
 In Print: Saturday, November 7, 2009



Soileau says the 2009 Heart O' Dixie Triathlon in Philadelphia, Miss., is one of his favorite triathlons, because of the unique course and a hometown feel. Here, he's in the biking leg of the event in July. Photos courtesy of Chad Soileau

Three years ago, Chad Soileau was sitting in a roller coaster seat at Six Flags amusement park near Washington, D.C., when he was overcome with panic. He had waited in line for more than an hour for the four-minute ride on the Wild One, but when it came time to buckle up, the seat belt wouldn't fit.

"The attendant walked up and told me I was too big for the ride," recalled Soileau. "She yelled back to her co-workers, 'Bring the tool, we've got a large rider.'"

Five minutes seemed like an eternity as the crew struggled to extend the roller coaster's seat belt.

"Hundreds of people were watching," Soileau said. "It was the most humbling, humiliating experience of my life."

Afterward, Soileau stumbled off the ride and ran to the nearest restroom. "My stomach was in knots," he said. "I vomited for 10 minutes."

On Nov. 14, a very different Soileau will again face an audience — but this one will be cheering his remarkable achievements.

The Louisiana man will be among the 1,500 or so elite athletes who will gather on Clearwater Beach to swim 1.2 miles, bike 56 miles and run 13.1

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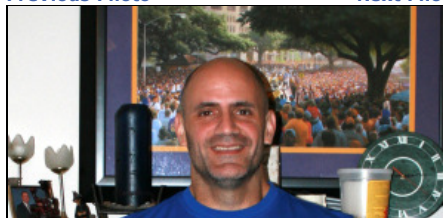
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miles in the Ironman World Championship 70.3. (The name comes from the combined distance of the three events, which is half the distance of the world famous Ironman World Championship held each October in Kona, Hawaii.)

"It has been a long road to get here," said Soileau, 37. "And I still have a long way to go."

Team 464

Despite the trauma of the roller coaster incident, it wasn't until a few months later that Soileau realized the full extent of his obesity.

"I was on the scale at the doctor's office when he asked if I knew how much I weighed," he said. "I figured about 350. He said no, 464."

Soileau couldn't believe he was off by 114 pounds. He made up his mind, then and there, that he would do something about his weight.

On March 22, 2006, he underwent gastric bypass surgery. "I call it my re-birthday," he said.

The surgery came with complications. He developed several blood clots and had to undergo three additional surgeries, including one to have his gallbladder removed and another to repair a twisted bowel and an internal hernia. But Soileau persevered.

Soileau was 34 when he started his weight-loss journey. Overcoming his longtime addiction to food was his first obstacle.

"I used to order double of everything . . . two appetizers, two entrees, two desserts," he said. "When I would go to the drive-through I would pretend there was somebody else in the car because I was ordering so much food."

Weight-loss surgery is no sure bet; plenty of people regain weight after the procedure. But after his surgery, Soileau found it easier to control his urges. (See related story, Page 12.)

"Physically I couldn't eat as much," he said.

The physical changes soon were followed by emotional ones. "After a while I stopped wanting the food," he said.

The victories piled up. One day, he discovered he could bend over to tie his shoes. "It was a huge accomplishment for me when I could get in my truck without my stomach hitting the steering wheel," he said.

Soileau set weight goals, which he published on his Web site, www.Team464.com:

"Weigh less than 400 pounds — DONE!"

"Weigh less than 350 pounds — DONE!"

He also kept track of his progress by his pants size: He went from a size 64 to a size 34.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

As he recovered from the surgery and started to drop pounds, he began to exercise.

He started off small, walking back and forth to the stop sign a block from his house. Gradually, his walks got longer and longer. Eventually, he started running, then swimming, then biking.

"I came up with a list of goals for myself," he said. "One of them was to complete a triathlon."

To help him reach his goals, he kept a training log.

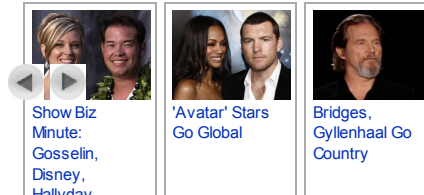
"At first it was just a mile, then 2 miles, then 3 miles," he said. "The whole time I dreamed about completing a marathon."

Soileau, who has a girlfriend, works as a Web site designer in New Orleans. He struggles to find time for the one to two hours of daily training a triathlon requires. As for his diet, he



Soileau says the 2009 Heart O' Dixie Triathlon in Philadelphia, Miss., is one of his favorite triathlons, because of the unique course and a hometown feel. Here, he's in the biking leg of the event in July. Photos courtesy of Chad Soileau

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YEAR END
WRAP UP

focuses on fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean protein to help power his new physique.

The discipline paid off. In February 2008, Soileau finished the Mardis Gras Marathon in New Orleans with a time of 5 hours and 36 minutes.

IRONMAN

Soileau has completed dozens of road races and triathlons. He was invited by the World Triathlon Corporation to be its guest at this year's event in Clearwater. Officials hope Soileau's story will inspire others to try the sport.

"It is an honor to be here," he said. "What other sport lets you share the course with the pros?"

But despite his success, Soileau doesn't feel as if he has won his battle against obesity. He won't feel victorious, he said, until he completes a full-distance Ironman.

"I will know I won when I step over the finish line and I hear the announcer yell, 'Chad Soileau, you are an IRONMAN!' "

Terry Tomalin can be reached at tomalin@sptimes.com or (727) 893-8808.

BEFORE

464

pounds

waist **64**

shirt size

XXXXXXL

BMI (body mass index)

62

Maximum activity:

Walk 1 block

AFTER

205*

pounds

waist **32**

shirt size

L

BMI (body mass index)

26

Maximum activity:

Ironman 70.3

* Photo taken at 215 pounds

[Last modified: Nov 07, 2009 12:54 PM]

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ZOD wrote:

interesting, most articles of this nature show a before shot.

Nov 8th, 2009 12:57 am

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Jeapugrad wrote:

This guy is a complete liar. Having been to the Six Flags park he mentions, there are NEVER hundreds of people waiting in line for the Wild One. In fact, many of the coasters at EVERY Six Flags park have test seats out in front of the coaster's entrance line. Had he sat in the test seat before getting in line, he could've saved himself ths humiliation.

Nov 7th, 2009 8:05 pm

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LollyJean wrote:

Congratulations! The triathlon and the weight loss are amazing accomplishments.

Nov 7th, 2009 6:22 pm

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Phoenix wrote:

Congratulations!!!!!!

Nov 7th, 2009 1:52 pm

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sunnygal wrote:

These stories are so inspirational. That's why I love watching the Biggest Loser. I've got about 55 lbs. to lose and this is the motivation I need to do it. Congrats CHAD!!! :) GREAT JOB!

Nov 7th, 2009 12:20 pm

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monalisatampabay wrote:

Great job, Chad! I had the lap band surgery myself (thank you St. Pete Times - my then employer who's insurance plan covered the surgery) in September 2007 and lost about 120lbs. I have yet to find my inner athlete, though I am proud to have maintained a healthy weight. Important to note, if you don't come to terms with whatever caused you to turn to food in the first place, you won't be able to lose the weight or keep it off. I applaud you for taking charge of your health and best of luck in the race!

Nov 7th, 2009 11:22 am

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whasup wrote:

Wow, who would have known there was a babe in that body just waiting to get out? Good job, and it is nice to see such a big smile. You should be proud - you deserve all the kudos you get!

Nov 7th, 2009 11:04 am

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